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The Problem of Islamic Philosophy: Definitions and Origins

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ABSTRACT

Islamic philosophy is the product of a complex intellectual process in which Syrians, Arabs, Persians, Turks, Berbers and others took an active part. When we speak of Islamic philosophy we mean that a philosophy which development, and modalities, are essentially linked to the religions and spiritual fact of Islam. Sometimes the researchers of Islamic philosophy had also used the term Arabic Philosophy or Muslim Philosophy rather than Islamic. Islamic philosophy presents us with a number of unresolved questions having to do with its origin and its relation to Greek philosophy. However, the term Islamic philosophy preferable to the others. For example, in Islam, it has been explained in how Islamic philosophy was internally taken by the thought of the Quran through its propagation within the first Muslim community. It must also be included in the notion of the Quranic concept *'Sunatullah'* or 'natural' which means the characteristic or trait given by God 'alluding thereby to nature as something that is created by God It should not deny the importance of the science of metaphysics because it is very close to our reality. This study attempts to elaborate the development of Islamic philosophical ideas and analyses them from the Islamic theologico-philosphical views. This study examined the terms of the Islamic philosophy, analyze the function and structure of the terminology mentioned in the Qur'an since Allah's Commandments would have explicit and implicit wisdoms. This study is a qualitative study using content analysis method, as the subject determination. The results shown the terms which are issued in history of Islamic thought from various classical schools of Islamic thought which is Islamic philosophy will be defined it with regard to its fundamental characteristics mainly in connection to its origin.

Keywords: Islam, Islamic philosophy, philosophy, origin & theology.

Introduction

Islamic philosophy is a philosophy which the existence is proof against the unjustly claim, Islamic law (*fiqh*) alone is neither on adequate nor a decisive expression of Islam. With regard to the development of Islamic philosophy[1] we have observed that the intellectual history of the Arabs

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[1] Sometimes for the researchers of philosophy; they had also used the term 'Arabic philosophy' or 'Muslim philosophy rather than Islamic. However, the term Islamic philosophy is more preferred than the others. For a more detailed

to whom the development of philosophy and science in the Near East owed so much virtually begins with the rise of Islam. Nevertheless, the development of philosophy and theology in Islam is bound up with the advent of the Abbasid dynasty in the middle of the 8th century. They were interested in the development of science and philosophy during this period to such an extent that scientific and philosophical output were no longer a matter of individual effort or initiative[2] Long before, that the Abbasid dynasty took an active part in its promotion since the intellectual repercussions of this activity required much greater scope**.** The theological divisions, which were growing out of philosophical controversy or inquiry racked the whole of the Muslim community. Caliphs upheld one theological view against another and demanded adherence to it on politic grounds, with the inevitable result that theology soon became the handmaid of politics. Consequently, freedom of thought and conscience was seriously jeopardized.[3]

The fundamental cause of this development is definitely the close correlation in Islam between principle and law, the realm of the temporal and the realm of the spiritual. But such development requires the challenge of foreign ideas. This is precisely the role played by the introduction of Greek ideas and the Greek spirit of intellectual curiosity which generates a bipolar reaction of the utmost importance for the understanding of Islam. However, the varying degrees of allegiance to Greek philosophy and logic do not only rise the diverse theological schools of thought, but generated the more distinctly Hellenic current of ideas, which we shall designate as the Islamic philosophical school[4] So, again, the beginnings of the Islamic philosophical school coincide with the first translations of the works of the Greek masters from Syriac or Greek into Arabic. The Arabs as well as the Persians who have contributed abundantly to the scientific and philosophical enlightenment in Islam were practically minded people. Their interest in the more abstract aspects of Greek thought had been a subsequent development primarily in Aristotelian logic and Greek philosophy as prelude to the study of theological texts.[5]

Similarly, the terms *falsafah and faylasuf* were derived from the Greek's transcription to the peripatetic philosophers and West-platonists of the first centuries of Islam. The clear distinction which existed in the West between philosophy and theology went back to Medieval scholasticism, it also presupposed a process of secularization of the idea of which could not exist in Islam, mainly because Islam has never experienced the phenomenon of church. The term

