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The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy was long overdue. The Arabic philosophical tradition has often been treated as marginal by Western scholars, but this work attests to its great riches. It has, however, remained much understudied, hence, the editors aim to "invite" readers to the study of Arabic philosophy and to provide "a basic grounding in some of the main figures and themes." These are modest goals in comparison to what this excellent new *Cambridge Companion* achieves. The authors of the 18 articles of this collection are all specialists in their respective fields.

In their "Introduction" (Chapter 1), the editors argue for their choice of title. They favor the term "Arabic philosophy" -- *falsafa* (a term translated from Greek) -- over "Islamic philosophy," because of the importance of Arabic in the translation of Greek works, the equally important contributions of Christians and Jews to the Arabic philosophical tradition, and the sincere endeavor of many Muslim writers (e.g., al-Kindî, al-Fârâbî, Averroes) to understand the newly translated Greek philosophical texts, rather than to propose an "Islamic" philosophy.

The work is structured around one central figure, as Arabic philosophy can be viewed as "the tradition that leads up to and stems from" the work of Avicenna. A first section covers the advent of the translation movement that culminates in the classical period of 10th century Baghdad with the reception and integration of Greek philosophy.¹ A long study follows on the work of Avicenna (d. 1037) who provided a truly masterly synthesis of Arabic philosophy. Finally, the post-Avicennian period and traditions are introduced. Post-Avicennian tradition branches out into two different directions: a vibrant Andalusian Aristotelian tradition emerged in the West, while a new Illuminationist tradition emerged in the East, along side a flourishing Avicennian

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The studies from the first part of the *Cambridge Companion* follow a chronological order and focus on the reception of Greek philosophy by individual authors, whereas the studies of the second part center on a number thematic issues. This review follows the organization of the volume and provides a short synopsis of each chapter. In this way, I hope to offer a glimpse of the richness of Arabic philosophy and some of the more important issues it tackled.

Christina D'Ancona writes an excellent introduction to the transmission of Neoplatonism in her "Greek into Arabic: Neoplatonism in translation" (Chapter 2).

The importance of the transmission of the Greek Neoplatonic tradition remains greatly neglected and generally underestimated. D'Ancona notes that the work of Plotinus in Arabic provided new philosophical topics that were integrated into *falsafa*: e.g., the "amphibious" life of the soul (belonging to two worlds) which sees the intelligibles and animates the living body, the identity of the Forms and Intellect, and the absolute simplicity and ineffability of the First Principle.

In his contribution on "Al-Kindî and the reception of Greek philosophy" (Chapter 3), Peter Adamson examines the work of the "first self-described" philosopher in the Islamic world. Partaking in the translation movement of Greek works into Arabic, al-Kindî (d. after 870) remains a "transitional" figure whose work "set the agenda" for later developments, e.g., his theories of intellect and of creation. Al-Kindî and early philosophers often opted for Neoplatonizing Aristotelian positions, already present in the works of later Greek commentators, such as Alexander, Themistius, and Philoponus. Adamson provides a succinct survey of al-Kindî's major ideas in metaphysics (creation as manifestation of being from non-being), psychology (a separate immaterial "first" intellect), natural sciences (against Mu'tazili atomism) which include cosmology and astrology (heavens as instruments of divine providence), and optics (accepting the "extramission" theory of vision and rejecting the Aristotelian position), and concludes with a section on prophetic dreams (similarity of the knowledge of philosophers and prophets).

David C. Reisman turns to "Al-Fârâbî and the philosophical curriculum" (Chapter 4). Al-Fârâbî (d. 950), whom he labels the "most systematic" of all the early philosophers, refined the "neo-Aristotelianism" of the Alexandrian tradition. This is nowhere better exemplified than with al-Fârâbî's *Principles of the Opinions of the People of the Excellent City*. Neoplatonic elements are obvious in his emanationist scheme, which was central to his cosmology, his theory of the intellect and his postulation of an Active Intellect standing outside the human intellect (inspired by Alexander). Using the most important studies of the past few decades, Reisman surveys al-Fârâbî's legacy in metaphysics (First Cause) and cosmology (emanationism), psychology and the soul (noetics), and the importance of logic for the education of the philosopher.

