

THE BEGINNING OF ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

The theme presented in this article is not a new one and is fairly commonplace in countless studies of Islamic philosophy. However, the description in this article is written with a special emphasis, namely that Islamic philosophy is an attempt to explain religious teaching philosophically and that philosophy is useful for defending religious doctrines through rational-demonstrative arguments. This emphasis is present amidst the persistence of negative sentiments and even rejection raised by some Muslims, as well as criticism from philosophical reviewers who doubt the originality of religious philosophy. For this reason, the author tries to present a brief history of the emergence of Islamic philosophy along with the motives that prompted Muslim scholars to build this philosophy and the influence that surrounded it. Next, the author will explain how Muslim philosophers proved the originality of their philosophy. Everything is conveyed to state that Islamic philosophy is not as alleged by its opponents.

Keywords: *Islamic philosophy, Greek philosophy, Beginning, Originality*

Abstrak

Tema yang disajikan pada artikel ini bukanlah tema yang baru dan terbilang lumrah dalam kajian filsafat Islam yang sudah tak terhitung banyaknya. Namun uraian tentang permulaan filsafat Islam pada artikel ini ditulis dengan penekanan khusus, yaitu bahwa filsafat Islam merupakan upaya untuk menjelaskan ajaran agama secara filosofis dan bahwa filsafat bermanfaat untuk membela doktrin-doktrin agama melalui argumentasi rasional-demonstratif. Penekanan tersebut hadir di tengah masih adanya sentimen negatif dan bahkan penolakan terhadap filsafat Islam yang dilontarkan oleh sebagian umat Islam, serta adanya kritik dari kalangan pengkaji filsafat yang meragukan orisinalitas filsafat keagamaan. Untuk itu, penulis mencoba menengokkan sejarah singkat kemunculan filsafat Islam bersama dengan motif-motif yang mendorong para sarjana muslim membangun filsafat ini dan pengaruh yang melingkupinya. Selanjutnya, pengarang akan menjelaskan bagaimana para filsuf Muslim membuktikan orisinalitas filsafat mereka. Semuanya disampaikan untuk menyatakan bahwa filsafat Islam tidaklah seperti yang dituduhkan oleh para penolaknya.

Kata Kunci: *Filsafat Islam, Filosofi Yunani, Permulaan, Originalitas*

Introduction

There have been surely many books, articles, and writings of Islamic Philosophy since the time of its presence around the 2nd century Hijriyah to this day that can be accessed by the current generation. Those works are available in various forms, ranging from introductory books, translation books from Muslim philosophers, lecture dictates, to works that discuss Islamic Philosophy in depth.

The theme that I have adopted in this article is definitely not a new topic and even somewhat obsolete. However, this article was written with a special emphasis, namely that "Islamic Philosophy is an attempt to explain religious teachings philosophically and gives benefit as defenders of religious doctrines through rational-demonstrative argumentation". This scholastic approach to viewing religious philosophy not only emerged in the early days of Islamic Philosophy but also in the European Middle Ages, especially in the thinking of philosophers such as Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

This stressing point is inseparable from the context of Islamic religious life that surrounds my era and place. Islamic philosophy and philosophy itself in the eyes of most Muslims are still considered strange, practically useless, not an Islamic science, tends to mislead, and many other negative sentiments. When this article was still being compiled, a meme-shaped post containing a logo of an Islamic group appeared on social media with a large inscription "The Haram of Philosophy" (Haramnya Ilmu Filsafat), completed with the utterance of Imam Shafi'i who denounced philosophy.

Also, criticism on Islamic philosophy does not only come from those outside the philosophy who firmly reject it, but also from those within the circle of philosophical

reviewers who seem to base their judgments on the Western philosophical tradition. This group is usually skeptical about religious philosophy and think that religious philosophy will undermine the characteristics of free and speculative philosophy. Some people even say that Islamic philosophy is just a *copy-paste* of Greek philosophy and then given the arguments from the Quran and hadith.

This assumption has also surfaced in discussions on Islamic philosophy when I studied it in the lecture class. Some friends of mine even prefer to call the term “Muslim philosophy” instead of “Islamic philosophy”, although for me the two terms are not much different. However, both are still suitable to be used to designate this philosophical tradition in Islam.¹

This article does not behave apologetically to these offensive claims, but rather tries to reverse the negative narrative of Islamic philosophy based on historical facts that on the one hand it gives a rational dimension to religious teachings, so that religious understanding becomes broader and deeper, and defends the truth of religious doctrines from attacks by outsiders on the other side. On this occasion, I will present a brief history of the emergence of Islamic Philosophy along with the motives that encouraged Muslim scholars to build this philosophy and the influence that surrounded it. Later, I will explain how Muslim philosophers proved the originality of their philosophy. All of this was delivered to affirm that Islamic Philosophy is not as it is alleged by its opponents.

The Definitions of Islamic Philosophy

Among the various defenses of Muslim philosophers for their philosophical thinking is the argument that there is harmony between the philosophy that first originates from Greek culture with religion. For this reason, they referred to the Quran and found several terms in that holy scripture that represent the tradition of philosophical thinking.

It is well known that the term Philosophy (Bahasa: filsafat) is derived from the Greek word "*philos*" (love) and "*sophos*" (wisdom). Through the translation of Greek Philosophy books in the 2nd to 4th century H (8-10 AD), the term entered Arabic so that the term "*falsafah*" emerged. But there is also another term embedded in this tradition based on the Quran and Hadith by Muslim authorities, namely "*ḥikmah*". It's just that this last term raised a big claim debate between Sufis, kalam experts (*mutakallimūn*), and philosophers.

