



Book Reviews

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Ali Paya (ed.)

The Misty Land of Ideas and the Light of Dialogue

**An Anthology of Comparative
Philosophy: Western & Islamic**

**Islamic College for Advanced
Studies Press, London 2013**

Ali Paya is an editor of a new anthology of comparative philosophy, which deals with topics in Western and Eastern/Islamic philosophies. This project gathered together distinguished scholars such as David Burrell, Lenn E. Goodman, Roy Jackson, Muhammad Kamal, Mahmoud Khatami, Oliver Leaman, Hajj Muhammad Legenhausen, Sari Nusseibeh, Latimah-Parvin Peerwani and W. Craig Streetman, with their own contributions from rather long gestation period from the very idea of producing a volume in comparative philosophy until its realization. The Islamic College for Advanced Studies (ICAS) Press publication should be applauded in this cacophony in the post-9/11 world with the rise of interest in Islam and Islamic matters across the globe, necessitating an explanation of the authentic teaching of Islamic philosophical tradition anew in light of the challenges of the present-day situation.

Comparing different views within their own tradition or in cross-cultural fashion as Ali Paya underwent through his whole project, according to one of the “patriarchs” of comparative philosophy, P. T. Raju, author of *Introduction to Comparative Philosophy*, means that “this need to understand is no longer a matter of mere intellectual curiosity but of survival”. Also, P. T. Raju underlined in his above mentioned book the fact that no separate section is allotted to Islamic philosophy, which gives more importance to Ali Paya’s and similar editions and publica-

tions and makes the importance of the task undertaken by himself and involved contributors more evident. All the papers in this volume deal with issues which are of great importance nowadays and all the contributors in this anthology have a deep belief that dialogue can transcend the borders of ethnicity, religion, and ideology, and that it is certainly the best and surest method to achieve a peaceful solution for any problem – since it includes a continuous discussion among philosophers-comparativists, as the interpreters, the commentators, the educators, the communicators, the interlocutors – and to understand the position of the other, representing various cultural, educational, and religious positions. This is why this book starts with a statement about the ‘comparativists’ (i.e. practitioners of comparative philosophy, those involved in the intellectual enterprise of comparing views and ideas from two different philosophical traditions, those getting engaged in the task of critical comparison of philosophers), who can agree and sign with both their hands something as a maxim: the more diverse and different the interlocutors’ intellectual frameworks, the higher the probability of fruitfulness of their ‘dialogue’.

As it is clearly expressed in the introductory chapter of this book, this set of essays gathers the best papers from a large number of papers submitted for the previously planned two-volume collection of essays. In addition, this book represents a collaborative effort toward achieving this end and, as a matter of fact, it tells about the dialogue between civilizations concerning globalization and cultural pluralism versus falling into a trap of epistemological relativism. Ali Paya’s own research and views in this anthology focus on vital aspects of dialogue culture and peace culture, as well as on the reforms these contributors offer to the modern world – through the process of dialogue and more than meticulous textual analysis, namely, interpersonal and intercultural exchanges based on respect of differences, openness and tolerance, which started in Islamic tradition with philosophers like

Suhrawardi and many others and has continued up until now.

It is crucial to mention that the function of the dialogue is not only in search of sameness or uniformity, but it is also an enriching way to learn how to be human. Namely, through dialogue we cultivate the art of listening, the ethics of caring, and the feeling of self-discovery through the meeting of various lifestyles. We are all the children of Enlightenment and this fact is especially important in inventing a new paradigm of thinking in international relations, as well as inventing new vision for the rising world order of harmonic coexistence, since it is obvious that we must redirect the modern world to liberate it from its obsession with progress and individualism. Needless to say, based on an extensive bibliographic research, field studies, and contributions by the editor and included scholars, this book provides a rare and useful overall updated review of the state of Islamic matters in Western academia and the international higher education landscape as ways of knowing Islam.

Opposed to this intention is Huntington's dichotomy "West and the rest", which includes ethnocentrism, chauvinistic nationalism, cultural imperialism, expansionism, and religious fundamentalism. If there is an imminent danger of civilizational clash, the promotion of dialogue among civilizations is an imperative and an urgent necessity – to paraphrase P. T. Raju's words once again. Also, here we reach the insight that an original understanding of cultural diversity demands the art of listening, the cultivation of which might require years. This is the first step towards the realization of a true dialogue and the building of a culture of peace in the present radically complex world of conflicting hatreds, contradictory interests, and conflicts. This is an important question for the development of a cultural pluralism *hic et nunc* to stand against the prevailing tunnel images of the world and the parochial consciousness of small-town philosophy or the philosophy of a Muslim residential alley.