Building on his previous numerous works,² Paul E. Walker introduces the philosophical doctrines of "The Ismâ'îlîs" (Chapter 5). He focuses on the works of major Ismâ'îlî figures: Muhammad al-Nasafî (d. 943), Abû *Hâtim al-Râzî (d. 934), Abû Ya'qûb al-Sijistânî (d. 971), and *Hamîd al-Dîn al-Kirmânî (d. 1021). Walker notes that although Ismâ'îlîs relied on the "sure guidance of divinely inspired prophets," the formative period of the Ismâ'îlî tradition would be unintelligible without *falsafa* which allowed the Ismâ'îlîs to maintain the absolute primacy of intellect, whereby "revelation is not, and cannot be, in conflict with universal reason" and "religious law ... is a manifestation of reason."

Robert Wisnovsky provides the longest contribution (a double-length chapter) on "Avicenna and the Avicennian tradition" (Chapter 6) in which he highlights the centrality of Avicenna's contribution to Arabic philosophy. Wisnovsky demonstrates how Avicenna makes use of the Neoplatonic tradition to understand Aristotle, while simultaneously engaging directly with "problematics from *kalâm* tradition," i.e., Islamic scholastic theology. Wisnovsky focuses on the history of three basic philosophical issues tackled by Avicenna: (i) the theory that a human rational soul comes into existence with the birth of the body which it governs and uses, yet survives the body's death; (ii) the essence/existence distinction, and (iii) God as the only being which necessarily exists by virtue of itself, as opposed to all other beings that only exist by virtue of another, i.e., by virtue of their cause. He skillfully illustrates

Avicenna's ability to provide a synthesis of both the philosophical and theological traditions into a coherent philosophical system.

In his study on "Al-Ghazâlî" (Chapter 7), Michael E. Marmura explores the manner in which Avicennian ideas are reinterpreted in terms of al-Ghazâlî's (d. 1111) Ash'arite occasionalist perspective, so that the former can be rendered consistent with his theology. Marmura restricts his study (mainly a textual analysis) to the notion of causality that al-Ghazâlî developed out of his reflection upon Ash'arite doctrine of divine attributes. Although theologically motivated by his Ash'arite occasionalism, al-Ghazâlî is able to develop a philosophical argument for necessary causal connection. Marmura then notes the mystical elements of his epistemology that complement al-Ghazâlî's theological-philosophical stances.

Josef Puig Montada introduces "Philosophy in Andalusia: Ibn Bâjja and Ibn *Tufayl" (Chapter 8). He highlights the initial Fârâbîan and Avicennian impetus for Arabic *falsafa* in the Iberian Peninsula, but notes that it eventually branches out into two different directions: the Aristotelian strand and the Sufi tradition developed by Ibn 'Arabî (d. 1240). Montada shows how those who worked in the *falsafa* tradition, like Ibn Bâjja (Avempace) (d. 1139) with his classification of sciences, his metaphysics of forms and his political philosophy, and Ibn *Tufayl (d. 1185) with his search for the origins of human life with *Hayy Ibn Yaqzân's quest for and union with the Creator, were not immune from the influences of the Sufi tradition.

In his contribution, "Averroes: religious dialectic and Aristotelian philosophical thought" (Chapter 9), Richard C. Taylor, one of the editors, challenges prevailing interpretations of Averroes' (d. 1198) doctrine of "Double Truth" (noting that these interpretations arose in the Latin West). He reviews the evidence and concludes that Averroes proposes a "unity of truth" in his *Decisive Treatise*: philosophical demonstrations can provide explanations of divine knowledge or of the existence of God. Averroes' close (and perceptive) readings of Aristotle's texts also led him to provide (various) positions on the nature of the intellect, and to reject a number of Avicenna's ideas, such as the latter's theologically inspired existence/essence distinction and distinction of beings into beings necessary in themselves, beings possible in themselves, and beings possible in themselves but necessitated by another. For some strange reason, no Arabic Averroist tradition developed in the Islamic world comparable to the Avicennian or Suhrawardîan traditions in the East, although Averroes' thought did reemerge, later, in the Latin West.