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elaboration and this, See 'Ali Azam Mahfuz, 'Fi al-Falsafah Islamiyvah: Madkhal Wa al-Qadhaya (Cairo: Dar al-Hidayah, 1986) pp, 14-17, Ibrahim Madkur,' Fi al-Falsafah Islamiyyah: Manhaj Wa Tatbiquh, (Cairo: Dar-al-Ma'arif, n.d.), juz v, pp 17-21. M. M. Shariff A History of Muslim Philosophy (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrosowitz, 1960), vols 2, pp.22. This paper is originally a term paper submitted to Professor Alparslan Acigenck for the course Islamic philosophy (IT 6 Semester 1 1994-1995) at ISTAC on Feb 1995, Kuala Lumpur. Some addition, correction and modification had been made for this purpose.

[2] See, Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) pp xv- xxtv - (introduction's section). In order to know whether the term philosophy is equal with the term al-Hikmah. please see, Abd Halim. Mahmud in his book al-Tafkir fi al-falsafiy fi al Islam, (Beirut: Dar Kitab Lubnani, 1982) pp. 223-245, also, Ali Azam Mahfuz in his, Madkhal Falsafah Ammah. (Cairo: Dar al-Hidayah, 1986) pp Mahmud Hamdi Zaqzuq, Tamhid al-Falsafah. (Cairo: Maktabah Anglo al-Misriyyah 1979), pp. 40-103

[3] Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, *ibid*.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

hikmah is the equivalent of the Greek *Sophia,* and the term *hikmat Ilahiyyah* is the lateral equivalent of the Greek *theosophia*.[6]

In relation to that, metaphysics is also generally defined as being concerned with the *Ilahiyat, the Divinalia*. The term *'ilm Ilahi' (scientia divina)* should not be translated by the word *theodicy.* According to some Muslim historians such as al-Shahrastani and Qutb al-Din al-Syirazi that the wisdom of the "Greek sages' itself was also derived from the 'cave of the lights of prophecy. Obviously, philosophy in Islam has confronted more than one difficult situation, but the difficulties were not the same as those confronted in the Christian world. In other words, philosophy in Islam was mostly here when the object of meditation, was the fundamental fact of prophecy and of the prophetic revelation. This fact also implies with the hermeneutical problems and situation in Christianity.[7]

As a result, the term philosophy itself assumes that the form of prophetic philosophy in the proper sense. In the same way, it is impossible to speak of *hikmah* in Islam without speaking of mysticism. For example, Sufism from the point of view of its spiritual experience and its speculative theosophy. Therefore, the history of philosophy and the history of spirituality or Sufism are inseparable.

Scope and Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the study, this paper takes a qualitative approach through a literature review covering books, articles and journals. The data obtained from these sources were analysed, screened, interpreted and categorised according to two themes which are definition of Islamic Philosophy and its origin. This study focuses on the discussion of issues in Islamic philosophy from the aspects of definition and origin. This study also uses the content analysis method to analyze the sources that have been obtained.

The Significance of Methodology in the Study of Islamic Philosophy

It is hoped that this study does not need the heritage of Islamic philosophy which embodied all viewpoints of Islamic philosophy. It is sufficient to state that there is something new in Islamic philosophy contribution in Islam. However, this would leads to one conclusion which is each field or discipline of knowledge has its own terminology or nomenclature. Therefore, what do we actually need for this present study? Before answering this methodological question, it is better to deliver this problem which has dual aspects.[8]

Firstly, each philosopher has his own view renewed in the beginning, one of which is his position or stand on the philosophical issues and its variety as clearly stated by Aristotle. If he does not have this particular viewpoint of the philosophical problems we cannot consider him as philosopher as far as philosophy is concerned Secondly, the heritage of philosophy makes the

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[6] See, Henry Corbin, 'History of Islamic Philosophy (trans) London and New York: Islamic Publications for the Institute of Ismaili Studies and Kegan Paul International, 1993) at Foreword's section (xiii - xviii).

