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AN INTRODUCTION TO CLASSICAL ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

Islamic philosophy is a unique and fascinating form of thought, and particular interest lies in its classical (Greek-influenced) period, when many of the ideas of Greek philosophy were used to explore the issues and theoretical problems which arise in trying to understand the Qur'ān and Islamic practice. In this revised and expanded edition of his classic introductory work, Oliver Leaman examines the distinctive features of classical Islamic philosophy and offers detailed accounts of major individual thinkers. In contrast to many previous studies that have treated this subject as only of historical interest, he offers analysis of the key arguments within Islamic philosophy so that the reader can engage with them and assess their strengths and weaknesses. His book will interest a wide range of readers in philosophy, religious studies and Islamic studies.

OLIVER LEAMAN is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Kentucky. He has written extensively on Islamic philosophy and is the author of *A brief introduction to Islamic philosophy* (1999). He is the editor of *Friendship east and west: philosophical perspectives* (1996) and *The future of philosophy* (1998) and co-editor of the *History of Islamic philosophy* (1996) and the *History of Jewish philosophy* (1997).

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[More information](#)

In fond memory of my father and mother

Cambridge University Press
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Oliver Leaman
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

وَعَنِ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: "فَقِيهٌ
وَاحِدٌ أَشَدُّ عَلَى الشَّيْطَانِ مِنْ أَلْفِ عَابِدٍ"

Ibn ‘Abbās (may God be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of God (peace and blessings of God be on him) said: A single scholar of religion is more powerful against the Devil than a thousand devout individuals.

Contents

<i>Preface to the first edition</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Preface to the second edition</i>	xi
<i>List of texts and abbreviations</i>	xiv
Introduction	I
PART I AL-GHAZĀLĪ’S ATTACK ON PHILOSOPHY	
1 How did God create the world?	41
Averroes v. Al-Ghazālī on the creation of the world	55
Maimonides and the problem of creation	77
Creation and the controversy over the nature of causality	94
2 Immortality and the active intellect	107
3 Can God know particulars?	130
PART II REASON V. REVELATION IN PRACTICAL REASONING	
4 Are the ethics of religion objective or subjective?	147
5 Happiness, philosophy and society	174
6 How to read Islamic philosophy	191
Mysticism	191
Illuminationism	199
Issues of interpretation	205
Averroes and Aristotle	225
<i>Further reading</i>	237
<i>Glossary</i>	245
<i>Index of passages</i>	246
<i>General index</i>	249

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface to the first edition*

My aim in this book is not just to describe aspects of Islamic philosophy but also to arouse interest in the philosophical problems, arguments and ideas current in the medieval Islamic world. I very much hope that readers of the book will want to go on to read the philosophers themselves. I have tried to bring out something of the range and flavour of Islamic philosophy by following a number of central arguments and issues from their origins in theology to their discussion in philosophy without attempting in any way to provide a comprehensive historical account of the period and its main thinkers. There are a number of books already which describe in some detail the cultural milieu in which philosophy developed in the Islamic world, and there are also books which painstakingly analyse the intellectual predecessors and influences upon the Islamic philosophers. By way of contrast, the emphasis in this book is on the arguments of the philosophers themselves, and the theme of the book is that this is the appropriate emphasis. It is a shame that Islamic philosophy as a topic of interest is at present largely confined to orientalists rather than philosophers. The former often have concerns and interpretative methods which are not shared by the latter, and vice versa. This sometimes has the result that the philosophical point of the argument is lost or confused. I hope that this book will serve to a degree to bring philosophers and orientalists together in a better appreciation of the nature and interest of Islamic philosophy.

It is always a difficulty when dealing with a set of arguments so firmly set within their own period as is much medieval Islamic philosophy to know how far to bring into their analysis the works of more modern philosophers. Indeed, a superficial glance at such arguments might well suggest that they bear close resemblances to later philosophical discussions. For example, it has often been argued that al-Ghazālī's critique of the Aristotelian notion of causality is rather similar to Hume's analysis of the causal relation. In addition, the conflict between al-Ghazālī

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Oliver Leaman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

Preface to the first edition

and the philosophers over the character of the origin of the world is not unlike the sorts of conflict which are represented in Kant's discussion of the antinomies. It has to be said, though, that when one closely compares the medieval and the modern formulations of apparently similar arguments, the resemblance often appears slight. It is possible to understand Islamic philosophy on its own terms, as a philosophy which deals with topics which do not always appear relevant to contemporary philosophical issues. It is not necessary to relate Islamic philosophy to modern philosophical thought, nor to the continuation of the themes of Islamic philosophy among the Scholastics such as Aquinas. It would be very interesting to carry out a detailed investigation of the relation between the arguments of Islamic philosophy and more recent arguments which proceed on roughly similar lines. It would also be interesting to see precisely how Scholastic thought was influenced by Islamic philosophy. It is not the purpose of this book to explore these fascinating issues, but rather to carry out a far more modest task. This is to discuss some of the leading themes of Islamic philosophy by analysing the arguments of some of the most important philosophers concerned, and by relating those arguments to Greek philosophy on the one hand and to the principles of religion on the other. In this way I hope that the book will be accessible and useful both to philosophers who know nothing about Islam and the Arabic language, and to orientalists who are unpractised in philosophy.

