AL-ITQĀN

JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC SCIENCES AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Volume:7   **Issue No. 1**   **February 2023**

Table of Contents

Author Guidelines

Manuscript article can be either in English, Malay or Arabic using software Microsoft office (Word, and Excel), Font 12 Times New Roman. Only tables, figures and appendix can be written using Font 10, Times New Roman.

If there is a usage of Quranic verses or Hadith fom Prophet P.B.U.H., it only needs to be done by translation only.

The manuscript should be in 1.5 single spacing and justified, with the margin of 2.5cm.

Article needs to have a title and author's name and second author's name along with the full address (institution's or university's address, e-mail, handphone's number, office's number, fax together with the second author's details).

Every article must include an `abstract in Malay and English. The length of the abstract is no more than 150 words including 5 keywords.

The length of each article must not exceed 6000 words.

The Arabic words in manuscript should be in a transliterated form.

Reference for each article must be written according to **Chicago Manual**.

Notification Letter:

Letter of Acceptance – editorial board will send an e-mail to the author to notify that the manuscript is received.

Letter of Acceptance/Rejection for Publication – editorial board will send a letter by an e-mail to the author to notify if the manuscript judged by the panels is approved or declined to be published.

Letter of Publication – editorial board will send a letter by e-mail to the author if the article has been judged, repaired, and corrected to be published in the college's journal.

Certificate of Appreciation– editorial board will send a certificate of appreciation by mail to the authors who have sent their articles.

A Terminological Issue: Islamic Phılosophy or "Phılosophy in The Islamıc World"?

Megawati Moris[*]

Abstract

There have been debates and contentions on what should be the term, translated into English, given to the discipline of *falsafah* or *ḥikmah* in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Some of the common terms given to it by both Western and Muslim scholars are 'Islamic philosophy', 'Muslim philosophy', 'Arab philosophy' and 'Arabic philosophy'. More recently the term 'philosophy in the Islamic World' was made popular by the scholar and philosopher Peter Adamson. The reason for using this term which Adamson considers as a terminological issue is that it is the "most appropriate", and the term Islamic Philosophy is "too obvious". In this paper, firstly, the different terms given to the discipline of *falsafah* or *ḥikmah* as aforementioned will be discussed and secondly, why the term 'Islamic Philosophy' is the most precise term to be given to it will be shown. A critique of why the term coined by Adamson is imprecise and does not address the essential meaning of the discipline itself and its role in Islamic civilization will also be undertaken. This issue is of particular significance since using and explaining the correct term would be helpful to clarify how 'Islamic philosophy' is **essentially Islamic** in its definitions, principles, and characteristics. This counters the common misunderstanding that Islam does not have an authentic philosophical tradition of its own. Understanding the real meaning and role of Islamic philosophy is important to avoid the commonly held view by Muslims and non-Muslims alike that Islam has an anti-intellectual stance which is the cause of violence and extremism among its adherents.
Keywords: Terminology, Meaning, Role, Islamic Philosophy, 'Philosophy in the Islamic world'.

Introduction

Since the discipline of *falsafah* or *ḥikmah* in the Islamic intellectual tradition and studies on it began to be translated into the English language from its original languages, primarily Arabic and Persian, there have been debates and contentions on what should be the name or term given, in English, to the discipline. Some of the common names given to

---

[*] Assistant. Prof. Dr., Department of Uṣūl al-Dīn and Comparative Religion, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: megawati@iium.edu.my

it by both Western and Muslim scholars are 'Islamic philosophy'[1], 'Muslim philosophy' 'Arab philosophy' and 'Arabic philosophy'. More recently the term 'philosophy in the Islamic World'[2] was made popular by the American scholar and philosopher Peter Adamson who is currently teaching at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, Germany. The reason for using this term which Adamson considers as a terminological issue is that it is the "most appropriate", and the name Islamic Philosophy is "too obvious".[3]

Method and Critique

In this article I will account the different terms given to the discipline of *falsafah* or *ḥikmah* in English such as those mentioned above and refute why they are not precise translations. Consequently, I will show why the term 'Islamic philosophy' is the most precise for the discipline.

