THE IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF RATIONALITY IN ISLAM

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Abstract. Islam the religion of Muslims, founded on *Qu'rānic* revelations transmitted through the Prophet Muhammad (570-632 AD). The Arabic roots *slm*, convey the ideas of safety, obedience, submission, commitment, and dedication. The word Islam signifies the self-surrender to Allah that characterizes a Muslim's relationship with God. Islamic tradition records that in 610 and 632 CE Prophet Muhammad began to receive revelations from God through the mediation of Angel Gabriel. The revelations were memorized and recorded word by word, and are today found in Arabic text of the Qur'ān in the precisely the manner God intended.[1] The community, working on the basis of pieces of text written 'on palm leaves or flat stones or in the heart of men', compiled the text some thirty years after the death of Prophet Muhammad.[2] All the Muslims assert unequivocally the divine authorship of the Qur'ān, Muhammad is but the messenger through which it was revealed.

Theoretically, the Qur'ān is the primary source of guidance in the Islamic community (*Ummah*). The Qur'ān text does not, however, provide solutions for every specific problem that might arise. To determine norm of practice, Muslims turned to the lives of Prophet Muhammad and his early companions, preserved in *Sunnah*, the living tradition of the community. Originally the practicing of *Sunnah* varied from place to place, reflecting the pre-Islamic local customs of particular region. By the 9th century, however, the diversity evident in local traditions was branded as an innovation (*bid'a*). Efforts therefore were made to collect record in writing and

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authenticate traditions ascribed to the Prophet and his early companions. These written compendia of traditions (*Hadith*) codified the *Sunnah* and eliminated any further need for reliance on divergent local sources. The two most important collections of *Hadith* are those of *al-Bukhari* (d. 870) and *Muslim* (d. 875).

RATIONALISTIC SPIRIT OF ISLAM

At the same time that this formidable expansion beyond the Arabian Peninsula was taking place, an enlarged vision of the world was imposing itself on philosophy. Probably the greatest contribution of Islam to universal thought was its absolute monotheism. With Islam, belief in God reached, theologically speaking, its ultimate position. The new religion advocated a more profound pursuit of knowledge and the use of reason in order to understand divine revelation. The universe is perceived by the Muslim as being a unified system, which facilitates comprehension of the principles of causality and determinism that rule it. In response to the exhortations of the Qur'ān, Muslims devoted much more time than hitherto to these new concerns.

Pre-Socratic philosophy greatly influenced Muslim philosophers and their thoughts. The influence of Plato and Aristotle was such that they designated the former 'divine' and the latter 'first teacher'. The last and greatest philosopher of the Hellenistic period, Plotinus, also occupied a very important place in Muslim thinking. Plotinus extended Platonism by conferring on it a mystical dimension that rendered it compatible with monotheism. His theory was known as Neo-Platonism. Plotinus agreed with Plato that Ideas were the archetypes of everything that existed.[3] According to him; the eternal and invisible One was everywhere present. From Him proceeded Mind; from Mind, Soul; from Soul, Matter; three hypostases of the Godhead. The original One manifested itself in multiple appearances, but this multiplicity tended to reintegrate into Oneness by means of Love.[4]

The philosophical ideas of Plotinus spread into Syria and Egypt, particularly Alexandria, which was the most important cultural centre of the Hellenistic era. Christianized Greek philosophy penetrated the Muslim world through Alexandria,

especially following the closure of the Academy of Athens when the philosophers of the Academy took refuge there. At Alexandria the works of Plato were translated first into Syriac, then into Aramaic, and finally into Arabic. Iqbal says:[5]

> It must, however, be remembered that Greek wisdom flowed towards the Moslem east through Harran and Syria. The Syrians took up the latest Greek speculation, *i.e.* Neo-Platonism and transmitted to the Moslem what they believed to be the real philosophy of Aristotle. It is surprising that Mohammedan Philosophers, Arabs as well as Persians, continued wrangling over what they believed to be the real teaching of Aristotle and Plato, and it never occurred to them that for a through comprehension of their Philosophies, the knowledge of Greek language was absolutely necessary.

The scholars of Islam contented themselves initially with translating and interpreting the works of the Hellenistic period, hence their philosophy was at first scarcely original. Later, however, the numerous translations undertaken at the beginning of the Abbasid period (9th century) provoked an expansion of thought which generated new philosophies of religion and law, and a philosophy of mysticism. As a result of this massive classicist movement, comparable only to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the translations of Greek philosophers reached Baghdad through Edessa (Urfa) and Harran, where Islamic philosophical schools were created. While the revival of the reasoning mind was creating great Islamic works in this part of the world, in the West, including the Eastern Roman Empire, intellectual activity stagnated. It was Islamic philosophy, acting as a cultural relay, which kept alive and ensured the continuity of the Greek philosophical tradition until the Italian Renaissance. Fazlur Rahman says:[6]

> Within a century of Muslim conquests the Muslims were thus able to develop their peculiar intellectual life and had history. This immensely rapid intellectual development, which was the result of interaction of the Hellenistic tradition in Syria and basic structure of ideas

supplied by the Arabic Qur'ān, remains one of the marvels of intellectual history of mankind.

