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## *Introduction*

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Aristotle is widely considered to be the most influential figure in the history of Arabic philosophy. His thought has played a fundamental role throughout the Arabic tradition, primarily in philosophy (*falsafā*) and to some extent even in other disciplines, including speculative theology (*kalām*), and jurisprudence. Aristotle is often revered in the Islamic world as the “First Teacher/Philosopher” (*al-mu‘allim al-awwal*) epitomizing the paradigm of the ancient philosopher who seeks to establish a comprehensive grasp of the first principles of things. Arabic philosophers consistently relied upon the corpus of Aristotle to systematically investigate every branch of knowledge from logic, to the natural sciences, to first philosophy (metaphysics), and ethics. His own teleological worldview enabled these philosophers to identify a set of relationships that determined their own understanding of the nature of the universe and the place of the human being within it. Aristotle was not only the first teacher of philosophy, but also the first challenge to be overcome in order to successfully prove their own conclusions. As the primary source for all subsequent philosophical inquiry, the legacy of his thought was to be celebrated and organically integrated into Arabic philosophy.

In this volume, we aim to employ the pedagogical model of the classical and medieval curriculum representing the diversity of Aristotle’s corpus throughout the Arabic tradition beginning with Logic, followed by Rhetoric, Natural Science, Psychology, and Metaphysics, before concluding with Ethics and Politics. Following this model, we adopt a comprehensive approach to the reception, transmission, and examination of his corpus in the Islamic world from roughly the ninth through the twelfth centuries. Insofar as the chapters remain attentive to the history of the reception of Aristotle, they highlight his influence upon respective philosophers such as al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Avicenna, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Bājja, Averroes, and others included in their scope. Each chapter takes into account relevant historical considerations, such as the availability of his

texts and the attendant challenges presented in the process of establishing these texts as the seminal foundation for the Arabic tradition. However, it should be acknowledged that the transmission of Aristotle into Arabic philosophy does not follow a clear chain of historical continuity. In lieu of attempting to exhaustively trace this lineage in order to reduce it to some kind of unified and comprehensive history, our authors often engage those moments that most decisively contribute to the dissemination of his corpus.

The following chapters are informed by a portrayal of Aristotle which focuses upon the formative or classical period of Arabic philosophy, namely the stages of translation that made available to Arabic readers most of his works to create the historical image of the “Arabic Aristotle.” At issue is an interpretation of Aristotle that is distilled through the lens of the Arabic imagination, including the image of the “pseudo-Aristotle” and a rich tradition of writings attributed to him. This is an image of Aristotle that has not been fully explored by scholars. One perspective of the pseudo-Aristotle refers to the Aristotle of the court. For instance, the so-called *Letter of the Golden House* written by an anonymous author during the early Abbasid period recasts Aristotle’s *De Mundo* as an epistolary romance. Another perspective of the pseudo-Aristotle becomes apparent in one of the most widely read works disseminated throughout the early translation period, namely the *Theology of Aristotle* (*Uthūlūjīyyā Aristūṭālīs*). The transmission of this text conveys a certain image of Aristotelian philosophy as a systematic whole following the stages of ascent from logic to physics and metaphysics to finally arrive at rational theology. The Neoplatonic tendency to read Aristotle’s philosophy in such a way is primarily responsible for inspiring a false image of the Stagirite. Beginning with al-Kindī, this image would continue to influence philosophers in the Islamic world as an enduring legacy of the greatness of Aristotle’s works.

Another aim of our volume is to demonstrate how the Arabic philosophers came to critically examine a set of philosophical problems within Aristotle’s corpus through the process of refining, reconstructing, and developing his views. Perhaps this is nowhere more evident than throughout the collection of his logical treatises known as the *Organon*. Aristotle’s *Organon* is widely considered to be the most influential branch of his corpus. Logic was the foundation for all the other sciences as a means to explain the natural world. Its influence transcended philosophy to contribute to different aspects of the Arabic tradition. Syllogistic logic became instrumental for legal reasoning from the earliest stages of Arabic philosophy. Given the significance of the *Organon*, a number of Arabic

philosophers discuss and debate various aspects of its reception and transmission, specifically its reconstruction by commentators from late antiquity such as Ammonius, Themistius, and Olympiodorus.

