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*An International Journal of Constructive Engagement
of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy*

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EDITOR'S WORDS

To implement the constructive-engagement emphasis of the journal *Comparative Philosophy* in a more straightforward and engaging way, the current issue features a special section entitled "Constructive Engagement Dialogue". It consists of two "Author-Meets-Critic" sub-sections and includes articles from seven authors and critics, respectively on two recent publications: Kristie Dotson's "How is this Paper Philosophy?" [*Comparative Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2012): 3-29] and Mohammad Azadpur's *Reason Unbound: On Spiritual Practice in Islamic Peripatetic Philosophy* [SUNY Press, 2011],¹ both of which are more or less provocative but philosophically engaging and have aroused healthy discussion in the field.

Dialogue for critical engagement has been emphasized in philosophy, as being open to reflective criticism is one defining character of philosophical exploration. No matter what specific form it takes in various philosophical traditions (say, either in a Socratic *elenchus* form in ancient Greek philosophy or in a *bian* (辨/辯) form in the pre-*Han* Chinese philosophy), and no matter how one characterizes and implements (a variety of) justification, various forms of philosophical dialogue share the same spirit: it is not merely an intellectual game but is intended to enhance dialogue participants' understanding and treatment of their jointly concerned issues or topics of philosophical significance and value via critique and justification. It has thus possessed the character of engendering change in the direction of constructive cooperation and joint contribution, as addressed by Donald Davidson concerning Socratic *elenchus* method in this way:

...there are two vital aspects of the Socratic dialectic which transcend the mere attempt to convict a pretender to knowledge of inconsistency. One is that both participants can hope to profit; the other is that unlike a written treatise, it represents a process which engenders change....There can be a great difference between a dispute involving people who understand each other well, and an exchange in which achieving mutual understanding is a large part of the problem. But there is even greater chasm between an exchange viewed as a situation in which the participants have clear concepts whether or not they use the same words to express those concepts, and an exchange seen as a process in which the concepts themselves come into focus. A written discussion veils this distinction almost completely. Writing reduces the number of active interpreters to one, the reader, thus

¹ Earlier versions of the author' and critics' writings on *Reason Unbound* were presented at an "Author-Meets-Critic" session, American Philosophical Association Pacific Division 2012 meeting (3rd April 2012, Seattle, USA).

eliminating the interaction of minds in which words can be bent to new uses and ideas progressively shaped.²

Davidson's ending point in the foregoing citation is not to deny that philosophical writings can be effectively involved in a philosophical dialogue but to address one important aspect of its spirit: all participants in a reflective dialogue, whether the authors, critics or readers in this case, are expected to be open-minded and sensitive to critiques and distinct approaches so as to progressively and jointly shape and refine ideas that contribute to our understanding and treatment of the issues or topic under examination. In the above sense, the engaging discussion presented in this issue is a beginning of the dialogue, rather than its ending; it invites further interaction, reflection, critique and constructive contributions from the readers' part as well as from the current authors' and critics' parts.

Indeed, the constructive-engagement exploration in comparative philosophy not only intrinsically demands, but also can significantly enhance and effectively implement, the foregoing crucial character of philosophical dialogue, specifically speaking, and philosophical exploration, general speaking: distinct approaches and resources from different philosophical traditions, whenever they are constructively relevant and contributing, can provide broad visions, complementary perspectives, and other valuable or even indispensable resources in need for philosophical dialogue to enhance our understanding and treatment of various objects of study in philosophical exploration³ (they can be jointly concerned through appropriate philosophical interpretation and from a broader philosophical vantage point). The point can be vividly captured via a poetic adage by Su Shi, an ancient Chinese poet in the *Song* Dynasty: "One can't recognize the genuine facets of Lushan Mountain, just because one has oneself caught in the midst of this very mountain."⁴

Bo Mou
July 2012

² Donald Davidson (1994), "Dialectic and Dialogue," in G. Preyer et al., eds., *Language, Mind and Epistemology* (Kluwer), 432.

³ The identity of a (genuine) object of study in philosophy is understood broadly: whether it is a naturally produced object in physical reality, or an object in social reality, or an abstract object out of theoretic construction, or a 'linguistic' object which are introduced linguistically, or an object of philosophical inquiries as an issue or topic in philosophy, which are referentially accessible and critically communicable among participants in philosophical dialogue.

⁴ The sentence ("不識廬山真面目，只緣身在此山中" in its Chinese original) is from Su Shi (蘇軾)'s poem "Inscription on the Wall of *Xilinxi* Temple" (《題西林寺壁》) (my translation).

CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE (1.1)

IN THE SAME WAY THAT THIS ONE IS: SOME COMMENTS ON DOTSON

GRAHAM PRIEST

In her paper ‘How is this Paper Philosophy?’¹ Kristie Dotson discusses the nature of philosophy – or at least, the way that it is practiced – and recommends changes that would make it less alienating for much of the profession. I agree wholeheartedly with the spirit of her views. In what follows, I will disagree with some of the things she says (principally with some of her comments on me), but most of what I say can be seen as articulating the marked points of agreement.