Philosophy and theology were thus continuing to develop and to produce important works, especially between the seventh and fourteenth centuries. The speculative theology (*Ilm al-Kalam)* of Islam is the "Science that involves arguing with logical proofs in defense of articles of faith and refuting innovations (non *Sunnahs*) who deviate in their dogmas from the early Muslims and Muslim orthodox."[7] Its main concern is there refutation of sectarian beliefs and thoughts. According to Ibn-Khaldun, the study of *Ilm-Kalam* was not necessary for his students because the heretics and innovators had been destroyed.[8] This was however not true historically, for the battle of ideologies in Islam is endemic. The different dogmas of main centres of political power, the extension of court patronage to members of their own sect and persecution of their rivals, and the struggle of the competing political groups for dominance by pandering to sectarian fanatism and gullibility have been, and still are, eroding the body-politic of Islam like cancer.

A section of Prophet Muhammad's followers were deeply devoted to Ali (RA) (the 4th Caliph) and their number increased even during the reign of first three Caliphs. After the battle of *Siffin* between Ali and *Muawiya,* the Muslims were clearly divided into *Shias* (Ali partisans), *Khawarij* (opponents to the arbitration proposed by *Muawiya* when he was losing the battle and which Ali reluctantly agreed) and the rest (*Sunnis*). For ideological and political reasons the *Sunnis* splintered into several sub-groups or sects. Those hostile to the *Umayyads* evolved into the *Quadriya* sect. They rejected absolute predestination and advocated that man was the architect of his actions. His *Qadr* (determination) lay in his own hands.[9] Those who deliberately committed serious sins became heretics.

The *Qadiriyas* rivals were *Jabiriyya.* They believed that all human actions were subject to divine compulsion (*Jabr*).[10] The extremist amongst the *Jabriyya* denied the distinct existence of all God's attributes and was known as *Muattila,* or "believers in *tatil*"[11] (making God a bare unity). They were called *Jahimyya*

after their leader Jahm bin Safwan 10.[12] Jahm had rebelled against the Umayyads between 116/734 and 128/746 and has seized Eastern Khurasan with the help of Turks. He was killed in 128/746. Pitted against the *Jabriyya, Jahmiyya* and *Qadriyya* were Mutazila. The Abbasid Patronage made *Mu'tazila* the dominant sect. The *Mu'tazila* — literally 'those who withdraw themselves' — movement was founded by Wasil bin 'Ata'.[13] The *Mu'tazila* originated in Basra at the beginning of the 2nd century AH (8th century AD.). In the following century it became, for a period of some thirty years, the official doctrine of the caliphate in Baghdad. This patronage ceased in AH. 238/848 AD when al-Mutawakkil reversed the edict of al-Ma'mun, which had required officials to publicly profess that the Qur'ān was the created word of God. By this time, however, *Mu'tazilites* were well established in many other centres of Islamic learning, especially in Persia, and had split into two rival factions, the Basran School and the Baghdad School. Although their links with these two cities became increasingly tenuous, both schools flourished until the middle of the 5th century AH (11th century AD), and the Basran School only finally disappeared with the Mongol invasions at the beginning of the 7th century AH. (13th century AD.). Iqbal says:[14]

> Wasil Ibn Ata — a Persian disciple of famous theologian Hasan of Basra — starting *Mu'tazilaism* (Rationalism) — that most interesting movement which engaged some of the sublet minds of Persia, finally exhausted its force in the keen metaphysical controversies of Baghdad and Basra. The famous city of Basra had become, owing to its commercial situation, the play ground of various forces — Greek Philosophy, Scepticism, Christianity, Buddhistic ideas, Manihaeism (1) which furnished ample spiritual food to the inquiring mind of the time, and formed the intellectual environment of Islamic Rationalism.

Mu'tazila's members were united in their conviction that it was necessary to give a rationally coherent account of Islamic beliefs. Almost all authorities agree that the speculation of the *Mu'tazilah* centred around the two crucial concepts of divine justice and unity *(Tauheed* and *Adl)*, of which they claimed to be

the exclusive, genuine exponents. Although other propositions were debated by them, it is noteworthy that many could be logically reduced to the two fundamental ideas of justice and unity. Thus, according to a leading *Mu'tazilte* authority of the end of 9th century, five basic tents make up the strict *Mu'tazilite* creed: justice and unity, the inevitability of God's threats and promises, the intermediary position, and injunction of right, and the prohibition of wrong.[15] Recent historical research revealed, writes Dr. Fazlur Rahman, that the *Mu'tazilah* were a group of Muslims Intellectuals who in an arena of great ideological conflict in the Middle East in the early centuries of Islam, had successfully defended Islam against Gnosticism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. They were no mere intellectual idlers. One of the weapon with which they defended Islam, adds the writer was the doctrine of free-will and responsibility which they sought to formulate in terms of the current stock of philosophical ideas of Greek origin.[16] Iqbal says:[17]

> The period of Umayyad dominance is taken up, with the process of co-mingling and adjustment to new conditions of life; but with the rise of the Abbasid Dynasty and the study of Greek Philosophy, pent-up intellectual force of Persia bursts out again, and exhibits wonderful activity in all the departments of thought and action. The fresh intellectual vigour imparted by the assimilation of Greek Philosophy, which was studied with great avidity, led immediately to critical examination of Islamic Monotheism.