The history of this early reconstruction decisively informs the interpretation of Aristotle's categories by al-Fārābī and Avicenna. While Aristotle purportedly provides an exhaustive list of the categories, there is a long-standing tradition beginning with the late ancient Greek commentators to justify such a list in order to rationally deduce the number and identity of the categories. The account of the division of the categories taken up by Avicenna is especially important given the particular emphasis upon his rejection of previous approaches. Avicenna reconstructs the arguments against such a deductive approach and occupies a unique position in the history of medieval philosophy by distinguishing himself as an independent thinker rather than as a commentator on Aristotle. In many ways, Avicenna conceives his project in his multivolume work, "Book of the Cure" (*al-Shifā'*), as a faithful defender of Aristotle against those Arabic commentators who misinterpreted the Stagirite, including al-Kindī and al-Fārābī. While Avicenna departs from al-Kindī by describing the need for a division of the categories, Avicenna also departs from al-Fārābī by offering a division of them. Avicenna's attempt to reconstruct the problems apparent in any such division provides a new standard for the division of the categories. His re-elaboration of this widely accepted division only confirms Avicenna's own intellectual virtuosity as an original thinker displaying both critical astuteness and philosophical breadth.

Another example of this innovative approach to reconstructing the *Organon* occurs with Avicenna's classification of the various forms of scientific inquiry in his "Book of Demonstration" (*Kitāb al-Burhān*). In particular, Avicenna examines the four Aristotelian interrogatives (if, that, why, and what) and their mutual relationship to develop the distinction between definition and demonstration. The latter is ultimately rooted in a more fundamental division in Arabic logic and epistemology between conception (*taṣawwur*) and assent (*taṣdīq*) which identifies irreducible domains of knowledge. A pivotal role in this division is played by the characteristics and function of the demonstrative middle terms within the structure of scientific syllogisms.

The *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* were also studied as disciplines belonging to the *Organon* beginning with al-Fārābī and extending to Averroes. The history of the translation and reception of the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* begins with two distinct strands of writing devoted to these works. The first strand explains theoretical concepts, most importantly, the role and place

of the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* in the *Organon*, while the second strand consists of full-fledged commentaries aiming to explain the work in more elaborate exegetical detail. Both strands are illustrated in the commentaries of al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes, even though the commentators themselves were unable to consult the Greek texts and were often guided by the misleading authority of second-hand sources from late antiquity. The history of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* also involves making explicit a set of issues that became readily available in Arabic philosophy, including the nature of opinion (*doxa*) and persuasion (*pistis*), the distinction between rhetoric and poetics, the concept of art/craft (*technē*), and concomitant theories of imitation (*mimesis*) and representation. The reconstruction and reception of one seminal text in this tradition, the *Didascalía* or Latin translation of al-Fārābī's *Long Commentary on Aristotle's Rhetoric*, brings to light al-Fārābī's role as a commentator by describing the influence of the earlier Alexandrian school and observing the critical role of persuasion in the *Rhetoric*. Al-Fārābī recognizes that the Arabic translation of the *Rhetoric* as a treatise on logic has decisive political implications insofar as it functions to illuminate the relationship between citizens and their ruler. This insight is especially important given that the *Didascalía* which we possess today precedes the translation movement and thus has longstanding religious and political consequences for the subsequent tradition of Arabic philosophy.

While it is difficult to underestimate the degree of influence of the natural sciences upon the medieval Arabic tradition, these works are also indebted to an understanding of Aristotle's *Organon*. The natural sciences became more active and dynamic in the tenth century as a result of the demand for rational explanations of natural phenomena. There is also an extensive history of commentary devoted to the transmission of Aristotle's collected works on natural science, such as the *Physics*, *De Caelo*, and *Meteorology* through either their direct translation or through a rendering into Arabic from Greek commentators. Due to the breadth of Aristotle's physical corpus, it was not uncommon for Aristotle's texts to be received in a rather fragmentary fashion so that mistranslations and misunderstandings did arise for many of the Arabic commentators. A primary aim of reconstructing this history of early Arabic commentary is to highlight how these differences in translation came to influence their own observations about the natural world. In many cases, their simple observations disproved many of Aristotle's scientific explanations of certain natural phenomena. One such example is the debate regarding the motion of a body through a medium such as air or water. The divergent interpretations of