[7] Henry Corbin 'History of Islamic Philosophy. at Foreword's section (xiii – xviii)

[8] See, Muhammad Abd Fadhil Qusi, Jawanib Min Turath al-Falsafiy Fi-Al-Islam. (Cairo: Dar Tiba'ah al-Muhammadiyyah, 1984), pp. 11-13.

philosopher gets the opportunity to have his real own viewpoint[9] However, the viewpoints need to be original without the influence from any other philosophers. This will be discussed later in this study. This present study provided an appropriate method which embodies all schools of philosophers (thought) as a real embodiment in which leads to the discovery of a collected system containing all particulars in one single arrangement (co-ordination). It is believed the first step that should be taken limiting of what might be called as 'the beginning or starting point which refers to the central idea the main concerned of the philosophers. For that reason, it is no doubt, that they can achieved it from the centered idea without the lack of vitality and fertility of ideas. As a matter of fact, when a philosopher lost his energy towards certain ideas for constructing his specific philosophical system he would find himself as stated by some researchers really, leading towards an expression *'Kathrah Kathirah min at-tafsilat as-Saghirah al-Mutanasirah* (*stating that a philosopher is able to see and produce a new and big concept from a small detail*). Therefore, to construct the philosophical basis, there are two cardinal qualities, the arrangement or the binding of sects", and relations in unity of complete membership and production of its premises for its results as a valid production. And what is meant by the comprehensiveness is the presentation of the extremities of the sect as a complete presentation on various fields of philosophy and problems. A researcher should recognize the controlling idea of these facts completely until it becomes a complete foundation or what we call it as 'the unity of membership'.[10]

The second step would be conducting a survey based on the content of the legacy of philosophy given to the philosopher, without any exaggeration in destroying of special subjectivism to the philosopher by returning all elements of his school of thought to the foregoing elements and without refuting or rejecting for each relation of these elements. These steps made it possible for researchers of the heritage of Islamic philosophy to see the sect of philosophy has a study topic. Based on the discussion above, the topics of the study could be summarized as follows:

1. Outlining which the beginning and ending or the central point that is turning around it the rest of points or as possible also for the team of researchers.
2. Drawing a complete outline for the history of Islamic philosophy generally which connect the latter with the former and submitted each point into what is read from many points in which should not to be destroyed by the cardinal instructions.
3. The detailed outline which is followed by this history of philosophy links the continuity throughout the next generations[11]

Map's Approach for the Problems of Islamic Philosophy

We do not expect the philosophical's stream to be one of the numerous philosophical's streams in the heritage of world philosophy in which comprises demonstrations and debates on one hand and contradiction between the opinions of historians which more and less between absolute rejection for the essence of philosophy and its existence and absolute acceptance towards this existence and emphasizing of a few proof upon it on the other. This debate is not depending solely, on Islamic philosophy. On the other hand it jumps over to the controversy on

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[9] Muhammad Abd Fadhil Qusi, Jawanib Min Turath al-Falsafiy Fi-Al-Islam, pp. 11-13
[10] Alfred North Whitehead, Modes of Thought (New York: The Free Press, 1938) pp. 12-15
[11] Muhammad Abd Fadhil Qusi, Jawanib Min Turath al-Falsafiy Fi-Al-Islam, pp.15-20

domains or fields of this philosophy, on justification of its continuity and on its representative and spokesman, From our point of view it is possible the answer of this debate is referred to the three fundamental problems as follows:-

1. The problem of relationship between Islamic philosophy and the others.
2. The problem of connection between Islamic philosophy and the religion of Islam itself.
3. The role of Islamic philosophy during its rise, growth and finally the justifications of its continuity in our present day.[12]

Regarding to the first problem, it is undoubtedly that most of the philosophical ideas whether it is Greek, Indian or Persian have its method in one single form or another, into those who are concerned with philosophy from the Muslim people since translation's time namely it became legacy or heritage which was given the opportunity for them. For this reason, the wave of controversy has begun between the historians of Islamic philosophy regarding how far is its origin, does it has innovation and invention and which original or its role is only as a good connector and in detail of Greek expression based on certain definition's or concepts or it is a kind of repetition for the Greek's ideas which is written into Arabic language according to Renan or it was translated from the Greek's book [13.]Consequently, it appeared another stream of controversy on limitation of the fields of Islamic philosophy and its scopes does it restrict upon terminological of schools of philosophy such as peripatetic school and the school of illumination. On this basis, Islamic philosophy becomes the following link that links the Hellenic and Hellenistic thoughts which had influenced Islamic philosophy or we can say that, the field of Islamic philosophical thought is wider including the science of kalam, Sufism and the principles of *fiqh* considering it entirely as an embodying for the innovation of Islamic thought originally.[14]