Mu'tazila's greatest patron was the Abbasid Caliph, al-Mamun, (198-218/813-833) who instituted the inquisitional tribunals (*Mihna*) for the trial of the non-*Mu'tazila*.[18] Orthodox Muslims believe that the Qur'ān is an identical reproduction of a celestial original, but the official *Mu'tazila* dogma states it was creation (*Khalq*).[19] Although they were also divided into several sub-sects, some features were common to all *Mu'tazila* sects. They assert that divine unity is not meaningful without strict *tanzih* (via remotions) and that the *tatil* of the *Jabriyya* is clear contradiction of divine unity. They believe that the clarity of God is the peculiar feature of His nature but denies the existence of

any external attributes as distinct from His nature. His nature is Omniscient, loving, and Almighty, but Knowledge, Power and Life are part of His Essence and not eternal attributes.

To the *Mu'tazila*, the attributes are not entities added to the divine being. They interpret the anthropomorphisms in the *Qur'ān* allegorically. To them God's 'hand' and 'face' etc. means 'grace', 'essence' and so on, as God cannot be seen either in this world or the next.[20] Man is responsible for his actions by God in him Reward and Punishments are strictly dependent on human actions. Things by their own nature contain both good and evil. God wills only good. His justice (*Adl*) operates in the best interest of His creation. As Almighty, He can act unjustly but He does not. By insisting on human freedom and responsibility the Mu'tazilites made a person's ultimate destiny depend on him. The basic thought was that God in revelation showed the believers what they ought to do attain Paradise, and then left it to each of them to do it not to it. This gave a tidy rational scheme with paradise as the reward for obedience and Hell as the punishment for disobedience.[21] Those who commit grave sins (*Kabair*) and do not repent are destined for hell.

The *Mu'tazilite* doctrine of the created *Qur'ān* was upheld by three Abbasid caliphs: *al-Mamun, al-Mutasim, and al-Wathiq* (who ruled in succession from 813 to 847). They attempted to enforce *Mu'tazilite* doctrine on society by compelling the leading religious thinkers to subscribe to it. Resistance led to an inquisition, which caused many uncompromising scholars suffering and imprisonment. The most famous example is Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855).[22] The *Mu'tazila* were weakened but continued to produce great scholars such as Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025) and al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144). Although *Mu'tazilism* seemed to collapse by the time the Mongols sacked Baghdad in 1258. The *Mu'tazilites* are often characterized as heterodox thinkers, their attempt to place Islamic religious belief on a rational basis in conjunction with revelation has found some support among 20th century Muslim intellectuals.

Fazlur Rahman says, that the *Mu'tazila* were not 'free-thinkers' as they have been sometimes called. They were not pure

'rationalist' (despite their claim that reason is an equal source with revelation, of moral truth), although the impulse to a systematic thinking out of dogma, unlike traditional Islam, was certainly an activity which made them pursue their ratiocination further and further as the time went on.[23] He says that *Mu'tazila* carried their rationalism so far as to claim parity for reason with revelation in the discovery of religious truth. They were not content only with a declaration of the superiority of reason over revelation, but put it with equal footing the Word of God as a religious guide.[24] He further says that it is, however, undeniable that the *Mu'tazila* movement did a great internal service to Islam not only by attempting to erect an edifying picture of God for refined minds but, above all, by insisting on the claims of reason in theology.[25]

Patronised by the early Caliphs of the house of 'Abbas, Rationalism continued to flourish in the intellectual centres of the Islamic world; until, in the first half Century, it met the powerful orthodox reaction which found a very energetic leader Al-*Asha'ri* who studied under Rationalist teachers to demolish, by their own methods, the edifice they had so laboriously built.[26] The Abbasid Caliph, al-Mutawakil (232-247/847-861), reversed Mamun's policy and in the wake of resurgence of orthodoxy Abul Hasan al-Ashari (260/873 — 324-935) founded the Asharite school. It had its origin in the reaction against the excessive rationalism of the *Mu'tazila*. Its members insisted that reason must be subordinate to revelation. They accepted the cosmology of the *Mu'tazilites* but put forward a nuanced rejection of their theological principles.[27]

Al-Ash'ari (d. AH 324/AD 935) was a pupil of Abu 'Ali al-Jubba'i (d. AH 303/AD 915), the head of the Basran School. A few years before his master's death, al-Ash'ari announced dramatically that he repented of having been a *Mu'tazilite* and pledged himself to oppose the *Mu'tazila*. In taking this step he capitalized on popular discontent with the excessive rationalism of the *Mu'tazilites*, which had been steadily gaining ground since their loss of official patronage half a century earlier. After his conversion, al-Ash'ari continued to use the dialectic method in theology but insisted that reason must be subservient to

revelation.[28] It is not possible to discuss al-Ash'ari's successors in detail here, but it should be noted that from the second half of the 6th century AH (12th century AD) onwards, the movement adopted the language and concepts of the Islamic philosophers whose views they sought to refute. The most significant thinkers among these later *Ash'arites* were al-Ghazali and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi.