To prove this point, firstly, I will examine the term for the discipline of *falsafah* or *ḥikmah* according to the meaning understood by the philosophers (*falāsifah*; *ḥukamā'*) themselves within the framework of the Islamic tradition. Secondly, I will provide the definitions of philosophy by the philosophers which will demonstrate its essential and true meaning overall. Subsequently, I will refute why the term 'philosophy in the Islamic world' used by Adamson is not precise since the term does not capture the discipline's real and true meaning, its role in Islamic history and intellectual tradition as well as its worldview, and objectives. Finally, I will explain why the terminological issue raised by Adamson is significant in its implications on the general understanding of Islam, its intellectual tradition and culture and on its adherents.

English Terms for the Discipline of *Falsafah* or *Ḥikmah*
1. Muslim Philosophy:

The general view is that since the philosophers comprise of Muslims hence, the name of the discipline should be Muslim philosophy. For example, M. M. Sharif named the book he edited as, *A History of*

---

[1] The authors use the term they believe to be appropriate in the title of their books. For example, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006).

[2] Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). He also stated that this term is equivalent to the term 'Islamicate Philosophy'.

[3] "Philosophy in the Islamic World, Prof. Peter Adamson Talks at Google", (3) Philosophy in the Islamic World | Prof. Peter Adamson | Talks at Google - YouTube

Muslim Philosophy.[1] This term, however, refers to the philosophical thought and writings of Muslim figures without evaluating whether its contents originated from the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* or are in accordance with their teachings as the term 'Islamic' denotes. Its critics for example, Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) consider the three views held by Muslim Peripatetic (*Mashshā'ī*) philosophers Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) and al-Fārābī (d. 950) namely, the eternity of the world, God's lack of knowledge of particulars and the impossibility of bodily resurrection are contrary to Islamic belief.[2]

The assumption that only Muslims make up the discipline in Islamic tradition and history is also not accurate, since there are also prominent Christian and Jewish figures who contributed to it. The translators during second to third century A.H/eighth to ninth century C.E who translated the Greek philosophical texts from Greek into Syriac and Arabic are mostly Christians notably for example, Yuḥanna Ibn Māsawayh (d. 857) and Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (d. 873); and Saadia Gaon (d. 942) and Maimonides (d. 1204), both important philosophers in the Islamic world and were influenced by its intellectual tradition were Jewish.[3]

2. Arabic Philosophy

Although Arabic[4] is the main language of these philosophical works there are found numerous works written in Persian and other Islamic languages such as, Turkish, Urdu and others which does not make the term 'Arabic philosophy' accurate. Moreover, this term emphasizes the role and significance of the Greek-Arabic translation movement of the eighth and ninth centuries and Arabic-Latin translation movement in Toledo, Spain in the twelfth century[5] but not the concept and tradition of

---

[1] M. M. Sharif (Ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*. (New Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1961).

[2] Zailan Moris, "Arabic, Muslim, or Islamic Philosophy" in *Voices of Three Generations: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Mohammad H. Faghfoory and Katherine O' Brien (eds.). (U. S. A.: Kazi Publications, 2019), p. 100.

[3] See for example Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World*, p. 5.

[4] See for example, Jon Mc Ginnis and David C. Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company. Inc., 2007).

[5] As for example, the numerous commentaries on the Aristotelian corpus by Ibn Rushd (d. 1198).

philosophy in Islamic intellectual history.[1] This standpoint is 'Eurocentric' and viewed from the Western intellectual tradition since the Arabic language is considered merely as a translation medium and the description 'Graeco-Alexandrian philosophy in Arabic dress'[2] developed as a result of this misperception.[3]

3. Arab Philosophy[4]

The philosophers are not only Arabs but include from other ethnicities for example, Persians, Central Asians, Turks, and others. While there are several famous philosophers of Arab origin for example al-Kindī (d. ca. 866) who is known as the 'philosopher of the Arabs', the majority are however, Persians for example, Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030), Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925/935), Naṣir al-Dīn Tūsī (d. 1274), and Qutb al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1311), to name a few. In this context, there is a confusion between the Arab race and the Arabic language since the language does not represent the race or ethnic group.[5]

Terms for the Discipline of Philosophy in the Islamic Intellectual Tradition

1. *Falsafah*: A term which has been Arabized from the Greek words *philo* and *sophia* thus, *philosophia*, which means 'love of wisdom'.
2. *Ḥikmah*: A term which has been much debated since the discipline has been claimed by the philosophers (*falāsifah*; *ḥukamā'*), theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and Sufis based on the meaning of the term *ḥikmah* in the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*.