This is a clear claim which mentioned by some Muslim researchers at the beginning of this century. With regard to the second problem, it also has raised another streams of controversy that is, is it possible to say that this philosophy is the production which is legitimated for the Islamic world view as brought by the Holy Quran and the sacred tradition? In fact, the Holy Quran and the sacred traditions indeed have guaranteed that by putting of Islamic world view for the metaphysical thing in the form of stopping which is no way of modification in which or ascription to which on decrease from which, so what happen to the philosophy at that time because this field is the field of belief. Thus, this matter should be chosen in one of each two sides either to believe or not to believe. Nevertheless, some researchers said that as long as the philosophy claims for itself that the truth in examining of everything until presuppositional belief, whereas religion that verily everything in what in philosophy itself, it should coordinate with its conceptions which is taken from divine revelation[15]. As for the third problem, what we meant by which is the function of Islamic philosophy with the question of philosophy's translation whether it was done by individual for the sake of individualism too or it was received for the needs of contemporary itself? Whatever the answer is there justifications which allows the

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[12] Muhammad Abd Fadhil Qusi, Jawanib Min Turath al-Falsafiy Fi-Al-Islam, pp. 25-30

[13] See, T. J. De Boer, The History of Philosophy in Islam (trans) by E.R. Jones (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1933), pp, 20-30. Also see, in Arabic translation by Abd Hadi Abu Raidah, Tarikh Falsafah Islamiyyah, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahdah al-Misriyyah, 1938), pp. 50

[14] T. J. De Boer, The History of Philosophy in Islam (trans) by E.R. Jones, pp.20-30

[15] Muhammad Abd Fadhil Qusi, Jawanib Min Turath al-Falsafiy Fi al-Islam, pp. 40-45

continuity of the existence of philosophy in nowadays and what is the role which we can hope beyond this study?

Result and Discussion

The relationship of Arabs with the Philosophies of other nations

[1] Before the coming of Islam

As we have already known, simplicity is a major characteristic in the life of the Arab people before Islam. Each phenomenon of nature and its signs around them is easy, convenient and smooth as well as their livelihood and social circumstances. Accordingly, this situation or environment motivated them in researching sciences and knowledge in which makes them so convenient in their daily practical life. So, what else we can hope for them if their condition in that manner in producing philosophical thoughts or ideas which qualified with complexity, composition or construction and so on. Indeed, before Islam they have had '*hukama'* whom they possess viewpoints of medicine and its branches but all of these are very little to be known as stated by al-Shahrastani in his book *'al-Milal wa al-Nihal'*. Briefly speaking, the people of Arab before Islam in accordance to some researchers are not concerned with the philosophical contemplations which have too much absurdity and ambiguity.[16]

[2] The Point of Beginning

It is known the spreading of Islam in Arabic country was a fundamental point which changes in all aspects of human life mainly in intellectual aspect. Islam had directed an Arabic intellectualism entirely towards the belief of metaphysical realm in all aspects of its scope, the Arab people believe the unseen world. This is not the first problem which started by the Holy Quran at the very beginning of its verses, but it would not be an exaggeration of we said that the belief of *al-Ghayb* is like a dangerous revolution in conceiving the physical realm and metaphysical for human kind. In addition, the belief of al-Ghayb is a belief with thing which is not perceptible through the senses and also a belief of existence which has a dual creation and this dualism is inevitable in the forming of existence. Hence the material conceptions are restricted alone from the interpretation of universe entirely and men, by believing it this has made the method more noble and higher from other method such as sensation's method ended by the coming of Islam. In order to give an understanding of natural world, Islam also had urged all human kind to view the signs of God and its majesty, its beauty and also its greatness.[17] Among the Quranic verses which have been stated in this respect is (*'Afala Yanzuruna Ila al-ibili Kaifa Khuliqat)* which was translated into*' Do They Not look at the Camels How They are made?*[18] Based on this verse, it is impossible to say that the Arab people have no intellectual dimension, or have no philosophical ideas or thoughts in their life. It is also not true if we want to claim that Arabic thought is not active, stagnant, not original or genuine because the coming of Islam has removed the binding of sensational knowledge and opened another dimension which is called the point of