Abul Hassan defended orthodoxy by rational methods. According to him, anthropomorphic terms such as God's 'hands', 'face' and 'sitting on throne' should be taken neither literally nor metaphorically but accepted without question (*bila kayf), Ashariyyas* like *Baghdadi* (d. 429/1037-8) and al-*Juwayni Imam al-Haramayan* (d. 478-1085-6) interpreted 'hand' and 'power' and 'face' as essence or existence.[29] Rejecting the *Mutazilites* view that God has no attributes distinct from his essence, *Ashari* maintains that God is knowing, seeing, and speaking through his eternal attributes. Although the manner in which God can be seen is not known, the vision of Him in the world to come is a reality. The *Qur'ān* is God's speech, an eternal attribute and not created. Everything good and evil is willed by God, and be instigates men's act by creating the power to do each act in them. According to *Ashari*, sinners are not unbelievers, but they will be punished in help.[30]

Al-Ashari employed reason in the defense of the traditionalist Muslim creed, especially the creed of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), which was based on the *Qur'ān* and the *hadith* (traditions). But, while the latter renounced the use of reason or speculative theology (*i.e. kalam*), *al-Ashari* justified its use in defending the true faith against external attacks and internal deviators. *Al-Ashari* and his followers nonetheless were critical of the extreme rationalism of the rival *Mutazilite* School. The *Asharites* also rejected the blind emulation of other scholars, be they pious ancestors or contemporary scholars, and advocated the obligation of individual believers to use reason (and as a minimum, the simplest kind of reasoning) in proving doctrines to their own satisfaction before they adhered to them.

Asharites thought it necessary to demonstrate rationally the existence of a creator (God), and that he is one, unique, and

eternal; and to establish the veracity of the claimant to prophecy. They affirmed seven essential eternal attributes of God: life, will, omnipotence, omniscience, speech, vision, and hearing[31] (some, like *al-Baqillani*, added permanence [*baqa*]). As to the relation of these attributes to the essence of God, *Asharites* offered as against the *Mu'tazilites*, held that, "God has attributes which inhere eternally in Him and are in addition to His essence."[32] Affirming God's various attributes, the later *Asharites* interpreted anthropomorphic expressions allegorically. They also introduced discussions of epistemology. *Asharites* affirmed the *Qur'ān* to be the speech of God, uncreated, thus was taking a stand on one of the most disputed issues in medieval Islam. Many *Asharite* theologians distinguished between God's "self speech", which is eternal, and the speech of God in the *Qur'ān,* which is written on paper with ink, recited by the tongue, and memorized in the heart — all created things. Yet, what is conveyed thereby is the uncreated speech of God.[33]

Another debated issue was human physical and moral control over action. The *Asharites* said that human capacity over action is acquired[34] (*kasb or muktasab*) from God for the action and at the very moment of action. But they maintained that while God creates the power for the action, a human being is responsible and held accountable for the action. Their detractors, the *Mutazilites,* accused the *Asharites* of holding to predestination, and although the later *Asharites* added the affirmation that humans have choices over their actions, the claim was too qualified to be convincing. Regarding this, Dr. Fazlur Rahman, has made the acute remark that whereas in the hands of Ibn Hanbal the emphasis on the power and Majesty of God was a simple assertion of religious impulse, the later theologian like Al-Ash'ari, al-Matrudi and specially their successor transformed it into a full-fledged theological doctrine.[35]

The *Asharites* claimed to be the defenders of the true doctrine. For a time they dominated the core land of the Muslim caliphate and some of the western provinces, when in spite of the extremism of *Al-Ashari*, his doctrines prevailed in the Muslim world and submerged those of the *Mu'tazilah*, the question that naturally comes to one's mind is how to explain this

phenomenon. The answer is not simple. *Ashari's* doctrine prevailed, firstly, because they reaffirm the power of God which the tents of *Mu'tazilah* sought to undermine. Secondly, they contained a profound truth, namely, that God's wisdom is inscrutable in the ultimate analysis. This search for ultimate explanation will always remain unrewarding, because there is mystery at the base of life which cannot be resolved by any rational process.[36] But above all these things, stands the hard and undeniable fact to which Iqbal has pointed, *i.e.* "Rationalism was an attempt to measure reality by reason alone; it implied the identity of the spheres of religion and philosophy and strove to express faith in the form of concepts or terms of pure thought."[37]

Al-Ashari is known as founder of orthodox scholasticism (*Kalam*) and his followers, mainly *al-Shafi*, transformed his dialectic into articles of faith. *Al-Ashari's* such as *al-Baqillini* (d. 403/1013), *Ibn Furak* (d. 406/1015-6), *al-Ghazali* (1058/1111), made the *Ashariyya Kalam* the intellectual creed of *Sunnis*. *Al-Ashari's* contemporary, Abu Mansoor Muhammad al-Maturidi of Samarqand (d. 333/944) followed Abu Hanifa's rules. Both admit that evil deeds take place by the divine will but they do not accept that Allah's wishes are responsible.[38] *Maturidism* is very similar to *Ash'arism*, in basic outlook, but differs from it in certain important points. *Al-Maturidi*, like *al-Ash'ari*, hold that all acts are willed by God, but unlike him, maintains evil acts do not occur 'with the good pleasure of God'. More important, *Maturidism*, while emphasizing the Omnipotence of God, allows the efficacy of the human will and, in some of its later developments, the absolutely free human production of acts was unequivocally stated.[39]

Al-Kindi, Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq (c. 185/801 – c. 260/873) was the first Muslim Philosopher who was born and brought up in Kufah, which was a centre for Arab culture and learning in the 9th century. According to S. Hossein Nasr:[40]

> The first Muslim philosopher, any of whose writings has survived — al-Kindi — was also celebrated in the Latin West. He was well acquainted with the main tents of Greek philosophy, and even had a translation of a

summary version of the *Enneads* made for him. It was he who initiated the process of formulating a technical philosophical vocabulary in Arabic, and of rethinking Greek philosophy in terms of Islamic doctrine.