The philosophers contemplated on the definition of *falsafah* which they inherited from ancient sources and which they identified with the Qur'ānic term *ḥikmah* believing the term *ḥikmah* to be divine. In the Qur'ān there are twenty verses which contain the word *ḥikmah*. One of the most important verse mentions that *ḥikmah* is a gift from Allāh and

---

[1] Zailan Moris, "Arabic, Muslim, or Islamic Philosophy" in *Voices of Three Generations: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Mohammad H. Faghfoory and Katherine O' Brien (eds.). (U. S. A.: Kazi Publications, 2019), p. 98.

[2] This term is used by Orientalist scholars. See for example Nicholas Rescher, *Studies in Arabic Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: The University Press, 1966).

[3] Zailan Moris, "Arabic, Muslim, or Islamic Philosophy", pp. 97-98.

[4] An example of a work which uses the term 'Arab' is Muhammad 'Abed al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy: A Contemporary Critique*. (Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas-Austin, 1999).

[5] Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World*, p. 5.

human beings ought to be grateful for the blessing they receive, as follows:

> "He gives wisdom (*ḥikmah*) unto whom He will, and He unto whom wisdom is given, he truly has received abundant good; but none will grasp the message but men of understanding." [1] (2:269)

Scholars in Islam such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr view prophecy as the origin of *ḥikmah* which is based on *ḥadīth*s which prove the role of *ḥikmah* for example, "The acquisition of *ḥikmah* is incumbent upon you and the good resides in *ḥikmah*" and "Philosophy issues from the niche of prophecy."[2] These examples prove to show that philosophy in the Islamic intellectual tradition is based on the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* and the principles, inspirations and issues in philosophy originate from the Islamic revelation (*waḥy*).

Definitions, Principles, and Objectives of Islamic Philosophy

Philosophy in the Islamic intellectual tradition is concerned with the reality of existent things. It also emphasizes certainty and truth. The philosopher al-Kindī (d. 873) who was acknowledged as the first Muslim Peripatetic (*Mashshā'ī*) philosopher defines philosophy as: "The knowledge of the reality of things within people's possibility, because the philosopher's end in his theoretical knowledge is to gain truth and in his practical knowledge to behave in accordance with truth."[3] In agreement with al-Kindī', his successor al-Fārābī (d. 950) defines philosophy as the "Mother of all sciences and dealt with everything that exists."[4] Furthermore, he distinguished between philosophy based on certainty (*falsafah yaqīniyyah*) using the method of demonstration (*burhān*) and that of opinion (*falsafah maẓnūnah*) using dialectics and sophistry.[5]

Philosophy in the Islamic tradition is based on the Islamic worldview. It is a scientific inquiry concerning Allāh as the most

---

[1] Translation by Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall in the *Meaning of the Glorious Quran* (Hyderabad-Deccan: Government Central Press, 1938).
[2] S. H. Nasr, "The meaning and concept of philosophy in Islam" in *History of Islamic Philosophy Part 1*, S. H. Nasr and Oliver Leaman (eds.), (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. 22.
[3] From his *On First Philosophy* quoted by Ahmed Fouad El-Ehwany, "Al-Kindi" in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, M. M. Sharif (ed.), Vol. 1, p. 424.
[4] S. H. Nasr, "The meaning and concept of philosophy in Islam", p. 22.
[5] S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present*, p. 36.

fundamental concept and reality which pertains to the central concept of *tawḥīd* in Islam. The Islamic worldview as one based on religion encompasses both the physical (*al-ʿālam al-shaḥādah*) and spiritual realms (*al-ʿālam al-ghayb*) and this world (*al-dunyā*) and the hereafter (*al-ākhīrah*). Islamic philosophy as a discipline is related to the external dimension or *Sharīʿah* and inner truth or *Ḥaqīqah.* The philosophers relate philosophy and *ḥikmah* with *ḥaqīqah* which constitutes the essence of the Qur'ān. The goal of Islamic philosophy is to attain truth and reality which relate to one of the names of Allāh i.e., *al-Ḥaqq* or the Truth.[1]