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[16] Muhammad Abd Fadhil Qusi, Jawanib Min Turath al-Falsafiy Fi-Al-Islam, ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Surah al-Ghashiyyah:17. Look also for the view of Mahmud Hamdi Zaqzuq in his book. Zaqzuq, Muhmud Hamdi, Dawr al-Islam Fi Tatawwur al-Fikri al-Falsafiy (Cairo: Maktaba Wahbah, 1984), pp 2- 25

beginning of Arabic life of intellectual. This life is similarly to other intellectualism which is good for fertility development and agriculture. However perhaps their Arabic life of intellectualism is more fertility and more profoundly accepted for the conceptions of Islam and its metaphysics if compared to other nations. When we hold to this point of starting, we have not also neglected the influence of Greek 'translation towards Muslim during the translation's period but, we cannot forget, an original basis for this revival namely; those concepts of Islamic world view which moved the water of small sea after its long stop.[19]

Therefore, based on this, Arabic life of intellectualism becomes one of the activities of innovative thought or ideas but there is one condition that is 'Islamic', which means it is necessary to commit basically with the Islamic metaphysics and its concepts of metacosm. As a result, the life of Islamic Arabic intellectualism has a concrete measurement and genuine foundation started from which its revival namely the Islamic concept of metaphysical world.

Therefore, it seems to us with these two important points i.e. firstly, regarding to the view that Islamic philosophy is the product from the transmitted philosophy in terms of Greek philosophy as stated by Hourten[20] *al-Naaz'ah al-Yunaniyah fi al-hikmah al-Islamiyyah*" where this view is rejected because basically Arabic intellectualism spirit has emerged with the influence of Islam in its emergence and rise. They claimed that the Arabic Intellectualism life comes from the translation of Greek, India and Persia in the following stages, that is the only what we so-called it as the helping factors which cannot becomes the foundation and the source.

Secondly, with regards to the distinction between the spirit of Arabic intellectualism life and the spirit of Greek intellectualism life, it is inevitable, even though, the point of beginning of both philosophies are different from each other, from various aspects specifically at the beginning stage and the innovation and creation stage. Briefly speaking, we can conclude, on the point of beginning according to the Islamic invention activity namely started from the Islamic concepts of metaphysical realm whereas to the Greek invention activity namely started from the concept of nothingness or void towards the universe.[21]

[3] The Origin of Islamic Philosophy

Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration if we say again that, this issue is the most critical issue of Islamic philosophy on its origin because it deals with its existence and essence entirely. As we have already cited earlier, most of the European researchers have claimed, Islamic philosophy has no origin but it was taken and translated from Greek's books and it is not qualified to be registered in the world of thought. In addition, they have maintained, there are so many philosophers in Islam but they are not able to philosophize. Among of these orientalists are T.J De Boer, Renan, Russell, Judith and many others. In this connection, there is an opposing opinion, that Islamic philosophy becomes excellent with its themes, problems and solutions, in which it treats the problem of unity and multiplicity, the

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[19] Muhammad Abd Fadhil Qusi, Jawanib Min Turath al-Falsafiy Fi-Al-Islam, pp. 45-55.

[20] Ibid., pp.70-74.

[21] Ibid.

relationship between God and His creations. It attempts to harmonise between revelation and reason, belief and wisdom, and religion and philosophy [22]. In this regard also, the Islamic concept of philosophy is clarified by Ibrahim Madkour[23] was born in environment and culture which is apparently a spiritual religious philosophy. The truth is we are not able to give a specific view unless we have taken consideration few remarks (observations). Perhaps what is significant for us to note here is what has been done by the person or an innovator with such a transferred idea and also what has not been done and what is the results which we are able to take it concerning with its essence and its nature.[24]