John Walbridge provides an excellent summary of his earlier works [3](#) in "Suhrawardî and Illuminationism" (Chapter 10), in which he discusses an Avicennian Peripatetic who later in life became a "Platonist." Like Ibn 'Arabî's work, Shihâb al-Dîn Suhrawardî's (d. 1191) work remains a milestone for later mystical (*'irfân*) philosophy in the East. In metaphysics, Suhrawardî rejects "realism with regard to universals, holding that everything that exists is a particular," which Walbridge calls his "nominalist intuition." In opposition to the dominant Peripatetic epistemology, Suhrawardî holds the idea that knowledge "consists in immediate awareness," what Walbridge calls an "empiricist approach," a doctrine that came to be known as "knowledge by presence." Both of Suhrawardî's original criticisms of Avicenna's ontology and of Aristotelian epistemology remain part of his philosophical legacy.

Sajjad H. Rizvi writes a comparative chapter on "Mysticism and philosophy: Ibn 'Arabî and Mullâ *Sadrâ" (Chapter 11); the former represents the "rationalizing mystic," while Mullâ *Sadrâ (d. 1640) embodies the "mystical philosopher." Rizvi focuses on the reconciliation of rational discourse and mystical intuitive experience ("gnosis" or *'irfân*) in the later Iranian philosophical tradition, within the context of a

"Neoplatonic intellectual paradigm," while his aim is to discover a "therapeutic and even salvific" method for accessing the truth. Rizvi notes that later developments provided a "meta-language for explaining and analyzing the "pure consciousness experiences" that were the inner, ineffable, and infallible domain of the mystic." Rizvi introduces the practical and ethical dimensions that developed into a "salvational psychology" mediated by these philosophers' meditation on the nature of Being.

Tony Street tackles the difficult and little-studied topic of "Logic" (Chapter 12) in Arabic philosophy. His chapter is a welcome contribution to the thematic component of the *Cambridge Companion*. Street focuses on Najm al-Dîn al-Kâtibî's (d. 1276) *Logic for Shams al-Dîn*, the "first substantial text" on logic, also known as the *Shamsiyya*, a work that became the standard text on logic of the *madrassa* educational system. Street presents the content of the *Shamsiyya* and analyzes its treatment of modals, with its distinction between the *dhâtî* and the *wasfî* readings of the propositions. This is achieved by introducing the modals of the Aristotelian system and of their later Fârâbîan and Avicennian interpretations. The *dhâtî* (similar to *de re* readings) and the *wasfî* (similar to *de dicto*) distinction was first proposed by Avicenna to save Aristotle's text. Al-Kâtibî developed a more systematic and comprehensive system, based on his modifications of Avicenna's modal system.

Differentiating between "Ethical and political philosophy" (Chapter 13), Charles E. Butterworth identifies the beginning of a truly political philosophy in Arabic philosophy with al-Fârâbî. Butterworth argues that although al-Fârâbî's predecessors, al-Kindî and al-Râzî (d. 925), wrote ethical works and developed ethics, they did not provide systematic political reflections. The ethical only merges with the political with al-Fârâbî's fusing of statecraft with soulcraft. Following in the Fârâbîan tradition, Avicenna later notes the political aspects of prophecy and divine law, while Averroes' Platonic politics fosters a need for philosophy to serve religious and political well-being.