David Burrell, in his essay on "Aquinas and Mulla Sadra on the Primacy of Existing", provides a link to Thomas Aquinas for which we find similar efforts in Alparslan Açıkgenç, who, more than twenty years before Burrell, in his doctoral thesis *Being and Existence in Sadra and Heidegger: A Comparative Ontology* (International Institute of Islamic Thoughts and Civilization, Kuala Lumpur, 1992), made a link with Martin Heidegger, which is a fascinating comparative case study of both philosophers demonstrating how they both base their philosophies on the concept of existence. In Burrell's exploration we have, once again, testimony of the centrality of

existence in the works of two giants of spirit from distant epochs, suggesting how Mulla Sadra's development becomes relevant to contemporary philosophy and especially to philosophy of religion. This search of attaining the requisite "metaphysical standpoint" is also evident in Majid Fakhry's paper "Averroes, Aquinas and the Rediscovery of Aristotle in Western Europe" (CMCU, Georgetown University, Washington, D. C., 1997) and a large number of similar projects conducted in the meantime, which bear witness to the establishing of constructive engagement of Islamic and Western philosophy: a contemporary trend toward world philosophy – to paraphrase a famous project by Bo Mou as an editor of the journal *Comparative Philosophy*.

Lenn Goodman, in "Ghazzali and the Philosophers: The Defence of Causality", explains Ghazali's critique of causality with that of Hume, while Ghazali's rejection of the logical necessity between cause and effect is similar to the project in Mahmoud Zakzouk's doctoral thesis on *Al-Ghazali's Philosophie im Vergleich mit Descartes (Comparison of Al-Ghazali's Philosophy with that of Descartes)*, Frankfurt/M., 1992), another testimony of emerging networking, regardless of what one may think of the two men's conflicting views.

In his paper "Averroes' Aristotelian Soul" Roy Jackson deals with the nature of soul and Ibn Rushd's striving to equate an Aristotelian concept of the soul with the Qur'anic view – a strategy for producing an account which, while remaining true to canons of rationality of Aristotelian philosophy, does not offend traditional views of Muslim orthodoxy. Few philosophers are as capable of producing such sustained and brief theses as Averroes' and this is quite a good reason with which he makes his points that continue to attract the respect of philosophers many centuries after his death and for him to stand shoulder to shoulder with Aquinas and Maimonides giving the answer to the question simultaneously: "What has Athens to do with Mecca?"

In his first paper Muhammad Kamal discusses the philosophical turn advocated by Mulla Sadra Shirazi and Martin Heidegger ("Mulla Sadra and Martin Heidegger: A Philosophical Turn"). Sadrian philosophy and certain other principles of Sadrian teachings as the synthesis of previous schools of thought and modes of knowing are compared with Heidegger's by other authors as well (his grand philosophical system which he calls "transcendent wisdom" – *al-hikmah al-muta'aliya*). In his second paper Kamal broadens his exploration of Mulla Sadra's treatment from a new angle, i.e. by comparing it with Parmenides

in a comparative analysis of the philosophical views of both thinkers (“Parmenides and Mulla Sadra: The Mystical Journey to Being”). Kamal combines the new ontological position of both thinkers with mysticism, concluding that their similarity is not limited to their mystical experience aimed at apprehending the truth.

Mahmoud Khatami’s paper contains three interrelated marginal or preliminary remarks (contextuality, normativity, and criticality) provided for a meta-theory of comparative philosophy, critical comparative philosophy studies, which indicates a meta-study concerning philosophy of comparison, as well as the fact that they claim to be a cultural-based discipline of comparative philosophy itself. His major distinction in this essay is his outsider/insider approaches to comparative philosophy, i.e. the shift from the Orientalistic view (outsider view) to the cultural-based model (cultural identity) of this way of thinking, while the third remark is criticality that “not only question what is outside the intellectual tradition of their inquiry, but also critique the intellectual tradition”. Definitely, comparative philosophy itself is for him a part of a large programme of cultural studies and belongs to the idealised concept of “European culture”, a view from the presupposedly dominant, methodological, and indifferent position of an observer who has authority to judge the truth of others, i.e. non-Western heritages.

Oliver Leaman, in his essay “Ibn al-Haytham, Alberti and Brunelleschi on Perspective”, discusses Ibn al-Haytham, the famous Muslim physicist from the 10th/11th century, and his pioneering works in optics, which in many different ways made the Renaissance possible, and which helped Filippo Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti to develop the technique of perspective in the 15th century.

In Muhammad Legenhausen’s paper the focus is on recent criticisms surrounding the doctrine of necessity in Ibn Sina’s philosophy. It revisits Ibn Sina’s metaphysics of existence, necessity and causation and the modification of Ibn Sina’s theological metaphysics through comparison of Charles Sanders Peirce’s *tychism* (proposed in opposition to necessitarianism), on the one hand, and Ibn Sina’s determinism, on the other. According to the author, most of this paper is devoted to arguing in favour of the compatibility of physical indeterminism with theological causal determinism.

Dealing with the topic in a comparative fashion and with a comparative account of the

notion of the possible, in his paper “The Possible Worlds of Avicenna and Leibniz” Sari Nusseibeh expresses his thankfulness to the editor of this anthology for his numerous insightful corrections and remarks. Actually, he tackles the following issue through the lens of modern analytic philosophy: How does our view of *God as a First Cause* and a *Self-Sufficient Being*, according to Avicenna and Leibniz (as “intellectual interlocutors”), affect our understanding of our role in the world as free and culpable agents, especially taking into account that they lived 700 years, 5000 kilometres, and two cultures and religions apart?