such natural phenomena by Avicenna, Ibn Bājja, and Averroes make evident the extent to which the modern science of Galileo and Newton remained indebted to the Aristotelian–Arabic worldview. While Aristotle’s definition of nature as a cause and principle of motion had been widely accepted by subsequent philosophers throughout the centuries, it was not clear what kind of cause nature was or whether nature was involved in the production of motion as an active or a passive principle. For instance, John Philoponus (490–570 BCE) developed nature into an active principle. His definition as an equally successful emendation of Aristotle’s original definition conceived of nature as something similar to soul and was thereby embedded in the larger framework of Neoplatonic cosmology. However, it was met with disapproval by Avicenna who intended to dispel the idea of aligning nature with soul in order to provide his own novel definition of nature as part of a universal classification of natural powers.

Psychology was also considered as a part of natural science (*al-ṭabī‘iyyāt*) in the Arabic tradition. Within this tradition, al-Fārābī indicated that in addition to natural principles, the principle of the soul is necessary in order to inquire about the motion of living things. Following al-Fārābī, Avicenna claimed that after the study of natural bodies and their motion, one needs to study bodies that have substantial form, namely those bodies that have the form of the soul. Aristotle’s *De Anima* was the primary source for studying psychology. Among the central themes regarding the appropriation of *De Anima* within the Arabic tradition are the definition of the soul and its existence, the relationship between the soul and the body, the structure of the internal and external senses, the theory of perception, and theory of the intellect. The nature of self-knowledge and the role of the intellect are of particular interest to many philosophers in the Islamic world. Having adopted a form of dualism, Avicenna naturally departs from Aristotle’s theory of self-knowledge by introducing an important distinction between self-cognition and self-awareness. With this distinction, Avicenna demonstrates how self-awareness is essential and continuous within an individual self. The disagreement between Aristotle and Avicenna about self-knowledge can also be seen with respect to their understanding of the cognition of the divine intellect. Both maintain that the divine intellect essentially and continuously think itself. However, Avicenna disagrees with Aristotle on what constitutes the object of thought for the divine intellect.

Although Aristotle’s *De Anima* first became transmitted to individual philosophers such as Avicenna and Ibn Bājja, the *De Anima* perhaps came to be best understood by the *Short*, *Middle*, and *Long Commentaries* of

Averroes. The transformation of the *De Anima* into the Arabic commentary tradition is crucially informed by Averroes' account of intentionality distinguishing between apprehended forms, which are present in the soul of the apprehender, and forms that are actually present in the natural world. It is pertinent to trace the etymological complexity of the various uses of the term, "intention" (*ma'nā*), to consider how Averroes uniquely contributes to the history of Aristotelian psychology. Averroes first introduces "intention" in his account of apprehension (*idrāk*), a word unknown to Aristotle, to describe the conjunction between sensation and intellection.

Aristotle's thinking was also consciously utilized and implemented to resolve a set of interdisciplinary problems that are critical to the Arabic tradition. However, there is a process of selection whereby some topics of Aristotle's philosophy were regarded more importantly than others. For example, some of the central aims of the Arabic interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* were to investigate the relationship between the unicity and nature of Being and God, the creation of the world, and the character of agency and causality. Unlike the previous disciplines, these topics within metaphysics were highly contentious and precarious. After the execution of Jahm ibn Šafwān (746 BCE) for adopting certain views on free will and divine attributes, many philosophers within the Islamic world realized that debating these topics had a significant impact on their theological beliefs. Such topics in metaphysics were not exclusive to the *falsafa* tradition but were extensively debated in the *kalām* tradition. These two traditions were especially divided over how to demarcate the realm of divine reality from corporeal reality. It became clear for both traditions that the project of bridging these two realms of reality was contingent upon the way one defines a set of metaphysical terms such as existence, essence, substance, categories, wholes, parts, potentiality, and actuality. Thus, a great deal of attention is devoted to these terms and to their origins. In the *falsafa* tradition, al-Kindī and al-Fārābī play a critical role not only in appropriating Aristotle's terms, but ultimately translating them into Arabic. In doing so, both al-Kindī and al-Fārābī encountered a twofold challenge. First, they sought to comprehend the complexity of Aristotle's lexicon, especially central terms from his *Metaphysics*, like being, substance, and essence, in their different contexts throughout the corpus. Second, and most importantly, they aimed to reconstruct these terms to correspond to their own Arabic lexicon. Al-Fārābī, in particular, skillfully negotiates their linguistic origin, logical syntax, and metaphysical significance. This is particularly true with Arabic terms like *wujūd*, *anniyya*, *huwiyya*, and *sha'iyya*. This