1. PHILOSOPHY AND ITS INSTITUTIONALIZATION

First, I would distinguish between philosophy and the way in which it is institutionalized. Dotson starts her paper with a quotation from Anita Allen, asking ‘What does philosophy have to offer a black woman?’ My answer would be ‘The same as it has to offer anyone else’: it can enrich their perspectives on life, make them less gullible, give them intellectual pleasure, allow them to critique obsolete ideas and regressive social conditions, and so on.

This is not really what Allen was asking, however. Her point was that, given the way that philosophy is institutionalized today, the profession of philosophy offers little to a black woman looking for a profession. The way that philosophy is currently institutionalized is also Dotson’s concern. For her, this embodies a certain conception of what philosophy is, which is limiting, and even repressive.

Next, I think it wise to remember that philosophy has been institutionalized in different ways at different times. Thus, for example, most contemporary philosophers are university academics. But this tradition goes back at most to Germany in the 18th

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¹ Dotson (2012). Page references are to this unless otherwise flagged.

century, and, in English-speaking countries, just over 100 years. Indeed, even in the present time, it is institutionalized in different ways in different countries. Thus, the institutional structures are rather different in France, Japan, and India, from what it is in the US. Even in English-speaking countries, such as Australia, matters are not exactly the same, though they are certainly more similar. What things are on the agenda, what is taken for granted, what is expected of philosophers, matters of race and gender, all change from place to place. In what follows I will restrict my remarks to the present and to the US, as does Dotson.

2. CONFORMING TO ORTHODOXY

All professions have gate-keepers. To a certain extent this is necessary to keep out charlatans and pretenders. But gate-keeping can go badly wrong, especially when the gate-keepers exclude people who have a legitimate perspective on matters which disagrees with their own – when the gate-keepers let in, so to speak, not all legitimate traders, but just the members of their own club. Such an orthodoxy is unhealthy. And such it is at present in philosophy according to Dotson. I think that Dotson is largely right about this.

I am not qualified to comment on the race/gender issue. But let me give a couple of other examples which are salient to me. The first is mentioned by Dotson herself: Asian Philosophy. In fact, there are *many* interesting, profound and radically different Asian philosophical traditions (Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism); Asian philosophy is not a monolith.² But it must be said that most trained philosophers know nothing of these. They were not taught them, and so do not teach them. (Clearly, the situation is self-reproducing.) Worse than this, though, the orthodox attitude (at least till recent times) has been that these areas are not philosophy at all: they are religion, mysticism, oracular pronouncements.³ It must be said that this is a view that can be held only out of ignorance. One cannot start to read and understand the texts involved without seeing that they are rich in philosophical views, criticisms, and debates.

Fortunately, then, this view is slowly changing. But it is still the case that few departments teach these areas. And most departments appear to be unworried by the fact that they are missing half of the world's philosophy. Check the adverts in *Jobs for Philosophers*, for example. I always advise PhD students who want to write their thesis on a topic in Asian philosophy that they must be able to sell themselves in other areas as well; otherwise they are unlikely to get jobs. Whether this is intended or not, the situation is most unhealthy gate-keeping.

It might be thought that gate-keeping of this kind does not infect hard-core analytic subjects, such as logic. It does. Paraconsistent logics, that is, those logics in

² Any more than Western philosophy is. There are many traditions in Western philosophy: thus, e.g., the Neo-platonist tradition is radically different from the Marxist tradition, etc.

³ See, e.g., the comments on Chinese philosophy by the noted historian of philosophy, John Passmore (1967), p. 217 f.

which contradictions do not imply everything, were first developed in the 1960s and 70s. I have watched their progress since this time with interest. They are now accepted by communities in computer science and mathematics. (For example, they have their own code in the 2010 Mathematical Subject Classification employed by *Mathematical Reviews* and the *Zentralblatt für Mathematik*.) But, though again the attitude is slowly changing, it is still the case that this branch of logic, and the philosophical ideas which are embedded in it, are largely anathema in philosophy. If the logics were obviously philosophically or technically flawed this would be acceptable. But they are not. The response of the orthodox philosophical community has been, at best, one of ignoring the ideas or dismissing them with a cavalier remark betraying a lack of thought; and at worst, one of outright hostility and even ridicule.⁴

I am certainly not suggesting that discrimination on the grounds of being an Asian philosopher or paraconsistent logician has been as damaging to people as discrimination as on the grounds of race and gender. That would obviously be false. I cite these examples simply to widen the ambit of Dotson's critique. There is an interesting sociology of our profession to be written on these matters. I hope that, one day, written it will be.⁵

3. JUSTIFICATION AND A CULTURE OF PRAXIS

Dotson suggests that we might improve the situation in philosophy by replacing the current regime – in which anyone who wants to be taken seriously by the profession must justify their work against the accepted standards of orthodoxy – with a “culture of praxis”.⁶ According to her, such a culture has two features (17):

- 1) Value placed on seeking issues and circumstances pertinent to our living, where one maintains a healthy appreciation for the different issues that will emerge as pertinent among different populations.
- 2) Recognition and encouragement of multiple canons and multiple ways of understanding disciplinary validation.

