The Middle East

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The Middle East

- The Middle East was one of the cradles of civilization and the birthplace of not only the three most influential Western religions, but some of the first great philosophies as well.
- The ancient capitals of Babylon, Assyria, and Persia, for example, nurtured systems of ideas that eventually gave rise to many of our own concepts in philosophy and religion.

The Middle East

- The ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism, for example, is generally recognized as a precursor of the other great Western religions and of many of our central philosophical conceptions as well (for example, the basic opposition between good and evil).
- The Middle East was also responsible, during medieval times, for keeping many of the great ideas of ancient Greece and Rome alive when they were dormant or suppressed in Europe.

The Middle East

- At the height of the medieval period, the interchange between Christian, Jewish, and Islamic philosophers was so intense that it is often hard to separate the various innovations and influences.

The Middle East

- Islam, the third and latest of the three great Western religions, developed a theology and an accompanying philosophy that were in every way as profound and detailed as those of the other two.
- Although we often tend to collapse the various cultures of the Muslim world into the single concept of “Arabic,” there were and still are vital differences between the very different cultures, some of them not “Arab” at all.

The Middle East

- In Persia, for example, there is an active tradition of theology and philosophy that goes back to Zoroaster.
- With the spread of Islam in the seventh century, Persia along with its Arabic neighbors turned to theology and questions that were also being asked by the Christians in Europe.

The Middle East

- Medieval Islamic philosophers were conversant with ideas from ancient Greece and made use of them in their own thinking.
- Many of these thinkers were influenced by and elaborated on ideas in Aristotle, in particular, which they attempted to integrate with the teachings of Islam.

The Middle East

- Among them was al-Kindi (circa 800–866), from present-day Iraq, who made use of Aristotle's ideas about causality to articulate his views about the relation between God and the natural world.
- One of his views was that only God acts in a full sense.
- All other beings act only in a secondary sense.

The Middle East

- God created the world from nothing, but everything else comes to be as a result of a chain of causes and effects that God set in motion.
- Even our current activity depends on the action of God.

The Middle East

- Another Islamic thinker who considered God's relation to creation was the Persian philosopher Ibn-Sina (or Avicenna, as he came to be known in the West, 980–1037), an innovator in medical science as well as in philosophy.
- Ibn-Sina characterized God as pure thought, who, in his creation, "emanates" lesser intelligences.
- In other words, created beings flow forth from God's activity as pure thinking.

The Middle East

- A central issue in medieval Islamic thought concerned the whether reason or revelation should have primacy in coming to know the truth.
- al-Farabi (died circa 950), who was born in Turkestan, defended the primary importance of the intellect.
- His commentaries on Aristotelian logic were controversial for their apparent efforts to establish truth apart from revelation.

The Middle East

- Although al-Farabi considered revelation important as well, he did consider reason the most important means for attaining knowledge, and he defended it as the faculty of discernment on which the good ruler would rely.
- Ibn-Rushd (or Averroes, as he came to be known in the West, 1126–1198) sought to demonstrate that revealed truth and the conclusions of reason coincide, and he points out that the Qu'ran (the Islamic scripture) itself encourages the use of speculative reason.

The Middle East

- Not only did these Arabic thinkers make use of earlier thought from the "Western" tradition; they themselves were important contributors to later Western thought through their influence on Thomas Aquinas.

The Middle East

- In *Wisdom of the Throne*, the sixteenth-century Persian thinker **Mulla Sadra** (approximately 1571–1641) reflects on these questions of God's relation to the world and the relative importance of reason and revelation.
- Sadra argued that God shares his existence with lesser entities in creating the world.
- Drawing on an image used by twelfth-century philosopher al-Suhrawardi, Sadra compares God's creation to light that spills from its source to illuminate other things.

The Middle East

- God's existence is eternal, but God has allowed his existence to overflow to grant limited existence to the beings within the world.
- God's existence is also manifested in each particular thing, though in a limited way.
- Sadra contends that intellectual pursuit of truth and mystical experience must complement each other, and ideally the philosopher should engage in both.