process results, in some cases, in terms that transcended the meaning of their Aristotelian origin. Both al-Kindī and al-Fārābī participated in the formative stage of the transmission of the *Metaphysics* into Arabic. However, they diverge in their approaches to interpretation. For instance, the Neo-Platonic emphasis upon the One as identical to the Unmoved Mover enables al-Kindī to establish a First Cause or absolute beginning to the cosmos. While al-Kindī attempts to harmonize metaphysics with theology, al-Fārābī is careful to clarify the relationship between metaphysics as rational theology, on the one hand, and theodicy and *kalām*, on the other. However, Avicenna has less concern with the establishment of these metaphysical terms or the apparent harmonization of metaphysics with other disciplines and instead systematically develops his own set of ontological principles that logically justified the existence of a necessary existent, its nature, its universal knowledge, and its relation to the cosmos. In the process of doing so, Avicenna departs from some aspects of Aristotle's teachings on metaphysics, especially the issue concerning the relationship between existence and essence. However, al-Ghazālī takes an entirely different approach by rejecting the basic principles of Aristotle's metaphysics and questioning the validity and the meaning of its concepts, such as necessary existence and possible existence. Finally, Averroes views al-Ghazālī's critique as unjustified since it arises from his own reading of Avicenna, which in Averroes' view represented a clear misinterpretation of Aristotle's metaphysics. This complicated picture of studying metaphysics was taken up in a more substantial way by tracing the origin of these aspects in the *kalām* tradition and identifying their line of continuation in the *falsafa* tradition.

Debates concerning being and necessity also occupy a special place in the Arabic tradition. Since al-Kindī, philosophers in the Islamic world, notably al-Fārābī and Avicenna, investigated different senses of being and established criteria in order to distinguish "being" from the concepts of "thing," "nothing," and "non-existence." The distinction between existence and possible existence enables us to understand the difference between existence and the cause of existence and to account for the different senses of substances and accidents. Another longstanding discussion regarding divine essence and attributes is also extensively investigated by the *kalām* tradition. This discussion has an important influence upon subsequent debates in the *falsafa* tradition. On the one hand, al-Mu'tazila's view of the identity relation between divine essence and attributes is well defended by Avicenna. On the other hand, al-Ash'arī's theory of attribution is upheld and further developed by al-Ghazālī.



In the past, many scholars have treated the subject matter of agency, free will, and determinism outside the domain of metaphysics. However, in the orbit of Islamic metaphysics, it is organically integrated with central metaphysical concepts such as causation and divine knowledge. The early debate between al-Muʿtazila and al-Ashāʿira on this issue is filtered through the lens of Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes. For example, al-Ghazālī solidifies the position of al-Ashāʿira by questioning Aristotle's doctrine of causality. Furthermore, the topics of agency and causation are indigenous to the discourse of Islamic theology and are later integrated into the *falsafa* tradition. While the *kalām* tradition affirms that only intelligent beings can be agents and that being an agent (*fāʿil*) is a necessary condition for being a cause (*sabab*), the *falsafa* tradition affirms that non-intelligent beings and even inanimate beings can be causes and agents.