I am very grateful to the British Academy for their financial help in carrying out the research for this book. Dr Erwin Rosenthal has provided sustained encouragement even (especially!) when he has disagreed with me. Both he and Dr Ian Netton have made some very helpful comments on the manuscript. The skilful bibliographical assistance of Jill Stothard from the college Library has eased its path considerably, as has the advice and assistance of Peter Edwards and of the staff of the Cambridge University Press. My thanks go to them all.

Liverpool, January 1984

O. L.

Preface to the second edition

When it was suggested to me that there should be a second edition of my *Introduction to medieval Islamic philosophy* I was initially rather hesitant to agree. It seemed to me that the book I had written some time ago might well deserve to go to its final rest without the prospect of any form of resurrection. After all, since this book I have written many other things on Islamic philosophy, and certainly changed my mind on a number of the issues which I discussed in the earlier *Introduction*. In addition, that book was written with a certain degree of passion and conviction which I find rather harder to summon up nowadays, and not only because I am older and possibly wiser. At the time of the earlier book I felt with some justification that the methodological paradigm for doing Islamic philosophy was firmly in the wrong hands, and that it was important to challenge that paradigm. I felt that Islamic philosophy tended not to be studied as philosophy, but more as part of the history of ideas or as an aspect of some orientalist project, neither of which accurately represented the nature of what I took the discipline to be. Within the last two decades it is encouraging (to me at least) that a much broader set of approaches has been adopted in Islamic philosophy, and many of those who work in the area now are philosophers and treat the material as serious philosophy. So the battle has to a degree been won, and perhaps the situation in the past was not as grim as I represented it at the time.

When I came to read my earlier book again I felt that it still serves as a useful introduction to the Peripatetic tradition in Islamic philosophy. Since I wrote it I have come to have much greater respect for the other ways of doing philosophy in the Islamic world, in particular the mystical tradition, and illuminationist philosophy. In the past I took these to be not real philosophy at all, but much more closely linked with theology and subjective religious experience. I regarded these forms of thought

as indications of a form of *Schwärmerei* or wildness which I regarded with a Kantian disdain. I now think I was too limited in my approach to these ways of doing philosophy, which have much closer links with the Peripatetic tradition than I had previously realized. I have added to the book a brief account of these schools of thought, since they are so important to understanding the cultural context of the discipline as a whole. Nonetheless, I think there is merit in dealing with Peripatetic thought as a distinct entity, and this remains the aim of the book. Readers who are interested in exploring the wider aspects of Islamic philosophy will find many indications of where to go in the bibliography, and it is not the claim of this book that the full extent of Islamic philosophy is discussed here. But some of the central issues in the Peripatetic tradition are dealt with, in particular those which use classical Greek ideas in trying to understand theoretical issues. Although it has been argued often that this sort of philosophy came to an end in the Islamic world with the death of ibn Rushd (Averroes) in the sixth/twelfth century, even were this to be true, and it is not, that would not mean that this sort of philosophy was not of continuing interest. Nor would it mean that this sort of philosophy did not strongly affect the kinds of philosophy and theology which then became the leading theoretical approaches in the Islamic world.

Apart from including some introductory material about the mystical and Illuminationist schools of philosophy, I have also revised many of the translations and included a discussion of Averroes, who I regard as the paradigmatic exponent of classical Islamic philosophy, in his specific role as a commentator on Aristotle in order to try to throw some light on the links between this kind of Islamic philosophy and the classical Greek tradition on which it reflected. I have included some discussion of the influence of Averroes on the wider Christian and Jewish worlds.

I have continued to discuss the Jewish thinker Maimonides as an example of someone who although not a Muslim was firmly within the tradition of classical Islamic philosophy, but I have reduced the amount of space devoted to him. I hope that readers will find the account provided here of interest and useful to them in navigating through what often seem to be the rather choppy waters of Islamic philosophy.