Ibn Sīnā master of the *Mashshā'īyah* school of Islamic philosophy added another significant dimension to the discipline by relating it to the realization and perfection of human being with his definition of *ḥikmah* as: "The perfecting of the human soul through conceptualization (*taṣawwur*) of things and the judgment (*taṣdīq*) of theoretical and practical truths to the measure of human capability."[2]

Philosophy possesses a theoretical dimension or thought and a practical dimension which translates to living a life which is virtuous and noble. Shihāb al-dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191) who established the school of *ḥikmat al-ishrāq* (philosophy of illumination) considered the *ḥakīm* (philosopher) as someone who not only could discuss mental concepts in a clever manner but as one who also lived according to the wisdom which he knew theoretically.[3]

With Ṣadr al-dīn al-Shirazī (Mullā Ṣadrā; d. 1641) who synthesized the various schools of philosophy and other intellectual sciences in the Islamic tradition, the definition of philosophy became fuller and included all the elements of its earlier definitions which state,*"Falsafah* is the perfecting of the human soul to the extent of human ability through the knowledge of the essential realities of things as they are in themselves and through judgment concerning their existence established upon demonstration and not derived from opinion or through imitation."[4]

---

[1] S. H. Nasr, "The Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* as source and inspiration of Islamic philosophy" in *History of Islamic Philosophy Part 1*, pp. 28-29.

[2] From his *ʿUyūn al-ḥikmah* quoted by S. H. Nasr in *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present*, p. 36.

[3] S. H. Nasr, "The meaning and concept of philosophy in Islam", p. 23.

[4] From his *al-Ḥikmat al-mutaʿliyah fī al-asfār al-arbaʿah*, vol. 1, part 1 quoted by S. H. Nasr in *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present*, p. 37.

Peter Adamson's Intellectual Background

Before I refute why the term 'Philosophy in the Islamic world' is not precise I will introduce the scholar who started to use the term and made it popular. Peter Adamson, born on August 10, 1972, is an American who is currently a professor in late antiquity and the Islamic world in the Ludwig Maximilian University (LMU), Munich and was a professor of ancient and medieval philosophy in Kings college London. He received his education from Williams College and University of Notre Dame in the United States. He is proficient in English and German and an expert in reading texts in ancient Greek, Arabic, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian and Persian.[1]

Adamson has produced many works in philosophy which consist of the history of philosophy for various time periods and in different parts of the world. Some of the titles of his books, to name a few since he is a prolific author, are *Philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, *Medieval Philosophy*, *Classical Indian Philosophy*, *Philosophy in the Islamic World* and in the field of Islamic philosophy he has written books on the philosophies of al-Kindī and Abu Bakr al-Rāzī. He is also the host of the podcast *History of Philosophy Without any Gaps* which discusses philosophers and the philosophical tradition throughout history. According to Adamson the objective of the podcast is to present the history of philosophy in an entertaining style for the general audience. The podcast started in 2010 and until 2020 it is still going on. Until 2019 the podcast has exceeded twenty-five million downloads, played three hundred and fifty episodes, and had thousands of followers. His writings and the response they received exhibit his influence, popularity, and contribution in the field of philosophy during this time.[2]

Why the term 'Philosophy in the Islamic World'?

The term given by Adamson 'Philosophy in the Islamic World' is based on his view that the term 'Islamic' puts forward the importance of the religious context, but he says this dimension is not always relevant or the most important in the discipline of philosophy in Islam. Moreover, according to him, the term 'Islamic' marginalizes the role of figures who are not Muslims. They comprise of the Christian translators during second to third century A.H/eighth to ninth century C.E for example, the

---

[1] Professor Peter Adamson (kcl.ac.uk).

[2] Professor Peter Adamson (kcl.ac.uk). See also PETER ADAMSON — What Is It Like to Be a Philosopher? accessed September 23, 2022.

famous Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. 873) and his son Ishaq; the Christian philosophers from the School of Baghdad for example Yahya ibn Adi (d. 974) and the renown thinkers from the Jewish tradition many of whom lived in the Islamic world such as Saadia Gaon (d. 942) and Maimonides (d. 1204).