The concept of agency is contingent upon the conception that substances can act and be acted upon. This distinctive feature of Aristotle's account of causality is taken up by al-Fārābī and developed by Avicenna after him in two unique ways. First, there is an internal connection between the efficient cause and its effect represented by Aristotle's example of the builder as an efficient cause of the house in virtue of the fact that the builder has the building craft in his soul. The building craft as an activity is itself a principle or form in the agent that is enacted in building and its effect, the house. For al-Fārābī and Avicenna, the paradigm of this internal connection between the efficient cause and its effect is illustrated by their respective accounts of the First Cause as an Unmoved Mover. Second, their accounts of efficient causality are also unique insofar as they claim that per se causes are always simultaneous with their effects. For example, al-Ghazālī attributes to the *falsafa* tradition before him the physical example of a hand stirring water in a bowl. Assuming no void, the water moves simultaneously with the hand. Once the cause ceases to operate, the thing that was affected persists not as an effect, but as a thing in its own right. The *falsafa* tradition ultimately applies both features of Aristotle's account of efficient causality to reconcile the apparent tension between his commitment to the eternity of the world and his proof for the existence of a First Cause of motion.

The domain of metaphysics also shares a common ground with ethics insofar as agency extends to those agents who possess an intellect. The longstanding unity between metaphysics and ethics is a unique attribute of the Arabic tradition. The rationale for this unity between Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and ethical treatises, particularly the *Nicomachean Ethics*, first came to be appropriated by such philosophers as al-Fārābī and Averroes.



*Introduction*

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The *Nicomachean Ethics* has undergone a long and fascinating history of transmission throughout the Arabic tradition beginning with al-Kindī. However, al-Fārābī is the first Arabic philosopher to consider Aristotle's investigation of the virtues, specifically the intellectual virtues, as applying to the metaphysical domain. Al-Fārābī's reception and interpretation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* indicates the possibility that Aristotle's model of the virtuous citizen be understood on a global and even on a cosmic scale. Indeed, the intellectual virtues so decisively orient the investigation into first principles that ethical inquiry might be said to exceed metaphysics as the most crowning achievement of human intellectual investigation. This view is most widely espoused by al-Fārābī in his treatises, *Attainment of Happiness* (*Taḥṣīl al-sa'āda*) and *The Harmonization of the Two Opinions of the Two Sages: Plato, the Divine and Aristotle* (*Kitāb al-Jam' bayn ra'yay al-ḥakīmāy, Aflātūn al-ilāhī wa Aristūṭālīs*). While al-Fārābī's interpretation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* integrates both Plato and Aristotle into a harmonious whole to inform his own understanding of political philosophy, the Platonic role of the philosopher as both ruler of the city (philosopher-king) and an exile banished from the city as Socratic gadfly should not be overlooked. Al-Fārābī is instrumental in addressing the paradox of the philosopher who at once bears his own exclusivity as the paradigm of political authority yet also becomes displaced by the laws of the city.

Such paradoxes and problems presented by Aristotle and the rich tradition of Arabic interpretation are equally as important as his treatments and discussions. With this caveat in mind, students and scholars in the history of philosophy will be in a better position to explore the set of difficulties that philosophers in the Islamic world had to endure in order to make sense of Aristotle's works and to appropriate them into their own tradition. For example, one might turn to the "first Arabic philosopher," al-Kindī and his invocation to Muslims to "not be ashamed of appreciating the truth and acquiring it wherever it comes from even if it comes from races distant and nations different from us."<sup>1</sup> Al-Kindī not only invites Muslims to appreciate the truth of Aristotle's philosophy which predominated at that time, but to confront the challenge of acquiring this truth by making it one's own. Ultimately, one will not have a sufficient understanding of the development of Western philosophy and its different schools of thought without first considering the pervasive influence of Aristotle upon the Arabic tradition. While our volume cannot possibly capture the historical

<sup>1</sup> Al-Kindī 1974: 58, trans. Ivry.

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transmission and appropriation of Aristotle into the Arabic tradition in its entirety, it can strive to suggest a process of reading and interpreting Aristotle that retains the enduring legacy of his thinking. The contributions included in this volume aim to illuminate this legacy through their own scholarly engagement with the Stagirite. Since Aristotle's thought has been remarkably successful in its transmission through so many distinct channels of interpretation, we seek to encourage both students and scholars of ancient, medieval, and Islamic philosophy to contribute to this legacy for the sake of enriching the tradition of Aristotelian interpretation as a whole.