Marwan Rashed's contribution on "Natural philosophy" (Chapter 14) is an exquisite philosophical investigation into the "ontology of the sensible world," i.e., the way natural philosophy was understood. Physical theories developed around a number of fundamental topics of Aristotelian physics: the status of the *minima* and the distinction between actuality and potentiality. Discussions appear to have originated within the theological milieu and centered on the atomism common among the *kalâm* schools of theology. Rashed provides a detailed analysis of the origin of the problem with a study of the works of al-Hudhayl (d. ca. 840), al-Nazzâm (early 9th century), and the criticism of their views by people like Thâbit Ibn Qurra (d. ca. 840). Rashed then provides an account of Avicenna's original articulation of dynamics (of the theologians) and kinematics (of the geometers) and a detailed analysis of Avicenna's postulation of four kinds of notion of infinity (two potential infinities and two actual infinities) which were to dominate debates in post-Avicennian traditions.

A lucid discussion of the major psychological issues covered by theories of the soul in *falsafa* is provided by Deborah L. Black in her "Psychology: soul and intellect" (Chapter 15). Highlighting the significance of Aristotle's *De Anima* and *Parva Naturalia*, Black rightly holds that the conception of the soul advocated by all Arabic philosophers was derived from the Greek tradition whose Aristotelian division into faculties was readily accepted (at least until the modifications of Abû al-Barakât al-Baghdâdî (d. ca. 1150) and Suhrawardî). Avicenna introduces a dualistic conception of the soul, the idea of the soul as principle of cognition and a theory of intentionality. Prior to Averroes, the Arabic tradition identified four different stages of the intellect; Averroes added a fifth. Black notes that, on the whole, Arabic philosophers focus on

cognition (where appetite even became a byproduct of cognition), while not developing a strong conception of the will.

Thérèse-Anne Druart provides an overview of "Metaphysics" (Chapter 16) whose fate in Arabic philosophy was shaped by confusions arising from the mix of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism and the Arabic philosophers' understanding of metaphysics as a natural philosophy that (eventually) incorporates an ontology of "being qua being." Druart explores the metaphysical problems raised by the philosophers' eternity of the world and the theologians' creationist position. She begins with al-Kindî's defense of creation in time, proceeds with al-Râzî's rejection of creation out of nothing and in time, introduces al-Fârâbî's investigation into the nature of being and his distinction between physical and metaphysical causes. She then analyzes passages from Avicenna's *al-Shifâ'* in order to introduce the latter's distinction between existence and essence, and his elaboration of the modalities of existence (see Wisnovsky's discussion of Avicenna's use of the *kalâm* notion of "thing") within his theory of causality (physical / metaphysical). Al-Ghazâlî adopts a different view: only God is an agent. Among the Andalusian thinkers, Averroes discards Avicenna's essence/existence distinction to focus on Being as substance and form. Druart provides a truly excellent review of the most recent scholarship on metaphysics in Arabic philosophy.

In "Islamic philosophy and Jewish philosophy" (Chapter 17), Steven Harvey, the only contributor who insists on using "Islamic," rather than "Arabic," philosophy, discusses the similarities and differences between *falsafa* and Jewish philosophy. He notes the beginning of medieval Jewish philosophy in the 9th and early 10th century, with Dâwûd al-Muqammas, the theologian (early 9th century), Isaac Israeli, the Neoplatonist (d. 955) and Saadia Gaon (d. 942) and affirms that these Jewish philosophers, and others like Solomon Ibn Gabirol (Avicebron) (d. ca. 1060), were, at least till the second half of the 12th century, influenced by Mu'tazilis and Muslim Neoplatonists, rather than by the works of Arab philosophers of the Fârâbîan tradition (*falsafa*). Judah Halevi (d. 1141) provided a critique of Aristotelianism, while Maimonides' (d. 1204) work is rooted in the writings of al-Fârâbî, Avicenna, and Ibn Bâjjâ. Jewish philosophers later learned of Aristotle's thought through Averroes' commentaries upon which Gersonides (d. 1344) wrote his popular supercommentaries. Later influence of *falsafa* is also evident on post-Maimonidean Jewish writers who found appealing their theological discussions, e.g., in the writings of H_ asdai Crescas (d. ca. 1411) who criticized Maimonides, but used al-Ghazâlî's Avicennism. Harvey claims that Jewish philosophers and their Muslim counterparts took "divergent paths." He seemingly excludes from *falsafa* the Neoplatonist tradition, a counter-intuitive assumption in light of most of the contributions of this *Cambridge Companion*.