Ibn 'Arabī in his *Fuṣuṣ al-ḥikam* said that what is meant by *ḥikmah* was wisdom that is exposed through every manifestation of *logos* as *ḥikmah*. Whereas *mutakallimūn*, such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī stated that *kalām* is meant by *ḥikmah*. But Ibn Khaldūn asserted that the meaning of *ḥikmah* is the latest kalam concepts (*al-kalām al-muta`akhhbirīn*) in the theories of Mu'tazilah, Ash'āriyah, and Māturīdiyah.² What about Muslim philosophers?

The Islamic philosophers claimed that philosophy is identified with the term "*ḥikmah*" in the Quran so that here we can see a more divine style of the philosophical tradition in Islam. The early Islamic philosopher, Abū Ya'qūb al-Kindī (801-873 AD), wrote a definition of philosophy or *ḥikmah* in *Fī al-Falsafah al-Ūlā* that: "Philosophy is the knowledge of the reality of things within people's possibility because the philosopher's end in theoretical knowledge is to gain truth and in practical knowledge to behave in accordance with the truth."³

Al-Fārābī justified this definition, it's just that he distinguished between philosophy based on certainty and belief (*al-yaqīniyah*), which is based on the method of demonstration

¹MM. Sharif, for example, uses the term “Muslim Philosophy”, see MM. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy. (Volume One)*, (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1995); while Syed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman uses "Islamic philosophy", see Nasr and Leaman (ed.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001). The least reference will be used more heavily in this paper.

²Nasr in Nasr and Leaman (ed.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 58

³Ahmad Fouad El-Ehwany in MM. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy. (Volume One)*, p. 424; Nasr in Nasr and Leaman [ed.], *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 59

(*burbānī*), and philosophy based on the opinion of conjecture (*al-maẓnūnah*), which is based on dialectics. He then added that philosophy is the mother of all knowledge and studies everything that exists. Ibn Sīnā also emphasized the same thing, wherein *ʿUyūn al-Ḥikmah* he stated that *ḥikmah* is an attempt to convey the perfection of the soul through conceptualization (*taṣawwur*) of all things and judgment (*taṣdiq*) of theoretical and practical realities according to the measurement of human capabilities.⁴

From the three philosophers, it can be concluded that Islamic philosophy is an attempt to achieve convincing truth about all things using ratiocination and argumentative experiments to achieve perfection in knowledge and the practice of that knowledge. However, at the end of his life, Ibn Sīnā added that Islamic philosophy is not only in the form of ratiocination, but also includes *isbrāqiyah* (illumination) knowledge as in Shuhrāwardī's thought.

Through Shuhrāwardī's *Ḥikmah al-Isbrāq* we will find a new feature in Islamic philosophy. If the orientation of philosophical thought in the early days is called Peripatetic Philosophy (*al-falsafah al-mashā'iyah*) whose pattern refers to Aristotelian ratio, Shuhrāwardī's illuminative philosophy (*al-falsafah al-isbrāqiyah*) surpassed it by involving intuition as a philosophical construction. Here the role of contemplative experience is in a position that is superior to the Aristotelian ratio as shown by peripatetic philosophy so that Shuhrāwardī's philosophy is sometimes considered to be anti-Aristotelian.⁵ *Ḥikmah* is more called by Shuhrāwardī by the term *al-ḥikmah al-ilāhiyah* (divine wisdom/theosophy), which means the realization of wisdom in the whole human figure, not only mentally and identified with the process of detaching oneself from the body and climbing into the world of light.⁶

Trying to reconcile the two different philosophical epistemologies between peripatetic and illuminative schools of thought, Mulla Ṣadra further defined *ḥikmah*. He described *ḥikmah* as a search for truth with both rational and intuitive roles. Mulla Ṣadra agreed with the opinion of previous peripatetic philosophers about the definition of philosophy which aims to make "man becomes an intelligible world resembling the objective world and similar to the order of universal existence" as conveyed in *al-Shawāhid al-Rubūbiyah*, but he also added that *ḥikmah* also wants a divorce from lust and purity of the soul from its material defilements.⁷ The first phrase ("intelligible world") that Mulla Ṣadra uttered was very ratiocinative, while the addition gave off a very thick illuminative element. Mulla Ṣadra's style of philosophy and mostly followed by Islamic-Iranian philosophers are known as Philosophy of Wujūd (*al-falsafah al-Wujūdiyyah*).

Seeing the shift in the definition of *ḥikmah* or philosophy, as described above alone, has shown the charm and richness of Islamic philosophy. The breadth and majesty of its discussions would not have been possible without history, so it is interesting to examine the history of the emergence of Islamic philosophy which I will describe below.

The Emergence of Islamic Philosophy

The emergence of Islamic philosophy cannot be separated from the efforts to expand the territory of Islam which began systematically since the reign of ʿUmar ibn Khaṭṭāb. At that time Islamic power has touched areas outside the Arabian peninsula, such as Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran.⁸ This effort was continued by the Caliphs and kings of Islam until the reign of the ʿAbbasid dynasty which succeeded in building a large government with a capital city of Baghdad which was recognized and respected by the world, where its power had

⁴Nasr in Nasr and Leaman [ed.], *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 60

⁵Hossein Ziai in Nasr and Leaman [ed.], *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 842

⁶Nasr in Nasr and Leaman [ed.], *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 62

⁷Nasr in Nasr and Leaman [ed.], *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 63

⁸Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, trans. Yasin and Riyadi, (Jakarta: PT. Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2010), 182-206

completely overthrown Byzantium and conquered Raqqah (a city on the banks of the Euphrates river) to the Hiraqlah and Ṭuwanah. The success of this Islamic government has undoubtedly built Arab-Islamic societies from nomadic and primitive life to a cosmopolitan one.⁹

