

## THE FRAMEWORK FOR A HISTORY OF ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY \*

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History, like all other sciences, but maybe more essentially, requires a framework that enables us to conceive a historical account within its proper context. The need to provide a framework for the history of a nation, or civilization, be that a history of events or of ideas, is obvious. It is for this epistemological reason that a framework is also developed for the history of Islamic philosophy, which is neatly outlined by Corbin:

Arabic Philosophy began by al-Kindi, [to which one may also add, 'through the Greek translations'] reached its height with al-Fārābī and Avicenna, suffered the disastrous shock of the criticism of al-Ghazālī and made heroic effort to rise again with Averroës. That is all.<sup>1</sup>

This framework clearly reduces the whole of Islamic philosophy to merely Islamic Aristotelianism. In order to point out the implausibility of this, Morewedge rightly cites the names of original great philosophers, all of whom lived after al-

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Irving Texas: Spring Publications, Inc., 1980), 13.

Ghazālī—“Suhrawardī, Kāshānī, Ibn Khaldūn, Dawwānī, Mīr Dāmād, Mullā Şadrā and Sabzawārī, as well as Iqbal”.<sup>2</sup> This list can, of course, be augmented: Rāzī, Tūsī, Jurjānī, Ibn ‘Arabī, Qūnāwī, Abu’l-Su‘ūd Efendī, Mullā Fenārī, Birgīwī, Dāwūd al-Qaysarī, Kemāl Pashā Zāde, Ismā‘īl Ankaravī, and so on. We may, then, ask with sufficient justification: why has Islamic philosophy so far been restricted to Islamic Aristotelianism? A possible answer is that many historians of Islamic philosophy tried to develop this framework on the basis of the poorly available historical data alone, rather than waiting for adequate scholarship to bring out further material, which would give rise to a rather more meaningful and comprehensive history of Islamic philosophy. But this is only a *material reason*; there is also a methodological approach which is lacking in their work. This approach is what we shall try to develop here as the ‘framework of a history of Islamic philosophy’. It is simply the approach which takes into consideration the process out of which sciences emerge within a civilization.

We must, first of all, realize that sciences are not *discovered*; they are rather *established* by us. Therefore, they are not like the law of gravity, for example, or like the fact that the earth revolves around the sun. For these may be called scientific truths that are discovered by the scientists. But sciences are *established* by scholars. However, establishing a science usually involves many scientists, identified by some philosophers as the ‘scientific community’, who first establish a (scientific) tradition by laying down certain principles which acquire a general acceptance by the subsequent followers. In this way, the scattered and discrete studies begin to acquire a unity. The body of collected knowledge thus acquires the status of a discipline. Then, in this process, a

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<sup>2</sup> Parviz Morewedge, “Contemporary Scholarship on Near Eastern Philosophy”, *Philosophical Forum* 2 (1970–71), 122–140.