Ali Paya, the editor of this anthology, in his paper “Scepticism and the Problem of Acquiring Genuine Knowledge: Ghazzali and Popper”, compares and contrasts the epistemological approaches of these two prominent thinkers. At first glance, it would seem that they are poles apart. His main goal is to explore some aspects of the epistemological projects of these two thinkers, as well as, on closer inspection, to reveal many interesting and informative similarities and differences concerning the possibility of attaining knowledge by providing certain crucial background/contextual information for each of the two thinkers under consideration.

Latimah-Parvin Peerwani compares Mulla Sadra and Meister Eckhart, which is a part of the project of making links between distant philosophical-theological-mystical traditions. Something similar has been done, for instance, by Ueda Shizuteru in his doctoral thesis *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus* (Mohn, Gütersloh, 1965). Essentially, in her paper Peerwani discusses the question of the commonality of certain topics on man being the image of God in their thought (i.e. the Noble Man by Eckhart, who teaches that the perfect image of God is Jesus, and the Perfect Man, *al-insān al-kāmil*, in Mulla Sadra, who encourages us to follow Prophet Muhammad’s teachings as the best paradigm – *uswah hasanah*).

Finally, W. Craig Streetman, in his paper “On being ‘Useless’ yet ‘True’: Plato, Farabi, and Ibn Bajja on the Condition of Philosophers in the Context of a Corrupt State”, contrasts al-Farabi’s political philosophy with Plato’s and Ibn Bajja’s philosophies, underlining the fact that al-Farabi’s political philosophy is a novel synthesis of doctrines and themes, which he demonstrates very well in this paper with concrete examples of originality, ones that are alien to the Platonic model and, at the same

time, unique to al-Farabi. Streetman suggests, quite correctly, that previous findings on al-Farabi as a follower of Plato in the sphere of political philosophy should be revisited in the light of these new ones.

To sum up, the book bears witness to the fact that the time has finally come for the need to completely acknowledge the value of openness and cultural diversity and to revitalize Islamic discourse in this regard once more. This anthology could not have come at a better moment; it fills the gap and provides copious references for further study as really ground-breaking in this regard. The author of this review would like to recommend it whole-heartedly for its inclusion in courses of comparative philosophy. Its vantage point and its aim to support inter-traditional constructive engagement in our more and more interdependent world bear witness to the need for crucial mutual understanding, which is definitely a matter of survival in today's world.

Nevad Kahteran

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Oliver Leaman (ed.)

**The Biographical
Encyclopedia of Islamic
Philosophy**

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London et al. 2015

An extensive research of the significant contributions of Muslim thinkers to world philosophy, now available for the first time in its paperback edition, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Islamic Philosophy*, provides access to the ideas and persons belonging to almost 1400 years of the Islamic philosophical tradition and covers all the major and many minor philosophers, theologians, and mystics who contributed to its nascence and development. Its first edition (Continuum, London, 2006, 736 pages; also an electronic, searchable edition of the same work) was well received but also very expensive, which was the reason

why it was limited only to libraries and research institutes. Now this amazing volume is available at a much more reasonable price and it is more accessible. Created by the main editor, Oliver Leaman, and thirty-nine scholars and researchers, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Islamic Philosophy* contains entries on more than 300 thinkers and key concepts, and also includes a timeline, a glossary, and a detailed bibliography. Coverage extends from the early Islamic period to the modern age. Only a few scholars would be able to work on such a project, which Leaman has attempted as a collaborative work, provided that we exclude Hans Daiber's existing *Bibliography of Islamic Philosophy* (Brill, Leiden/Boston, 1999) and its supplement volume (2006).

This is the ideal study resource as it includes: an introduction, a list of contributors, a list of entries, and a combined bibliography with an index and a brief glossary. Leaman's inclusion of Ottoman scholars who studied and wrote on philosophy, which has also already been noted by other reviewers, should be commended. In addition, the editor is to be commended for compiling a work that will help to alleviate the pervasive lack of knowledge on Islamic thought and culture in the English-speaking world, because of its poor treatment. However, this largely overlooked area has a real potential to present enlightening insights into the development of Western thought as already presented in the work of the late professor A.-T. Tymieniecka, as well as contributing to contemporary discussions on philosophy and theology in general through constructive engagement of comparative philosophy. The editor himself, in showing its contemporary relevance, has undertaken an important task so that the status of Islamic philosophy may be promoted to its proper station in the dialogue of cultures.

This encyclopaedic work definitely offers access to Islamic philosophers from all periods, as well as providing information on the main trends, schools and ideas as the main aim of this volume to include entries on Islamic philosophers (biographical entries), as well as to constitute a comprehensive list of all those who could be described as such (the average entry is about 500 words long; the shorter ones only half as long). Within the body of entries there is a cross-referencing system to include the other entries, i.e. the work is fully cross-referenced. All this makes it highly recommended for faculties, university libraries, research centres, and, hopefully, other kinds of prestigious institutions, since it fills an important gap in reference literature in this field and includes a great deal of relevant material.