This kind of social atmosphere of course encouraged cultural assimilation between the Arab-Muslim nation and the people of the conquered areas which had more advanced civilizations than the Arabs. This nation, whose culture was not rich, then admired the works of those foreign civilizations, so that they then absorbed, studied, and adopted them with various modifications. Only a few times they had acquired a variety of cultural wealth resulting from assimilation with cultures of Indo-Persian, Syrian, Aramaic, Persian, Indian, and most importantly Greek.¹⁰

Greek culture did not necessarily mean that it came directly from Greece but from conquered areas which that Hellenism had previously embraced, such as Syria and Egypt. They also absorbed science and culture in various fields, from science, politics, economics, art, architecture, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, to philosophy. This was the time that is often referred to as the rise of Islamic intellectuals which began during the reign of Harūn al-Rashid (786-806 AD), one of the rulers of Bani 'Abbās, who is best known to the world for his services in the resurrection, followed by his son, al-Ma'mūn (813-833 AD), and lasted throughout the 8th to 10th centuries AD. It was also in the hands of the caliphs that Greek philosophy was adopted to formulate a conception and foster a philosophical thought and criticizing Islamic teachings. It began with the translation of Greek philosophical works into Arabic.

Translation of Greek Philosophical Works

Two motives drove the intensive transmission of Greek philosophy into the Islamic world. The first motive is the need for the importance of arguing with people of other religions who had qualified religious conceptions to convert them to Islam. Indeed, the Islamic community recognized that their religion did not compel someone to convert to their religion and indeed the entry of a new society in Islamic government into Islam did not have a major effect as long as the foreign society recognize Islamic rule. However, as a ruling empire, it would be very embarrassing if the Islamic religion they professed did not have the sophistication and conception skills compared to the older religious communities. Therefore, it was necessary to have a rational and objective explanation in explaining Islam.¹¹ Also, the conquering Muslim community, although considered superior, was divided into opposing groups, especially in the field of theology. So it was deemed necessary also systematic conceptions of theology which were useful for "awakening" their opponents to their opinion which was considered correct.¹²

The second motive is more practical. Muslim societies that have controlled new areas to be managed by Islamic governments have found advanced cultures around them. Those foreigners lived a fairly high standard of life filled with an atmosphere very different from what has been experienced. Muslims too were immediately interested in finding out what constituted such a culture.¹³ The Islamic political elites were well aware of this so that the transmission of Greek philosophy into the Islamic world began with the translation of the works of Greek philosophers found in cities where Western and Eastern traditions met, such as Alexandria and the Fertile Crescent.¹⁴

⁹Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, trans. Mas'adi, (Jakarta: PT. RajaGrafindo Persada 1999), 68-80

¹⁰Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 381-383

¹¹Oliver Leaman in Farhad Daftary [ed.], *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, trans. Jabali and Tholib, (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2002), 45

¹²Leaman in Daftary [ed.], *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, 47

¹³Leaman in Daftary [ed.], *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, 46

¹⁴Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 385

The discoveries of those Greek works explain to us that the contact of the Islamic world with Greek philosophy, of course, was not through direct contact, but through certain channels, namely the meeting of Greece in Southern Europe with areas of the Near East, such as Egypt, Syria, and the former Mesopotamia, which became the place for Greek philosophical studies, then with Arab-Islam based in Baghdad. Therefore, when the Islamic government-controlled these areas, Muslims were surrounded by the spirit of Hellenism (philosophically all-Greek ideology). Various attacks on areas previously controlled by the Roman empire, especially during the time of Harūn al-Rashīd, served as the entry point for Greek philosophy into the Islamic world. The next caliph, al-Ma'mūn, is said to have sent envoys to Constantinople (now Istanbul), to meet King Leo of Armenia to find and collect works of Greek philosophy.¹⁵

Caliph al-Ma'mūn was indeed a person who had rationalistic tendencies because of the Mu'tazilah school he adhered to, and he did need Greek philosophy to support his ideology. His seriousness in this matter immediately encouraged the Caliph to build an institution called *Bayt al-ḥikmah*, a library, academy, as well as a translation bureau in Baghdad in 830 AD.

Thus, since the time of Harūn al-Rashīd, and not so incessantly in the previous period, the translation movement has started since 750 AD and lasted more than a century. Initially, the translators came from Aramaic (Syrian) circles, so Greek philosophy was translated into Aramaic first, the later into Arabic, so there was no direct contact between Arabic culture and Greek. One of the first translators of Greek works was Abū Yaḥyā ibn al-Baṭrīq (d. between 796-906 AD). He translated the works of Galen and Hippocrates for the Caliph al-Manṣūr, and the works of Plotemy, *Quadipartitum*, for other caliphs.¹⁶ However, his translation was deemed not done well, so it had to be revised during the reign of Harūn al-Rashīd and al-Ma'mūn.

The "chief translators" and his prowess in this field earned him much praise was Hunayn ibn Ishāq (809-873 AD). Hunayn was a Christian Nestor from Hīrah (Iraq) and a doctor assistant to Ibn Masawayh who was challenged to learn Greek because of his employer's ridicule. He immediately ventured to various Greek-speaking regions in search of Greek texts and became an assistant to Jibrīl ibn Baktishu, the doctor of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn. His experience and intelligence undoubtedly attracted the heart of the Caliph to appoint him to supervise his academic libraries, Bayt al-Ḥikmah, and with this position, he was assigned to translate scientific works with the help of his son, Ishāq ibn Hunayn, and his nephew, Hubaish ibn al-Ḥasan. He was also assisted by his assistants, such as 'Īsā ibn Yaḥyā and Mūsā ibn Khālīd. These assistants helped him to translate Syrian writings which were his translation of Greek works.¹⁷ Thus, before becoming Arabic, works of Greek philosophy and other fields were first translated into Syrian. Among the philosophical works of Hunayn's translation were Aristotle's *Hermeneutica*, Plato's *Republic* (Siyāsah), *Categories* (Maqulāt), etc.