As we have previously stated, there are several remarks or observations on this matter, some of which are the heritage of Greek when it was transferred to Muslims, it would clash with the new ideas whereas it would not clash with Europe with the new ideas but with the new people merely. Therefore, it becomes compatible with the European community whilst it does not much useful for the Muslim. The second point is philosophy in its definition, has born in its environment and its culture; It is a mistake if we believe that the philosophy during its transfer from one civilization to another civilization is itself or at the same civilization in both civilizations. The third point is that civilization of Islamic intellectualism has started with the certain point of beginning namely the Quranic worldview of metaphysics for the Muslim as we have already mentioned. The fourth point is the fields of philosophizing in Islam which is wider and broader in which it cannot be denied the characteristic of innovation or creativity of the Muslim philosopher. One of the main distinctions between two civilizations or philosophies is the method of application which distinguishes between one philosopher and the other as well as their civilizations. The philosophical problems like the problem of unity and multiplicity or as the problem of duality between soul and matter but each philosopher definitely the fifth point has a certain method treating the issue which it was raised with it. Finally, is the method of philosophical interpretation (*al-Ta'wil al-Falsafiyy*) and what we mean by that method is the philosopher takes the ancient philosophical source from the one side for a new view then he forms it with a new formation from within its essence. Therefore, an allegorical interpretation (*at-ta'wil*) is the source of invention and creation. [25]

For instance, we can see this application in al-Shahrastani his famous book al-*Milal Wa Nihal*. Furthermore, we can find it in Ibn Sina namely Kitab-*Al- Shifa*, collections of Qutb al-Din Syirazi and some of the philosophical problems which have been interpreted by using the method of *Ta'wil*, the origination of the world, the resurrection of bodies whether it needs to harmonies or not. Perhaps one of the renowned allegorical interpretations is al-Farabi's attempt in reconciliation the view of the two philosophers (Plato and Aristotle) and that attempt shows to us the par excellence intellectualism which tends for the unity of different opinions and the like.

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[22] Abd Halim Mahmud, al-Tafkir al-Falsafiyy Fi al-Islam, pp. 248-274.

[23] Ibrahim Madkour, Fi al-Falsafah al-Islamiyyah Manhajun Wa Tatbiquh, pp. 15 – 21.

[24] Muhammad Abd Fadhil Qusi, Jawanib Min Turath al-Falsafiy Fi-Al-Islam, pp. 80-82.

[25] Ibid., pp. 85-89.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the writer would like to quote Sheikh Mustapha Abdur Raziq's view in his book *'Tamhid Li-Tarikh Falsafah Islamiyyah'*, that states[26]

> "*Islamic philosophy may be found in the books of theologians and jurists and al Imam al-Syafie, who was the author of science of Islamic Jurisprudence in Islam. His place for the Muslim as well as Aristotle's position for the Greek*."

The writer thinks that if we want to discuss in detail about the development of Islamic philosophical ideas from the beginning, we can refer to Ali Sami Nashar's[27] in his book *'Nash'atul Fikr al-Falsafiy Fil-al-Islam* volume one in chapter three which he has divided the first beginnings for the movement of Islamic intellectualism into several sections. The first section deals with the Jurists and their theological beliefs including the great figures such as Abu Hanifah, Malik b. Anas, Muhammad Idris al-Syafie and Ahmad Ibn. Hanbal. The second section discusses the earliest *Ahlus-Sunnah*. Furthermore, it also discusses the development of *Hasywiyyah, Musyabbihah* and *Mujassimah*, while in chapter five, al-Nasyar also speaks of the earliest *al-Qadariyyun* and *al-Mujbirah al-Awail* on the other. Subsequently, he also discusses in chapter six the Mu'tazilite and so on.

As a conclusion we have philosophy in Islam in terms of *Kalam, Fiqh, Hadith, Seerah, Tarikh, Tafsir* etc and it does not mean that there is no philosophy in Islamic civilization at all even though in the prophet time since our philosophy is not Greek philosophy as understood before. Again, we should emphasize more that Islam has its own philosophy, special characteristics, themes, fields of study, and scope and the clearest proof is the science of *kalam* in its origin and forms. Comparison of the views of Mustapha Abd Razik, Al-Hudhairi, Abu Raidah, Ali Sami Nasyar and many others including Prof Aparslan, to my point of view I also agreed with Prof Aparslan's view that philosophy in Islam is the science of kalam itself as well as sufism and the principles of fiqh.

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[26] Abd Razik Mustapha, *Tamhid li Tarikh al-Falsafah al-Islamiyyah*, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahdah al-Misriyyah, 1959), pp. 30-35.

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