Of greatest help to me in revising the first edition have been the many students in both Europe, the Middle East and North America who have used the book and been kind enough to send me comments and queries. My own students in Liverpool and now in the United States have been the most forthcoming here, and it would be invidious to name any of

Cambridge University Press
0521793432 - An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy
Oliver Leaman
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Preface to the second edition

xiii

them personally, since although some have helped more than others, I really have benefited from everyone's help. I have been privileged to have been able to discuss the ideas in this book with many colleagues all over the world, and I thank them all. All errors are of course my fault only.

Lexington, Kentucky, February 2001

O. L.

Texts and abbreviations

Where there are Oxford Classical Texts of the works of Plato and Aristotle these have been used, and the Oxford translation has generally been used, although sometimes modified. Translations from *De Anima* have been taken from W. Guthrie, *A history of Greek philosophy*, vol. VI, *Aristotle: an encounter* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981), since he adopts a similar interpretation of the active intellect to the Islamic philosophers.

<i>An. Post.</i>	<i>Posterior Analytics</i>
<i>Cat.</i>	<i>Categories</i>
<i>De An.</i>	<i>De Anima</i>
<i>De Int.</i>	<i>De Interpretatione</i>
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i>
<i>NE</i>	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>Phys.</i>	<i>Physics</i>

The sources of translations from Arabic and Hebrew are found in either the notes or the section on further reading, and these have often been modified, too. In the text these abbreviations are followed by a page or section number.

<i>Comm.Pl.Rep.</i>	<i>Averroes' Commentary on Plato's 'Republic'</i> , ed. and trans. E. Rosenthal, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, 1 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1956)
<i>FM</i>	<i>Averroes, Faṣl al-maqāl</i> , in G. Hourani, <i>On the harmony of religion and philosophy</i> (London, Luzac, 1976)
<i>GP</i>	<i>Maimonides, Guide of the perplexed</i> , trans. S. Pines, 2 vols. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1963)
<i>TT</i>	<i>Averroes' Tahāfut al-tahāfut</i> , trans. S. Van Den Bergh (London, Luzac, 1978)

Passages from the Qur'ān are generally taken from the Arberry version, with the sura in Roman and the lines in Arabic numbers.

In the notes, terms are fully transliterated, as are foreign terms, but not always proper names, in the text. Where more familiar Latin versions of names exist, these have been used in the text but not in the notes. The notes are designed to give readers an idea of the sorts of references they will find if they go on to read articles and books on Islamic philosophy. Given the introductory nature of this book, I have tended not to refer to the original Arabic or Hebrew text where an accurate and accessible translation exists. The original reference may readily be found by consulting the translations used.

There follows a list of texts used, with details of the Arabic editions, where these are not available in the notes.

- Al-Fārābī, *Agreement of the opinions of the philosophers Plato and Aristotle* – *Jam' bayna ra'yay al-ḥakīmāin Aflātūn al-ilāhī wa Aristūṭālīs*
Attainment of happiness – *Tahṣīl al-Sa'āda* (Hyderabad, Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1926)
Book of letters – *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*
Catalogue of sciences – *Iḥṣā' al-'Ulūm*, ed. O. Amine (Cairo, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1949)
Philosophy of Aristotle – *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*, ed. M. Mahdī (Beirut, Dār Majallat Shi'r, 1961)
Philosophy of Plato – *Falsafat Aflātūn*, ed. F. Rosenthal and R. Walzer (London, Warburg Institute, 1943)
Al-Ghazālī, *The incoherence of the philosophers* – *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. M. Bouges (Beirut, Imprimerie Catholique, 1962)
The intentions of the philosophers – *Maqāsid al-falāsifa*, ed. S. Dunya (Cairo, Sa'adah Press, 1961)
The Renaissance of the sciences of religion – *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, ed. 'Irāqī (Cairo, 'Uthmāniyya Press, 1933)
Averroes, *Decisive treatise on the harmony of religion and philosophy* – *Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl*
Incoherence of the incoherence – *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, ed. M. Bouges (Beirut, Bibliotheca Arabica Scholasticorum, 1930)
Short commentaries on Aristotle's 'Topic', 'Rhetoric' and 'Poetics' – *Talkhīṣ kitāb al-jadal, al-khaṭābah, al-shi'r*
Avicenna, *Book of deliverance* – *Kitāb al-najāt*
Metaphysics – *Shifā': al-Ilāhiyyāt*
Maimonides, *Guide of the perplexed* – *Dalālat al-ḥa'irīn* (Sefer Moreh Nebhukhim), ed. S. Munk (Jerusalem, Junovitch, 1931)
Treatise on logic – *Maqālah fi ṣinā'ah al-mantiq*