Furthermore, there were translators of Greek philosophical works and works in other fields, such as medicine, astronomy, and mathematics, such as Thābit ibn Qurrah (836-901), also a Nestorian Christian, which was followed by his son, Sinan (d. 943), and two of his grandchildren, Thābit (d. 973), and Ibrāhīm (d. 946). From the Islamic circles, Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Jabīr ibn Sinan (d. 926), better known as al-Battānī, was an astronomer and translator. There were also al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf ibn Maṭar (786-833), Yaḥyā ibn 'Ādī (893-974), and Abū 'Alī 'Īsā ibn Zur'ah (d. 1008) (Hitti, 2010: p. 392), and of course there were still many translators of foreign texts, especially Greek, whose works were no less

¹⁵Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 386

¹⁶Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 386

¹⁷Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 388-389

important. Cristina D'Acona in her article, *Greek Sources in Arabic and Islamic Philosophy*¹⁸ provides more complete details about the stages of the translation.

Mu'tazilah's Influence

As described above, the emergence of Islamic philosophy began and was marked by the translation of Greek philosophical works which were taken through the intermediary of Syria and Alexandria and translated into Arabic from the Syrian language. However, during the translation period, Muslims used philosophy in explaining religious doctrines or Theology (*kalām*), which was seen in the thought of the Mu'tazilah school. Therefore, we cannot forget this one party in their efforts to give birth to Islamic philosophy.

Mu'tazilah is a group of adherents to the *kalām* sect which was emerged around the year of 100 Hijriyah or 718 AD.¹⁹ Their birth was handled by Waṣīl ibn 'Aṭā' who since protested to his teacher, Ḥasan al-Baṣri, about the matter of grave sins, compiled his theological conceptions so that they had many followers. Mu'tazilah is known as a group that has theological concepts resulting from a rational approach.²⁰ (Mir Valiuddin in MM. Sharif [ed.], 1995: p. 200).

What is meant by "rational" does not necessarily mean that it refers directly to philosophical activity, but rather refers to the highest respect for reason, a spirit which contains a tendency to think philosophically. Mu'tazilah's figures have stated how great intellect with a great ability to seek the truth. Abū Huzail al-'Allāf (d. 235 H), for example, argued that humans with their minds can know God, and even humans who do not use their minds can get tormented. Intellect can also know good and bad (moral judgment and act) and can know metaphysical things, such as honesty, justice, and so on. Al-Nazzām (d. 221 H) stated that before revelation reaches human knowledge, the reason must be used to know the truth.²¹ High belief in the ability of the human reason is clearly related to the principle of Mu'tazilah's free will. Thus, the Mu'tazilah can be said to have provided theological legitimacy for the growth of the spirit of humanism which then encouraged the growth of a scientific spirit in Islamic society in the fourth H or tenth century AD, including the growth of Islamic philosophy.²²

Furthermore, Mu'tazilah on the one hand does not deny *naqliy* arguments (al-Quran and Hadith), but without doubt Mu'tazilah subject *naqliy* to the ability of reason.²³ This kind of spirit certainly facilitated the entry of philosophy into Mu'tazilah theological thought, especially when the seat of power was occupied by the Mu'tazilites, who in this case was Caliph al-Ma'mūn, and the development of this school coincided with the process of transmitting Greek philosophy to the Islamic world.

As result, Mu'tazilah's rationality is not only in the form of glorification of reason, but also the mixing of the theological concept with philosophy. When talking about the existence of God, for example, Mu'tazilah has used the term "*al-jauhar al-fard*" (atomic theory) which was used to support Aristotle's theory of eternal matter.²⁴ In explaining the oneness of God related to the existence of God's attributes, Mu'tazilah put forward one

¹⁸Cristina D'Acona in her article, *Greek Sources in Arabic and Islamic Philosophy*, in <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-greek/>, 2013, Accessed August 17, 2002

¹⁹Hadariansyah, *Pemikiran-Pemikiran Teologi Dalam Sejarah Pemikiran Islam*, (Banjarmasin: Antasari Press, 2010), 88. According to al-Shahrastani, the Mu'tazilah is also called *Ahl al-'adl wa al-Tanḥīd* and *Qadariyah* or *'Adliyah* because of their principle that upholds human free will and humans are fully responsible for their actions. Interestingly, because of this principle, al-Shahrastani denounced the Mu'tazilah as a "blindhearted" group. See al-Shahrastani, *al-Mīlāl wa al-Niḥāl*, trans. Asywardi Syukur, (Surabaya: PT. Bina Ilmu, 2003), 37-38

²⁰Mir Valiuddin in MM. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 200

²¹Hadariansyah, *Pemikiran-Pemikiran Teologi Dalam Sejarah Pemikiran Islam*, 152-153

²²See Oliver Leaman in Nasr in Nasr and Leaman [ed.], *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 295-305

²³Ibrahim Madkour, *Fi-al-Falsafah al-Islamiyyah: Manhaj wa Tathbiqubu al-Juz' al-Thani*, trans. Asmin, (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 1995), 48

²⁴Ibrahim Madkour, *Fi-al-Falsafah al-Islamiyyah: Manhaj wa Tathbiqubu al-Juz' al-Thani*, 50

statement: “whoever confirms an understanding and the nature of eternal means he has confirmed two Gods”.²⁵

This statement seems to have resulted from the Aristotelian syllogistic mindset, namely that if Allah is *qadīm* (eternal) and the attribute is also *qadīm*, then there will be two things that are *qadīm*. Then how does God have the power to know, hear, see, and be able to do anything? Abū Huzail al-'Allāf revealed that His power is also His substance so that for Him there is no difference between matter and attributes.²⁶ This conclusion is similar to Aristotle's theory of the first mover, namely reason, which is also a thinking subject.²⁷ This conception is completely doubtful from Aristotle. It is the result of the development of Aristotle's thought about the final cause (*prima causa*) by Ibn Sina. See further description.