Adamson puts forth that during the later period of Islamic philosophy particularly in the western part of the Islamic world the discipline of philosophy was not developed actively, and it continued within the framework of *'ilm al-kalām* (Islamic theology). Hence, he also remarks that the term 'Islamic philosophy' for the discipline of *'ilm al-kalām* is not accurate.

He also emphasized that 'Islamic philosophy' spread and was well-known in three main empires of the Islamic world namely, Ottoman, Safavid dan Mughal. Although these empires were under Muslim rule, but they encompass as well Jewish and Christian cultures, religions, and figures. Consequently, according to Adamson the name of the discipline should focus on the place where the discipline is alive and develop which is the 'Islamic world'.

Critique of the term 'Philosophy in the Islamic World'

Adamson's arguments do not consider the concept and the true meaning of philosophy as wisdom (*ḥikmah*) in the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* and as discussed according to the understanding of the Islamic philosophers. In contrast, he stresses the secondary factors such as geographical location and the milieu in which the discipline and the philosophers developed.

The essential meaning of 'Islamic philosophy' is that this discipline in its basis and foundation reflects the Islamic worldview which contain principles and characteristics originating from the religion and intellectual tradition of Islam. These elements are what make the discipline of 'Islamic philosophy' 'Islamic' and not the place, environment, or culture of its figures. Adamson's statement that the term 'Islamic philosophy' is "too obvious" is a contradiction since the name of something should signify its evident and clear meaning and not what is marginal and not 'obvious'.

In conclusion, the term 'philosophy in the Islamic world' is not precise because it does not represent the true meaning of Islamic philosophy and therefore should not be used.

This issue is very important since using and explaining the right term demonstrates how Islamic philosophy is Islamic in its foundation from the aspect of its worldview, principles, characteristics, objectives,

and method. This opposes the general understanding that Islam does not have its own philosophical tradition and borrowed from Greek philosophy only.

The real situation is that 'Islamic philosophy' has its own identity with concepts which have been 'Islamized' from its sources the Qur'an and Hadith and which have been integrated with other branches of knowledge in the Islamic intellectual tradition such as *'ilm al-kalām* and *taṣawwuf*.

Implications

It is evident from historical sources; Islamic philosophy has influenced Latin philosophy in Europe which was acquainted with Greek philosophy from the lens of Islamic philosophy.

Once again, the Islamic intellectual tradition has been marginalized with the issue of terminology by Adamson and has neglected the significance of the Islamic tradition and its real contribution to the world. Understanding the real meaning and role of Islamic philosophy is important to avoid the general view that Islam does not have its own genuine and strong intellectual tradition and as a result of this limitation it is considered irrational and not intellectual but emotive in terms of its nature as well as its adherents and in relation to its adherents the probable cause for violence and extremism among them.

References

ʿAbed al-Jabri, Muhammad. *Arab-Islamic Philosophy: A Contemporary Critique*. Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas-Austin, 1999.

Adamson, Peter. *Philosophy in the Islamic World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Adamson, Peter. "Philosophy in the Islamic World, Prof. Peter Adamson Talks at Google". Philosophy in the Islamic World Prof. Peter Adamson, Talks at Google - YouTube.

El-Ehwany, Ahmed Fouad. In (Ed.) M. M. Sharif. "Al-Kindi". *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Vol. 1. Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963.

Mc Ginnis, Jon and Reisman, David C. *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company. Inc., 2007.

Moris, Zailan. "Arabic, Muslim, or Islamic Philosophy" In (Eds.) Mohammad H. Faghfoory and Katherine O' Brien. *Voices of Three Generations: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, U. S. A.: Kazi Publications, 2019.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, "The Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* as source and inspiration of Islamic philosophy" In (Eds.) S. H. Nasr and Oliver Leaman. *History of Islamic Philosophy Part 1*. New York and London: Routledge, 1996.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "The meaning and concept of philosophy in Islam" In (Eds.) S. H. Nasr and Oliver Leaman. *History of Islamic Philosophy Part 1*, New York and London: Routledge, 1996.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2006.

Pickthall, Mohammed Marmaduke, *Meaning of the Glorious Quran*. Hyderabad-Deccan: Government Central Press, 1938.

AL-ITQĀN

JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC SCIENCES AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Volume: 7   **Issue No. 1**   **February 2023**