Kufah was certainly the right place for al-Kindi to get the best education possible at this time. Although quite a few details of al-Kindi's life are given in various sources, these are not all consistent. Al-Ma'mun (d. 218/833) was a patron of learning and founded an academy called the House of Wisdom (*Bayt al-hikma*) where Greek philosophical and scientific works were translated. Al-Kindi was appointed by al-Ma'mun to the House of Wisdom (*Bayt al-hikma*) together with al-Khwarizimi and the Banu Musa brothers. The main task that al-Kindi and his colleagues undertook in the House of Wisdom (*Bayt al-hikma*) involved the translation of Greek scientific manuscripts. Al-Ma'mun had built up a library of manuscripts, the first major library to be set up since that at Alexandria, collecting important works from Byzantium. In addition to the House of Wisdom, al-Ma'mun set up observatories in which Muslim astronomers could build on the knowledge acquired by earlier peoples.

In 833, al-Ma'mun died and was succeeded by his brother al-Mu'tasim (d. 227/842). Al-Kindi continued to be in favour and al-Mu'tasim employed al-Kindi to tutor his son Ahmad. Al-Mu'tasim died in 842 and was succeeded by al-Wathiq who, in turn, was succeeded as Caliph in 847 by al-Mutawakkil. Under both these Caliphs al-Kindi fared less well. It is not entirely clear whether this was because of his religious views or because of internal arguments and rivalry between the scholars in the House of Wisdom. Certainly al-Mutawakkil persecuted all non-orthodox and non-Muslim groups while he had synagogues and churches in Baghdad destroyed. However, al-Kindi's lack of interest in religious argument can be seen in the topics on which he wrote. He appears to coexist with the world view of orthodox Islam.[41] In fact most of al-Kindi's philosophical writings seem designed to show that he believed that the pursuit of philosophy is compatible with orthodox Islam.[42]

Al-Kindi was best known as a philosopher but he was also a mathematician and scientist of importance. To his people he became known as the philosopher of the Arabs. He was the only notable philosopher of pure Arabian blood and the first one in Islam. Al-Kindi was the most leaned of his age, unique among his contemporaries in the knowledge of the totality of ancient scientists, embracing logic, philosophy, geometry, mathematics, music and astrology.[43] Practically unknown in the Western world, al-Kindi has an honoured place in the Islamic world as the 'philosopher of the Arabs'. Today he might be viewed as a bridge between Greek philosophers and Islamic philosophy. Part of the brilliant 9th century 'Abbasid court at Baghdad, composed of literati of all types, al-Kindi served as tutor for the caliph's son. He gained insights into the thought of Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle, through the translation movement; although he did not make translations himself, he corrected them and used them advantageously in his own thought.

Al-Kindi is notable for his work on philosophical terminology and for developing a vocabulary for philosophical thought in Arabic, although his ideas were superseded by Ibn Sina in the 11th century. The debate about the allow-ability of philosophy in terms of orthodox Islam also began with al-Kindi. Like other innovators, his ideas may no longer appear revolutionary, but in his own day, to push for the supremacy of reason and for the importance of a 'foreign science' — philosophy — as opposed to an 'Arab science' — grammar, Qur'ānic studies — was quite astonishing. When the Khalif al-Mutawwakil came to power and sought to restore traditionalism, al-Kindi suffered a reversal of fortunes.

Al-Kindi may be thought of as a stage-setter for philosophy in the Islamic world,[44] laying out terms qua terms and redirecting the metaphysical concerns suggested by the *mutakallimun* (theologians) from the realm of religion to that of philosophy.[45] His lack of interest in religious argument can be seen in the topics on which he wrote. These topics were ontological, but he generally refrained from eschatological discussions on topics such as the resurrection, the last day and the last judgment. Even in his ethical treatise he dealt with the disciplined life in which a

person might find interior serenity in their current life, rather than an emphasis on reward in the hereafter. Scholars have sometimes thought of al-Kindi as a *Mu'tazili* sympathizer, but this has not been proved; he appears rather to coexist with the worldview of orthodox Islam.

Al-Kindi's work on definition is 'On the Definitions of Things and their Descriptions'.[46] Through the terms he chose to define – finitude, creation, the first cause – we can see where the constructs of Islamic philosophy diverged from their Greek predecessors. In the 11th century the *Kitab al-hudud* (Book of Definitions) of Ibn Sina replaced al-Kindi's work; this was considerably more advanced, both in its definitions and in its organization of the world into a concise ontological schema.

Al-Kindi's best known treatise is the metaphysical study, *Fi al-Falsafa al-Ula* (On First Philosophy). Aristotelian influence can be seen in certain elements, such as the four causes. However, he is Aristotelian only up to a point. The point of divergence is reached over the question of the origin of the world. Aristotle teaches the eternity of the world; Al-Kindi propounds creation *ex nihilo*. The later philosophers, such as al-Farabi, are usually considered to understand Aristotle more accurately; they had the advantage of better translations and a greater number of works. In *Fi al-Falsafa al-Ula,* al-Kindi described the first philosophy, which is also the most noble and highest philosophy, as the knowledge of the first truth, including the cause of every truth (the first cause).[47] The first cause is prior in time because it is the cause of time. By the study of philosophy, people will learn the knowledge of things in reality and through this the knowledge of the divinity of God and his unity. They will also learn human virtue. Throughout many of his treatises, al-Kindi emphasizes the importance of the intellect (*'aql*) and contrasts it with matter.