The Middle East

- Islamic philosophy refers to philosophy produced in an Islamic society. It is not necessarily concerned with religious issues, nor exclusively produced by Muslims.[2]
- Nor do all schools of thought within Islam admit the usefulness or legitimacy of philosophical inquiry. Some argue that there is no indication that the limited knowledge and experience of humans can lead to truth.
- It is also important to observe that, while "reason" ('aql) is sometimes recognised as a source of Islamic law, this may have a totally different meaning from "reason" in philosophy.
- [2] Oliver Leaman, Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

The Middle East

- Islamic philosophy is a generic term that can be defined and used in different ways.
- In its broadest sense it means the world view of Islam, as derived from the Islamic texts concerning the creation of the universe and the will of the Creator.
- In another sense it refers to any of the schools of thought that flourished under the Islamic empire or in the shadow of the Arab-Islamic culture and Islamic civilization.
- In its narrowest sense it is a translation of Falsafa, meaning those particular schools of thought that most reflect the influence of Greek systems of philosophy such as Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism.

The Middle East

- The historiography of Islamic philosophy is marked by disputes as to how the subject should be properly interpreted.
- Some of the key issues involve the comparative importance of eastern intellectuals such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and of western thinkers such as Ibn Rushd,[3] and also whether Islamic philosophy can be read at face value or should be interpreted in an esoteric fashion.
- Supporters of the latter thesis, like Leo Strauss, maintain that Islamic philosophers wrote so as to conceal their true meaning in order to avoid religious persecution, but scholars such as Oliver Leaman disagree.[4]
- [3] See Henry Corbin, History of Islamic Philosophy
- [4] Oliver Leaman (2002). An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy (2 ed.). Cambridge University Press. pp. 211–212. ISBN 0521793432.

The Middle East

- Islamic philosophy as the name implies refers to philosophical activity within the Islamic milieu.
- The main sources of classical or early Islamic philosophy are the religion of Islam itself (especially ideas derived and interpreted from the Quran) and Greek philosophy which the early Muslims inherited as a result of conquests, along with pre-Islamic Indian philosophy and Persian philosophy.
- Many of the early philosophical debates centered around reconciling religion and reason, the latter exemplified by Greek philosophy.

The Middle East

- In early Islamic thought, which refers to philosophy during the "Islamic Golden Age", traditionally dated between the 8th and 12th centuries, two main currents may be distinguished.
- The first is Kalam, which mainly dealt with Islamic theological questions, and the other is Falsafa, which was founded on interpretations of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism.
- There were attempts by later philosopher-theologians at harmonizing both trends, notably by Ibn Sina (Avicenna) who founded the school of Avicennism, Ibn Rushd (Averroës) who founded the school of Averroism, and others such as Ibn al-Haytham (Alhacen) and Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī.

The Middle East

- Kalam
- ʿIlm al-Kalām (Arabic: علم الكلام) is the philosophy that seeks Islamic theological principles through dialectic. In Arabic, the word literally means "speech".[5]
- One of first debates was that between partisans of the Qadar (قدرةmeaning "to have power"), who affirmed free will; and the Jabarites (جبرmeaning "force", "constraint"), who believed in fatalism.
- [5] Simon van den Bergh, in his commentary on Averroes' Incoherence of the Incoherence, argues that Kalām was influenced by Greek Stoicism and that the term mutakallimun (those who speak to each other, i.e. dialecticians) is derived from the Stoics' description of themselves as dialektikoi.

The Middle East

- At the 2nd century of the Hijra, a new movement arose in the theological school of Basra, Iraq.
- A pupil, Wasil ibn Ata, was expelled from the school because his answers were contrary to then Sunni tradition and became leader of a new school.
- He systematized the radical opinions of preceding sects, particularly those of the Qadarites and Jabarites.
- This new school was called Mu'tazilite (from i'tazala, to separate oneself).

The Middle East

- The Mu'tazilites, compelled to defend their principles against the Sunni Islam of their day, looked for support in philosophy, and represent an early attempt to pursue a rational theology in Islam. A later offshoot of this school, known as Ash'arism, aimed to reconcile critical dialectical thinking with a stricter Islamic orthodoxy. The Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite schools are collectively called Mutakallimun (dialecticians), and their type of theology was known as 'Ilm-al-Kalam (Scholastic theology).