Charles Burnett's "Arabic into Latin: the reception of Arabic philosophy into Western Europe" (Chapter 18) highlights the crucial importance of the translation movement of Arabic texts, starting in the late 11th century, for the history of Western philosophy. Latin translations were made of Arabic translations of Greek philosophical works (mainly Aristotle and commentaries on them), summaries and *quaestiones*, systematic treatises of *falsafa*, Arabic commentaries on Aristotle, and doxographies. Burnett provides a list of Arabic philosophical works translated into Latin before ca. 1600 and the advent of the modern discipline of Oriental Studies that divorced the study of Arabic from the study of philosophy. The list (391-400) includes names of texts, authors, translators, place of translation (when known), and translations made via the intermediary of a Hebrew text.

In his "Recent trends in Arabic and Persian philosophy" (Chapter 19), Hossein Ziai

provides an overview of post-Avicennian philosophical activities in Iran (Shiraz and Isfahan) from the mid-16th to the beginning of the 18th centuries. Ziai introduces the work of the less known *Sâ'in al-Dîn (Ibn Torkeh) (d. ca. 1432) who attempts to harmonize philosophy, religious doctrines and "mystical" (*'irfân-e nazari*) knowledge. Ziai then proceeds with some issues discussed in the logical works of the time: logical paradoxes and philosophy of language, ontology, and theories of causality. The acceptance of philosophy by religion culminates in the work of *Sadr al-Dîn al-Shîrâzî, known as Mullâ *Sadrâ, who elaborates a "unified system" whose core element is the "primacy of being" and which has, according to Ziai, religio-political implications for the legitimacy of the "guardians" of just rule.

The majority of the chapters contained in this *Cambridge Companion* provide insightful, at times, highly complex discussions of philosophical issues (logic, Avicenna's ontology, etc.). Although informative, some of the contributions are not as philosophically engaging ("Recent Trends" or "Islamic and Jewish philosophy") as one would hope. In spite of its structure, the work does exhibit a strong sense of unity. The volume includes a useful bibliography and a chronology of major philosophers in the Arabic tradition.

In short, *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* will not only be of interest to scholars and students of Arabic philosophy, but should also be of interest to students and scholars working more generally on later Greek philosophical traditions and on philosophy in the Middle Ages. The work should remain a very good reference for a number of years to come. *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* is the latest addition to recent works on Islamic philosophy, e.g., Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1996) [1211 pages] and Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi, eds., *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, vol. 1, 1999 [464 pages] and vol. 2, 2001 [416 pages])

Publication of a *Cambridge Companion* on Arabic philosophy definitely constitutes another step in the right direction. Arabic philosophy needs to be recognized for its philosophical insights; hence, more works of this kind are needed to show the richness of the Arabic philosophical tradition and its philosophical relevance. This will be achieved when individual philosophers of the likes of Avicenna, Averroes, Suhrawardî or Mullâ *Sadrâ have become the subject of their own *Cambridge Companions*.

Notes:

[1.](#) See Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbâsid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries)*, London: Routledge, 1998.

[2.](#) See Paul E. Walker, , **Hamîd al-Dîn al-Kirmânî: Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-*Hâkim*, London: I.B. Tauris; in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1999; *ibid.*, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom: A Study of Abû Ya'qûb al-Sijistânî's Kitâb al-Yanâbî: Including a Complete English Translation with Commentary and Notes on the Arabic Text*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994; *ibid.*, *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abû Ya'qûb al-Sijistânî*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

[3.](#) See John Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardî and the Heritage of the Greeks*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000; *ibid.*, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardî and Platonic Orientalism*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001.

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