He also discusses the One Truth, which is another name for God, and states that it does not have any attributes, predicates or characteristics. This view is consonant with the *Mu'tazili* declaration of the unity of God as being strictly without attributes, and consequently al-Kindi has sometimes been deemed to be a *Mu'tazili* by scholars. Other aspects of his position include

emphasis on the absolute unity of God, his power — particularly as creator — and creation *ex nihilo*. The Eternal, that is God, is not due to another; he has no cause and has neither genus nor species. There is no 'before' for the Eternal. The Eternal is unchanging, immutable and imperishable.[48] In human terms, death is the soul's taking leave of the body, which it employed during life. For al-Kindi, the intellect continues. Perhaps the soul is primarily the locus of the intellect. He reiterated in his ethical treatise the idea that humans must choose the world of the intellect over the material world.

Al-Kindi differs from the Hellenistic philosophical tradition primarily in espousing the belief that the world was created *ex nihilo*. In Aristotelian metaphysics the Prime Mover set the world in motion, but in the Hellenistic tradition, time and motion are intrinsically linked. Matter set in motion is eternally existing, since it exists before motion (and therefore before time). In this system, time is defined as the extension of the series of movements. Thus time begins with movement. In al-Kindi's system, matter, time and movement are all finite, with a beginning and a cessation at some future point.[49] In his philosophical writings, al-Kindi does not so much direct arguments to the concerns of religion as avoid them altogether, instead describing a parallel universe of philosophy. He consistently tries to show that the pursuit of philosophy is compatible with orthodox Islam.[50] The *mutakallimun* had previously speculated on questions about matter, atoms and substance, which he also considers. Another reason for the claim that al-Kindi was a *Mu'tazili* was his persecution by the Caliph al-Mutawwakil, who instigated a reactionary policy against the *Mu'tazili* and a return to traditionalism. Al-Kindi was caught in the general net of the Caliph's anti-intellectualism; the Kindian emphasis is always on rationalism, an attitude which the orthodox establishment of a revealed religion is bound to find inimical.

Abu Nasr Farabi (870-950), called Avennasar or Alfarabius/ Awzalugh, was born at Bukhara in Central Asia,[51] homeland of the Turks. Equally devoted to music, medicine, and mathematics he was not only a celebrated musician but more particularly one of the greatest philosophers of the Aristotelian school. He was

called the 'second teacher', the first being Aristotle.[52] He was the first and greatest of the Turks who have commented on, and refined, the thought of Greek philosophy.

Al-Farabi was an eclectic thinker who was familiar with the works of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Zeno, the systems of Pythagorus, the school of Cyrene and Aristippus, the Stoics, Diogenes, Pyrrhon, and Epicurus. He tried to form a synthesis of the concepts of Plato and Aristotle,[53] and to harmonise science with the *Qur'ānic* law. The primary activity of the Muslim and Christian philosophers still under the influence of Greek thought was an attempt to reconcile the rational side of Hellenistic philosophy with the principles of monotheistic religion.

According to Al-Farabi, only philosophers were capable of contemplating naked truth; others needed to be taught through the veil of religious symbolism.[54] This effectively placed the intelligence of philosophers above prophetic revelation. He was much criticized for this stance and for his efforts to reconcile incompatible notions. Nevertheless, Islamic doctrine occupied a very important place in his work. In politics he seems to have found no need for reconciliation. While advocating a Utopian political philosophy inspired by Plato's views on the State, he accepted the existence of a different real society.[55] He dreamed of a humanist State, gathering the whole of humanity into a sort of cosmopolitanism reminiscent of the universal citizenship of Zeno. He was probably influenced to an equal degree by the idea of a universal Islamic society. Like Hobbes, he saw in the universe a continual struggle where the strong triumphed over the weak.[56] It appeared to him necessary that the strong and the weak should come to an understanding with each other in order to survive, anarchy being the only other outcome.[57] To sum up, he believed that man had created society by a voluntary agreement. He thus revealed himself to be the distant precursor of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his Social Contract.

Al-Farabi was a determinist as far as nature was concerned. This was a consequence of his metaphysical doctrine, founded on the belief that God was a necessary Being, and that He gave His creation only to Himself.[58] Al-Farabi perceived creation in the

same way as Plato, God being neither nature, creative and without conscience, nor an arbitrary will. God, the One, created Intelligence, and also the heavens, from the empyrean level to the sub-lunar universe that we inhabit, this material universe being subject to births and changes.