Other Mu'tazilah's figures are also mentioned as philosophers or at least living in a philosophical environment, such as Al-Nazzām, Mu'ammār ibn 'Ibbād al-Sulami (d. 220 H), and Abū Hashīm al-Jubba'i (d. 321 H). In general, from the statements above, it is not an exaggeration to say that Mu'tazilah had an important role in the development of Islamic philosophy.

Muslim Philosophers' Defensive Arguments

After knowing that Islamic philosophy has taken Greek philosophy as its source, the question arises: to what extent have sources outside of Islam been adopted and used for the benefit of Islamic teachings? And what is the position of pure Islamic teachings when dealing with these sources? Of course, this question is something crucial between the principles of fundamentalism and ideological openness. As a result, the movement to adopt Greek philosophy into the area of Islamic scholarship was seriously challenged by those who did not like philosophy to enter the Islamic world, especially among *mutakallimīn*.

However, the philosophers had their responses on this. According to them, through the cultivation and development of Islamic philosophy, they have succeeded in reviving an ancient heritage that has long been lost. The philosophers found that Greek wisdom was actually drawn from wisdom in the Near East. Al-Fārābī, for example, said that philosophy had existed since ancient times among the Kaldeans in Iraq, then studied by the Egyptians, and from there philosophy was transferred into Greek culture. Philosophy then developed and spread back from Greece to Syria and it was through Syrian mediation that philosophy was studied by the Arabs.²⁸

Philosophers claimed that the Greeks learned this wisdom from the Prophets and noble peoples of the East. Empedocles, for example, is said to have learned from Luqmān al-Ḥakīm in Syro-Palestine and metaphysics from Solomon's students in Egypt. The study of Greek philosophy by Arab-Muslims was, therefore, more of a renovation than an invention. Thus, adopting Greek philosophy does not mean adopting something that comes from outside of Islam, but rather renewing universal ancient wisdom. That is why some Western scholars have called the golden peak of Islam that stretched from the 8th and 12th centuries AD with the term "renaissance".²⁹

Apart from the argument for revising this ancient wisdom, Muslim philosophers also claimed that the Quran and Hadith are the source and inspiration of Islamic philosophy. In the holy scripture, some terms indicate the activity of thinking (*tafakkur*) to obtain the truth. In addition to the word *ḥikmah*, there is also the word “*al-ḥaqīqah*” which shows a very close

²⁵Ibrahim Madkour, *Fī-al-Falsafah al-Islāmiyyah: Manhaj wa Tatbiqubū al-Juz' al-Thānī*, 53

²⁶Mir Valiuddin in MM. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 207. In simpler language, according to Mu'tazilah, Allah is All-Knowing with His substance, Allah is All-Life with His Substance, Allah is Almighty with His substance, not with His knowledge, life, and power. al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Nihāl*, 38

²⁷Ibrahim Madkour, *Fī-al-Falsafah al-Islāmiyyah: Manhaj wa Tatbiqubū al-Juz' al-Thānī*, 54

²⁸Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival During The Buyid Age*, trans. Saefullah, (Bandung: Mizan, 2003), 27

²⁹Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival During The Buyid Age*, 28

significance between philosophy and religious revelation. This word means truth and reality, which are closely related to God because one of the good names of God (*al-asmā` al-ḥusnā*) is al-Ḥaqq. Many verses invite readers to think and think about reality and call these thinkers with the term “*ulū al-bāb*”.

The source from the Quran that most clearly implies philosophy is the story of Luqmān al-Ḥakīm, which is said by Muslim philosophers to come from the name of a Prophet, and his name is immortalized as the name of the 31st *sūrah* which of course shows no trivial reason.³⁰ Verse 12 of the *sūrah* states that Luqmān has been given by Allah *ḥikmah*, and the wisdom will be bestowed by Allah on those who want to give thanks, as another verse of the Quran says: “*Allah gives wisdom to whom He wills. And whoever is given wisdom, has indeed been given a lot of goodness*” (al-Baqarah: 269). Other statements show similar things, such as: “*And Allah will teach him the book and ḥikmah*” (Ali Imrān: 48), and “*and (remember) when Allah took the agreement from the Prophets: ‘really, whatever I give to you is in the form of books and wisdom...’*” (Ali Imrān: 81).

However, the Muslim philosophers' defense of philosophy is generally stated by the emphasis that philosophy is not in conflict with religion and that philosophy can run in an integrated and harmonious manner with religion. The misunderstanding of the theologians seems to have been influenced by their exclusivity because Islamic philosophy originated from external sources, especially from Greek philosophy.

The Muslim philosopher who firmly defended philosophy was al-Kindī. This figure is recorded as the first big-name philosopher who introduced philosophy to the Islamic world, so it only natural that he was the first to receive opposition from theologians. This of course made him feel obligated to defend philosophy.