The Middle East

- In later times, Kalam was used to mean simply:
- "theology", i.e.:
  - the duties of the heart
    - as opposed to (or in conjunction with) “Fikh”
- “Fikh”, i.e.:
  - (jurisprudence), the duties of the body.[6]
- [6] Wolfson, Harry Austryn (1976). The philosophy of the Kalam. Harvard University Press. pp. 3–4. ISBN 978-0-674-66580-4. Retrieved 28 May 2011.

The Middle East

- Falsafa
- Falsafa is a Greek loanword meaning "philosophy" (the Greek pronunciation philosophia became falsafa).
- From the 9th century onward, due to Caliph al-Ma'mun and his successor, Ancient Greek philosophy was introduced among the Arabs and the Peripatetic School began to find able representatives.

The Middle East

- Among them were:
  - Al-Kindi,
  - Al-Farabi,
  - Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and
  - Ibn Rushd (Averroës),
- all of whose fundamental principles were considered as criticized by the Mutakallamin.
- Another trend, represented by the Brethren of Purity, used Aristotelian language to expound a fundamentally Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean world view.

The Middle East

- During the Abbasid caliphate, a number of thinkers and scientists, some of them heterodox Muslims (non-traditional Muslims) or non-Muslims, played a role in transmitting Greek, Hindu and other pre-Islamic knowledge to the Christian West.
- They contributed to making Aristotle known in Christian Europe.
- Three speculative thinkers, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and al-Kindi, combined Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism with other ideas introduced through Islam.

The Middle East

- Some differences between Kalam and Falsafa
- Aristotle attempted to demonstrate the unity of God, but from the view which he maintained, that matter was eternal, it followed that God could not be the Creator of the world. He did, however, demonstrate, through causal necessity, the existence of a "first cause" from which stemmed all of changeable creation, undermining the traditional views of God.

The Middle East

- Aristotle's "Divine Mind" can in fact be a creating principle.[7]
- According to Aristotelianism, the human soul is simply man's substantial form:
  - Man's "substantial form" just is the set of properties that make matter into a living human body.[8]

- [7] Aristotle. Metaphysics, XII.
- [8] Anthony Kenny, Aquinas on Mind (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 24, 26, 28

The Middle East

- This seems to imply that the human soul cannot exist apart from the body.
- Indeed, Aristotle writes:
  - "It is clear that the soul, or at least some parts of it (if it is divisible), cannot be separated from the body. [...]
  - And thus, those have the right idea who think that the soul does not exist without the body."[9]
- [9] De Anima 413a4-5; 414a19-20

The Middle East

- In Aristotelianism, at least one psychological force, the active intellect, can exist apart from the body.[10]
- However, according to many interpretations, the active intellect is a superhuman entity emanating from God and enlightening the human mind, not a part of any individual human soul.[11][12]
- Thus, Aristotle's theories seem to deny the immortality of the individual human soul.

- [10] "This intellect is separate, unaffected, and unmixed [...] In separation, it is just what it is, and this alone is immortal and eternal" (De Anima 430a18, 23-24).
- [11] Medieval Philosophy, ed. John Marenbon (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 54
- [12] Timothy Robinson, Aristotle in Outline (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995) p. 51

The Middle East

- Wherefore the Mutakallimun had, before anything else, to establish a system of philosophy to demonstrate the creation of matter.
- To that end, they adopted the theory of atoms as enunciated by Democritus.
- They taught that atoms possess neither quantity nor extension.

The Middle East

- Originally atoms were created by God, and are created now as occasion seems to require.
- Bodies come into existence or die, through the aggregation or the sunderance of these atoms.
- But this theory did not remove the objections of philosophy to a creation of matter.

The Middle East

- For, indeed, if it be supposed that God commenced His work at a certain definite time by His "will," and for a certain definite object, it must be admitted that He was imperfect before accomplishing His will, or before attaining His object.

The Middle East

- In order to obviate this difficulty, the Motekallamin extended their theory of the atoms to Time, and claimed that just as Space is constituted of atoms and vacuum, Time, likewise, is constituted of small indivisible moments.
- The creation of the world once established, it was an easy matter for them to demonstrate the existence of a Creator, and that God is unique, omnipotent, and omniscient.