Al-Farabi differed from theologians on several points. The main issue was his refusal to admit that the union of the spirit and the body survived after death.[59] On this point Farabi diverges from dogmatic theology. His theory of knowledge, inspired by Aristotle, rested on an empirical and rational base. He distinguished three sources of knowledge: perception, intellect, and speculation. Locke accepted only the first; the second produces what Descartes called 'innate ideas'. Al-Farabi considered the intellect as having four aspects: the active intellect (*'aql fa al),* the intellect in potential (*aql bi'l quwa*), the actualised intellect (*aql bi'l fi'l*) and the acquired intellect (*'aql mustafad*).[60] Al-Farabi could not discover any rational passage between metaphysics and mysticism. He accorded mysticism a place in his doctrine, but did not try to systematize it, considering it to be an individual spiritual state and not communicable. It is impossible, he said, to conceive God in his Oneness, because He does not reveal to us all His attributes. It is the power of His manifestations which prevent us from seeing Him.

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) was born at Afshana, in the vicinity of Bukhara. He acquired in his lifetime a prodigious reputation. It is astonishing that he found enough time to write such an extraordinary number of works during such a relatively short and eventful life. His first interest was medicine, and he gathered together, classified, and codified all the medical knowledge of his time. His Canon of Medicine merits him a place beside Hippocratus and Galenic among the greatest doctors.[61]

Just as St. Thomas Aquinas represents the summit of Scholasticism in the West, Avicenna represents its peak in the East. In his work, empiricism and rationalism are allied. He considered logic to be a tool which could be used either within philosophy or outside it. Like Al-Farabi he believed that some kinds of knowledge could be acquired directly by intuition, while

other knowledge was deduced from certain categorical principles. He attached a great deal of importance to experience, but considered it to be subordinate to logical rationalism to the extent that his system led, like that of Leibniz, to idealism. Avicenna was the first to use the Ontological Proof as a point of departure. According to him, thought and being were one; being was inconceivable without thought. Being was the object of metaphysics.[62] But Avicenna did not prove being by thought, as did Descartes; he identified being with thought. This proof, utilized for the first time in the West by St. Anselm, later became part of Scholastic thinking.

The image of the 'flying man', invented by Avicenna, spread through the medieval West. To the question: 'Can the soul be aware of its existence without the body?' Avicenna replied: 'Imagine a man flying in a void. His organs would not register any sensation, and perhaps he would not feel like a three dimensional being. But he would be aware of not experiencing his body, which means that the soul is a spiritual reality.' Avicenna defined the soul, after Aristotle, as the 'form' of the body (entelecheia), and as substance not depending on the body (substantia). The second definition leads to the conclusion that the soul is independent of the body, an opinion later formulated by Descartes.[63]

The influence of Avicenna on the West was considerable. A Latin translation of the Shifa, his most important work after the Canon, was made and published in the 16th century under the title of Sufficentia.[64] Latin translations multiplied in the 12th century. Farabi, Avicenna, and the Organon of Aristotle were discovered. These encounters enlarged the intellectual horizon of the West. In the 13th century new translations of Avicenna began to circulate. Avicenna is the thinker who most influenced the medieval Christian and eminent Western men of science. The most developed form of Avicennism is found in the illuminism of Roger Bacon and Robert Grossetiste.[65] The classification of the intelligence according to Al-Farabi and Avicenna was adopted by Albertus Magnus. According to Avicenna, in order to achieve knowledge of the general it is necessary to start with that of the particular. This type of reasoning demands the intervention of the

'lower faculties' such as imagination and memory, and amounts to saying that a meta-physical integrity cannot be achieved without a naturalist and analytical approach.[66] In other words, according to Avicenna, 'the intelligible' is attained only through the universe of sensations.

Finally, in contrast to Al-Farabi, Avicenna placed prophets above philosophers, since a prophet is one who unites theory and practice, intelligence and faith. Revelation does not come to him through the intermediary of the Angel Gabriel, but is the result of high intuition, proper to the intelligence.[67]

Ibn-Taimiyyah revitalized the spirit of *Ijtehad*, and criticized all the sects for their weakness and un-Islamic learning and urged them toward reform. By Ibn-Taimiyyah's time theology, philosophy and jurisprudence had made remarkable progress and given rise to different school of thought. But unfortunately political dissension and doctrinal differences sapped the unity of Muslims and make their countries easy prey to Mongol invasions in the 7th/13th century. It was a critical juncture that Imam Ibn-Taimiyyah appeared as a *Mujtahid* and called upon the people to go back to the original teachings of Islam as they are found in the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* of Prophet.[68] The excellence of Ibn-Taimiyya has been widely accepted, and he is generally considered to be the forerunner of Wahhabism, Sanusism, and Similar after reform movements in the Muslim world.[69]

A close examination of his works suggests that he followed none but early pious Muslims in formulating his scheme of reform. This is why his movement is often called the *Salafi* movement. His motto was, "Go back to Qu'ran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet."[70] He not only raised a strong voice against a rigid conformity (*Taqlid*) but successfully undertook *Ijtehad* also in a manner of early religious doctors. He draw inspiration direct from Holy Book and *Sunnah*, and lives of the companions, studies the various school of juristic thought with a critical eye and deduced and established great many inunctions. Thus he was able to set open the gate of *Ijtehad* and demonstrated precisely how to use and explored fully one's abilities in that field.