First of all, al-Kindī emphasized that philosophy and religion have the same goal even though each is different in the method of achieving that goal. Both philosophy and religion have the same goal in two ways, namely knowing and understanding the oneness of God at the theoretical level and pursuing virtue in a high moral life on a practical level.³¹ Regarding the first goal, it can be understood that philosophy in the time of al-Kindī and several times afterward was oriented towards metaphysical issues – even al-Kindī wrote a book specifically discussing this issue with the title *Fī al-Falsafah al-Ūlā*. The issue of metaphysics is important because at that time it was closely related to discussions about divinity (theology).

The second objective contains another problem: does reason determine moral principles or is it revelation (*wahy*)? In other words, if someone does good, is it the work of reason, or is it derived from revelation? The dispute between reason and revelation has been a long debate during scientific developments in the Islamic world. The dispute over which of the two sources of knowledge is considered more authoritative than the other occurs in various fields. In theology and fiqh, for example, the scholars are divided into *abl al-ra`y* (rationalism) and *abl al-sunnah* (traditionalism). In the science of tafsir, there are also methods of *tafsir bi al-ra`y* and *tafsir bi al-ma`thūr*.

Thus dispute is what al-Kindī tries to bridge. He emphasized that the conflict between reason and revelation occurs because of the shallowness of perspectives in understanding the Quran.³² In understanding the holy book, especially verses whose meaning is ambiguous or *mutashābihāt*, a special method is needed, name the method of allegory or *ta`wil*. When al-Kindī interpreted the Quran, he tried to narrow the distance between reason and revelation and at the same time wanted to illustrated the harmony of philosophy and religion.

³⁰Nasr in Nasr and Leaman [ed.], *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 73

³¹George N. Atiyeh, *al-Kindi: the Philosopher of the Arabs*, trans. Djojokusurno, (Bandung: Pustaka, 1983),

³²Atiyeh, *al-Kindi: the Philosopher of the Arabs*, 25

One of al-Kindī's efforts to interpret al-Quran with *ta`wīl* can be found in his treatise entitled *Fī al-Ibānah 'an Sujūd al-Jirm al-Aqṣā wa ṭā'at Allāh* (Concerning the Submission of the Outer Body and Its Prostration to God).³³ There he was asked by his pupil to explain the meaning of the verse: "and the stars and trees prostrate to Him". (Q. 55:6). al-Kindī states that the word "*yasjud*" in the verse has a double meaning. The word can be taken literally, that is, to bow the body and head in prayer, or it can be understood as *majāzī*, which is paying respect. Of course, al-Kindī took the second meaning because it is impossible for the stars and trees to perform the movements and pray the prayers as a Muslim does. The explanation does not stop there. He then gave a philosophical charge to the meaning of the verse. The stars and all celestial bodies move and circulate in an orderly manner and carry out their functions as the cause of life and death on earth. The order of the celestial bodies is their submission or *Sujūd* to God.³⁴

However, the order of the celestial bodies is not passive, but voluntary obedience. Here he was in line with Aristotle who believed that celestial bodies have life and reason. This he proved based on the fact that life and death on earth were caused by the regularity of those celestial bodies (the basic concept of modern biology states that the sun, for example, affects the growth of plants and the human body).

The cause has a higher position than the effect, so according to al-Kindī, if humans and other living creatures have life and reason, then the celestial bodies that cause life on earth must have life and reason as well. Of course, the reasoning of celestial bodies is different from human reasoning in its function and purpose, but this is sufficient to prove that celestial bodies have life and reason are voluntary subject to and obeying God's will.³⁵ It is not difficult to understand the moral consequences of this *ta`wīl* by al-Kindī on the above verse. If stars and objects submit and obey God by moving to carry out their functions and benefits to life on earth regularly, then trees and humans must move to carry out functions and benefit the life of the universe regularly as a form of their submission to Allah.

Another illustration that contains a message of harmony between philosophy and religion is when al-Kindī interpret the Quran verse: "*as a matter of fact, when He wants something, He just says to it: 'be', and so it is*" (Q. 36:82). As explained earlier, al-Kindī also uses linguistic and metaphysical analysis in understanding this verse.

For him, the word "be!" cannot be taken literally as an order from higher to lower. It should be noted beforehand that al-Kindī is a philosopher who believes in creation from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), unlike other philosophers who have said that nature is eternal, such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. So it's really strange if God gives orders to something that doesn't or doesn't exist yet. That is why the word "be" is not understood as a greeting, but is understood metaphorically, namely as a symbol of God's will. Thus, the creation is not a process that involves God's particular nature or movement, namely His words (*kalām*), but involves all aspects of God's will and power.³⁶

The two illustrations above are sufficient to illustrate how al-Kindī used the method of *ta`wīl* as an intermediary to bring reason and revelation closer together as well as to prove that philosophy and religion are not contradictory. Although the dispute between reason and revelation and rejection of philosophy continue to occur in the development of Islamic scholarship, at least through this description we know that al-Kindī has tried hard to defend philosophy.

³³Atiyeh, *al-Kindi: the Philosopher of the Arabs*, 25

³⁴Atiyeh, *al-Kindi: the Philosopher of the Arabs*, 26

³⁵Atiyeh, *al-Kindi: the Philosopher of the Arabs*, 26

³⁶Atiyeh, *al-Kindi: the Philosopher of the Arabs*, 28

The originality of Islamic Philosophy

As explained earlier, Islamic philosophy is a development of Greek philosophy – and partly influenced by Persian and Indian philosophy. The fact that Islamic philosophy has taken source from outside Islam has become the target of criticism, both from some conservative Muslims who reject it and even forbid it as well as from those within philosophy who think it was not born from the womb of Islam. Therefore, to affirm the originality of Islamic philosophy, a question that deserves to be asked is “what distinguishes Islamic philosophy from Greek philosophy and other philosophical traditions at the level of ideas?”.