Ibn-Taimiyyah put up a tough fight against innovations in religion, polytheistic customs, moral and social abuses of his days and had to undergo persecution in this connection. He believed that Sufism, pantheism, theology, philosophy and all sorts of superstitious belief corrupted Islam.[71] He cleaned Islam of all impurities purged its system of all shades of evil and presented it a fresh before the world in its original form. He aimed at purging the Muslim society of practices resulting of undue homage to the tombs of Prophets and Saints. He protested vehemently against all sorts of innovations. He did not spare any person in his criticism. Wrong customs and practices, which had been accepted as a part of Islam for centuries, for which religious sanctions had been obtained, were ruthlessly attached by Ibn-Taimyyah. In reality, the cry rose by him of following and practicing the pure faith generated a powerful movement, which can still be heard reverbting in the world of Islam. He provided such a strong arguments in support of the Islamic beliefs and injunctions as were more rational and in greater conformity with the spirit of Islam.[72] Ibn-Taimiyyah felt it imperative, therefore, to construct a concept of the *Shariah* which would synthesize a double but analogous duality between *Mu'tazilism* and *Asharism* and between Sufi monism and the reality of the moral law.[73] He is, no doubt, an independent thinker and is free from the fetters of blind following (*taqlid*) in every matter. He may be called the precursor of the modern trend of anti-Aristotelianism.[74]

In 18th century the Muslim empire all over the world shows sign of weakness and decay. The synchronized rapid strides of European power in technology and industry and these powers had developed superior naval military, equipment as well as war strategy. The Muslim powers, quarrelling as they were among themselves, sought for the latest weapons from European who found thus a splendid chance to enter into the complexities of oriented political intrigues and turn them to their advantage. They meddled in the affairs of the *Mughal* Empire in India, the *Mumluk* rulers of Egypt, *Safwaid* monarch of Persia and the Sultans of the *Ottman* Empire. The interfering powers were the English, the French, the German and the Russians. This will show that practically every European power, impelled by her superior

technical skill and actuated by commercial and impearlistic ambitions, set out to bring under their dominance as much of the Muslim world as they possibly could. The Muslim powers were no match for them.

The fundamental spiritual crisis of Islam in the 20th century stems from an awareness that something is awry between the religion which God has appointed and the historical development of the world which He controls.[75] Several non-political causes can be assigned to the general decay of the Muslim society. These causes operate in all parts of Muslim world with varying degree and intensity. The political fall of the Muslims was conditioned by factors both external and internal. As the external factors were almost in all cases due to interference of the Europeans, so the internal factors were in almost all cases were due to intellectual, moral and spiritual bankruptcy of Muslims themselves. Thus, primarily the Muslim themselves were responsible for their decadence. So long as the Muslims were in the vanguard of knowledge, they led the civilized world in culture, science and philosophy. But as soon as they test interest in free and independent inquiry, they ceased to exist as a dynamic force.

The Muslims of this period evinced no knowledge of *Ijtehad*. This principle has been variously interpreted by juriconsultants, but all seems to agree, despite their differences, that the reinterpretation of the *Qur'ānic* injunctions for legalistic and extra-legalistic needs of a society s not at forbidden by Islam. No doubt, there are differences among the jurists as regards the nature and scope of *Ijtehad*. But the existence of this principle and its operation in the early stages of Muslim society is a clear proof of the fact that Islam never accepted a static view of human society. Blind imitation of the past became the hallmark of the Muslims. The early thinkers interpreted and applied the tenets of Islam according to the needs and requirements of their time. But to suppose, as the Muslims did, that their solutions were true for all times indicated incapacity to think afresh in accordance with the changing needs of society.

As a result of reactionary tendencies, reason became the target of attack and even an object of ridicule. It was contended

that reason was foreign to religious truths and led only to their distortion and misrepresentation. Consequently, all domains of knowledge were given scant attention and their findings were not properly appreciated. Science was discarded on the plea that it led to materialism, and philosophy was opposed as intellect was debarred from entering the portals of divine knowledge. Science and philosophy condemned what remained was a fairly tale, very comforting to the ignoramus but extremely injurious to the nation as a whole. Another factor, which worked negatively for the Muslim was mysticism. Among the Muslims there had been great mystics who delved deep into the realm of the sprit and had moments of great insight. If we recall the well-known definition of Sufism by Junayad. "Sufism is that God make thee die to thyself and become resurrected in Him."[76] However, with which we are concerned here, mysticism ceased to exist as a live force and, instead, degenerated into a mode of escape from the hard facts of life. As a contemporary *Sufi* has said, "It is not I who have left the world, it is the world that has left me."[77] The inner detachment may in fact be combined with intense outward activity. If mysticism was never quite acceptable to the religious leaders, intellectualism was not acceptable at all. Some Muslims have seen the introduction of Greek thought into Islamic world as a greater threat to the religion than Crusades or the Mongol invasions. Even theology was subject.[78]

Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) of Arabia and Shah Wali Ullah (1703-1763) of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938), Jamaludin Afghani (1839-1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), S. Abul Ala Maududi (1903-1979), Ali Shariti (1933-1977) and Dr. Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988) are considered to be precursors of modern awakening in Islam and their movements as the signs of the coming dawn. The continuity of efforts for revival amongst the Muslims is a subject of profound interest. During the very early period of decadence these leaders of thoughts rose to combat the forces of ignorance and tried their best to bring back the Muslims to the fountainhead of Islam, whose spiritual influence spread far and wide in Islamic world, particularly in Arab countries, Yemen, Iraq, Syria,

Lebanon, Central Asia, Africa and Sub-Continent. Now there is need to continue the same struggle in future as well to face the challenges of 21ˢᵗ century.

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