If we trace the ideas of the early Muslim philosophers, the tendency of Islamic philosophy leads to Aristotle's philosophy, as seen in the philosophy of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. Even so, there are strong doubts about the Aristotelian originality in Islamic philosophy by the early Muslim philosophers.

Ibn Rushd is the philosopher who is most critical of this. As explained by Majid Fakhry,³⁷ before refuting al-Ghazālī's criticism toward the philosophers in *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, Ibn Rushd in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* first criticized al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā whom he thought had distorted Aristotle's philosophy and mixed it with Plato's philosophy and they had been confused by Plotin's philosophy.

Ibn Rushd also considered the early Muslim philosophers to have misunderstood some Greek works that were thought to be Aristotle's. For example, *Elements of Theology*, translated into Arabic under the title *Fī al-Khayr al-Mahḍ* (On Pure Goodness) is actually the work of Proclus, the figure of Greek Neoplatonism. Likewise, *Theologia Aristotelis*, translated by 'Abdul Masīḥ ibn Na'imah al-Himsi with *Uṭūlūjīyā Aristūṭālis*, is misunderstood as Aristotle's work, even though that is Porphyry's commentary on Plotinus's *Enneads*.

Ibn Rushd's criticism of al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and other Muslim neo-platonists, actually aims to restore, or more precisely purify Aristotle's philosophy, and wants to refute al-Ghazālī that his criticism of Islamic philosophy was misdirected. What the *Hujjah al-Islām* is actually targeting is the teachings of neo-platonism, which seem to contradict al-Ghazālī's theological doctrine.

However, as we have already understood from *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, Ibn Rushd further attacked the theologians, especially from among the Ash'āriyah circles, who ignored the messages of Allah in the Quran to reflect on the universe with demonstrative logic as did philosophers. In *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, Ibn Rushd also defended the arguments of philosophers, such as about the immortality of nature (*Ṣifāh*) and proved the harmony of philosophy and religion. Through Ibn Rushd, we can conclude that Islamic Philosophy is the result of the creative synthesis of the Muslim intellectuals on Greek philosophy with the spirit of the Quran which runs in harmony. Thus, the originality of Islamic philosophy can be explained so far.

Ibn Rushd's criticism above can be denied by arguing that al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā did not just mix Aristotle's ideas and neo-platonism in a syncretic manner, but wanted to build the originality of Islamic philosophy that distinguishes it from Greek philosophy as its source. In fact, the two early Muslim philosophers absorbed the sources of Aristotle's philosophy which had been modified by the Greek commentators. So, Aristotle's philosophy has undergone changes and developments before falling into the hands of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.

Yegane Shayegan³⁸ argues that the transmission of Greek philosophy is not just a process of geographic and social contact, but also a process of change and development of

³⁷Majid Fakhry, *Averroes: His Life, Works, and Influence*, trans. Amrizal, (Jakarta: Sadra Press, 2018), 21-29

³⁸Yegane Shayegan in Nasr and Leaman (ed.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*

Aristotle's theories based on a political atmosphere. The lengthy description of the political atmosphere in question is unlikely to be relevant for this paper. However, one thing can be concluded, that Aristotle's thought that entered the Islamic world was the result of modification of Aristotle's commentators who were under pressure from the government, such as Ammonius who tried to modify Aristotle's thought who was forced to abandon platonic thinking because he was deemed incompatible with Roman Church doctrines.³⁹

It was amid in a modified Greek philosophy that early philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā developed Aristotle's teachings with Neoplatonism so that some experts called the two philosophers as Muslim Aristotelians cum Neoplatonists. By combining Aristotle's teachings and Neoplatonism, Ibn Sīnā for example, like other Aristotle commentators, succeeded in developing an original Islamic philosophy, which was different from the Greek philosophy that had originally been its source.

One of the philosophical themes of Ibn Sīnā which shows the originality of Islamic philosophy is regarding *prima causa* (First Cause) as the culmination of a series of the law of causality (cause-effect). Aristotle stated that the First Cause (God) is something that moves things, but he does not move. According to Ammonius and Ibn Sīnā, there is an ontological imbalance in Aristotle's opinion. If the First Cause doesn't move, how does it get into existence?⁴⁰ This criticism was also made by Muhammad Iqbal in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*,⁴¹ namely that the logic of cause and effect will be problematic if it stops at one point because the law presupposes a never-ending sequence.

Therefore, for Ammonius and Ibn Sīnā, the First Cause is not a final cause, but an efficient cause, because it is impossible to consider the First Cause to be both the principle of motion and the principle of being. Thus, Ibn Sīnā's conception of the immanence and transcendence of God becomes something new, compared to Aristotle's thought which conditions First Cause only as a transcendence Being.⁴²

The transcendence of God, as Aristotle thought about the position of First Cause in the series creation, implies the absence of a relationship between Himself and creatures. Aristotle's opinion which states that there is no existential relationship between One God and the many (beings) cannot be maintained if it is correlated with Islamic teachings. Therefore, Muslim philosophers need other thoughts that can explain this relationship rationally, which in this case is the theory of emission or illumination of Neoplatonism. This is what Fazlur Rahman said.⁴³ Based on this, Ibn Sīnā built a hierarchical theory of creation, namely the theory of emanations. On the other hand, if philosophers simply refer to Neo-Platonic thoughts in terms of existence, then they will be trapped in a pantheistic view of the world, where there is no separation between God and creatures, and with that God becomes anthropomorphic. Of course, this is again not in accordance with Islamic teachings, so that Muslim philosophers did not completely abandon Aristotle's thinking.

In answering the question "how did the First Cause get its existence?", Ibn Sīnā added to Aristotle's philosophy a theory that shows the correlation between Islamic teachings and philosophy of the essence and existence of God. Essence means "what is God?", whereas existence is about "the fact that He exists". God is One, so He is not two elements (essence and existence) in one form, but one atomic element in a single form. This is different from other beings other than Him, which according to Aristotle, the essence is not identical with its existence, because something else is only possible and derived from the existence of God. God, therefore, is not the same as other than Him.

³⁹Shayegan, in Nasr and Leaman (ed.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 185

⁴⁰Shayegan, in Nasr and Leaman (ed.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 187

⁴¹Muhammad Iqbal in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, trans. Munib Iqbal and Wahid Iqbal, (Jakarta: Lazuardi, 2002), 44

⁴²Shayegan, in Nasr and Leaman (ed.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 188

⁴³Fazlur Rahman In MM. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 482

This principle is related to the conception of the form (ṣurah) and matter (māddah). The form of an object is the universal qualities that form the definition of a thing, so "what is an object?" can be seen by describing the object, while the matter is the real form of the object. It's just that, according to Ibn Sīnā, form and matter alone, like Aristotle. Cannot explain the real existence of an object. For that, In *al-Shifā*, Ibn Sīnā added Aristotle's statement above. All composed existence also cannot be caused by form and matter alone, but is caused by "something else", as Ibn Sīnā said explicitly: "Everything except the One, who is by essence One and Existent (*maujūd*), acquires its existence from something else..."⁴⁴

What is meant by "something else", according to Ibn Sīnā, is what is called Active Intellect, which is a kind of element of divinity (located at the tenth level in emanation theory) which gives forms (wāhib al-ṣuar). Active Intellect is a storage place for all forms, both material and immaterial. Form (ṣurah) and matter (māddah) as the constituent elements of existence depend on this Active Intellect. Since Active Intellect is the source of the form of every existence, then God is called by Ibn Sīnā *wājib al-wujūd* (inevitable form), while every being is called *mumkin al-wujūd* (possible form). So how did the First Cause come into existence? Because He absolutely exists!

This is how Ibn Sīnā modified Greek philosophy in order to be correlated with Islam so that with it Islamic philosophy became something truly original. Even though the source of Islamic philosophy is Greek philosophy, the modification made by Muslim philosophers shows its originality.

As a final note, it is really interesting to look at Haidar Bagir's claim was made in the introduction to the book *Pengantar Pemikiran Sadra* (Introduction to Ṣadra's Thought) which was attributed to Murtadha Motahhari.⁴⁵ He stated that by synthesizing all schools of Islamic philosophy plus the incorporation of the Quran and Hadīth, the true Islamic philosophy is in the Philosophy of Wisdom of Mulla Ṣadra. Fazlur Rahman even emphatically praises this philosopher as a true one, because "what his philosophical intelligence seeks is basically truth and originality"⁴⁶

This was done by Mulla Ṣadra by referring to various schools of previous Islamic philosophy in building his philosophical teachings, in particular the peripatetic philosophy of Ibn Sīnā, Shuhrāwardī's theosophy, Ibn 'Arabī's Sufism and Islamic law, including the words of the Prophet and Shi'i imams. But the synthesis he did was not a kind of reconciliation or compromise on the surface. For Fazlur Rahman, a great and original thinker is the one who is able to discover the main ideas and a big principle that underlies all reality and is able to interpret them in a completely new and important sense.⁴⁷

Even though Fazlur Rahman spoke in the context of Mulla Ṣadra's thought and figure, his view can be interpreted more broadly in the context of Islamic philosophy as a whole. Islamic philosophy does take Greek philosophy as its source, but Muslim philosophers have synthesized it with other philosophical traditions and Islamic teachings. This kind of creativity shows the originality of Islamic philosophy.

Conclusion

Many sentiments are aimed at Islamic philosophy, including that it does not originate from Islam itself, but a product of Western culture because of the enormous influence of Greek philosophy. I have mentioned that Muslim philosophers believe that philosophy is not a new thing in the process of searching for nature. Philosophy has even existed since the time before Greek philosophy appeared. Thus, the cultivation of a philosophical tradition in Islam is an attempt to revive a cultural heritage that has long been lost historically. Maybe

⁴⁴Rahman In MM. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 483

⁴⁵Murtadha Muthahhari, *Filsafat Hikmah: Pengantar Pemikiran Shadra*, trans. Tim Penerjemah Mizan, (Bandung Mizan, 2002)

⁴⁶Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Shadra*, trans. Muin, (Bandung: Pustaka, 2000), 9

⁴⁷Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Shadra*, 18

my writings on Hindu philosophy⁴⁸ can add to the reference that philosophy was born in the eastern world, not in the West.

Although the source of Islamic philosophy is Greek philosophy, the creative modifications made by Muslim philosophers show that Islamic philosophy is a product of the original tradition in Islam, and in fact, philosophy has its function to explain religious teachings philosophically and even strengthen the creed. As a legacy of Muslim scholars, therefore, there is no reason not to celebrate it.

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⁴⁸Yunizar Ramadhani, *Konsep Eskatologi Dalam Filsafat Hindu (Suatu Perbandingan Dengan Eskatologi Islam)*, thesis, Faculty of Ushuluddin, Department of Aqidah-Filsafat, 2010

⁴⁹M. Zainuddin, *Pluralisme Agama Pergulatan Dialogis Islam-Kristen di Indonesia*, 1-2