Explaining 1), Dotson says (24): ‘the first component of a culture of praxis is a value placed on seeking issues and circumstances that are pertinent to our living’. This sounds too narrow to me: it would appear to restrict philosophy to matters in ethics, social and political philosophy. This is an important part of philosophy; but only a part. Philosophy also concerns itself with many matters, including (sometimes technical) issues in the philosophy of physics, mathematics, the philosophy of mind,

⁴ In this context, it is worth looking at the introduction to the second edition of Priest 1987.

⁵ There is clearly a connection between power, knowledge, and its control. Perhaps no one has understood and investigated this more thoroughly than Foucault. A Foucauldian study, not of prisons or sexuality, but of the institution of philosophy, would make compelling reading.

⁶ I was a rather puzzled as to why she chose the term ‘praxis’. I don't see how what she suggests concerns action essentially. And the word has already been used by, e.g., Marxist philosophers in connections with positions that actually do – notably the Yugoslavian Praxis group. (See Sher 1977.)

and so on. One would hardly want to rule these things out. But maybe Dotson does not mean this. At another place she glosses this condition as (17): ‘investigations that contribute to old, new, and emerging problems, discussions and/or investigations’. This clearly does not limit philosophy in the same way. (So maybe ‘live matters’ would be better than ‘life matters’?) And understood like this, I entirely agree with her. Philosophy should be continuously engaged with the new problems that are thrown up by science, politics, art, religion, or whatever. In fact, one does not have to know much about the history of philosophy to know that new problems posed by these areas have been its life blood. This is not, of course, to say that old problems are not worth engaging in as well. It is just to say that philosophy should not become fossilized.

The second condition is a little trickier. Multiple theories and views are necessary for healthy philosophy (which is not to say that all views are of equal value, or that all philosophising is equally good). I have no disagreement with this point. (I will return it in a moment.) But Dotson counter-poses her suggested approach to philosophy with a regrettable “culture of justification”. I think that this is not the best way to put the point. It might be taken to suggest that philosophers should not try to justify their views. Such, I take it, would be a mistake. It is in the testing of a view against others that it proves its mettle. This involves attempting to justify it. Philosophy is not just about thinking up new ideas, problem solutions, etc. One needs to have one’s evaluative/critical faculty fully engaged. Dotson, indeed, acknowledges as much (18): ‘It is true that valuing the contribution of one’s works as part of a culture of praxis does not move us entirely away from methods of justification...’; (19) ‘I take a culture of praxis to be calling for better applications of justifying norms in a way that also distributes the burden of making changes’.

What Dotson is really against, I think, is having to fit philosophical ideas in with the justifications *required by orthodoxy* – with the insistence that only orthodoxy is really philosophy. Such legitimates both a certain kind of philosophy and a regime of power that enforces it. I agree with her on this. As history shows, orthodoxy is rarely right. Forcing philosophy to fit into such a straightjacket is a prime way of preventing philosophical (and social) progress.

4. PHILOSOPHY AS CRITIQUE

Finally, to the topic of Dotson’s critique of my own account of the nature of philosophy.⁷ In Section 6.1 Dotson gives a fair summary of my own view of philosophy. The nature of philosophy is essentially unrestricted critique: everything is fair game for challenging and questioning. This does not mean that we should not invent and explore new views: quite the contrary. Critique is at its most powerful in the light of rival theories.⁸ (Neither is this to say that all philosophers must be

⁷ As explained in Priest 2006.

⁸ The view should not be confused with what Moulton 1996 calls the ‘Adversary Paradigm’ in philosophy, where, as in a court of law, the main aim is simply to knock down one’s opponent. I emphasize here also that critique is of ideas, not people. My view is no endorsement of point-scoring,

primarily critics. There can obviously be a professional division of labour between those who critique and those who build the different views which make critique bite. (See Priest 2006, 206.)

After summarizing my view, she explains why she takes it to be at odds with hers.⁹ My account sits happily with her point 1). She says herself that (25):

Priest's account is far easier [than Lourde's] to reconcile with the value of seeking "live" questions. Priest at no point in his article specifies a body of relevant questions. Hence the creation of a single body of appropriate problems and/or questions seems to be antithetical to his approach.

Indeed so. Life, in the widest sense, is always throwing up new questions and issues. They are all grist to the philosopher's mill.

The problem that Dotson sees is, rather, with point 2). She explains (26):

Now, where his position might appear irreconcilable to the second components of a culture of praxis is whether Priest is committed to a single method of disciplinary validation, i.e., discernable critique. This is where the culture of praxis idea might appear to be incompatible with Priest's definition.

What is meant here by 'validation'? Earlier in the essay Dotson distinguishes between justification – which is a form of legitimation – and validation, as follows (7, fn. 3):

It bears noting that I see a difference between process of legitimation and process of validation. Legitimation takes as a sign of positive status congruence with dominant patterns and standards, where validation refers to evaluative processes more broadly. Validation, here, refers broadly to all processes aimed at establishing the soundness of some belief, process, and/or practice as such. Like legitimation, validation is an evaluative concept, but it is not confined to evaluation according to some accepted patterns and standards. In accordance with this distinction, legitimation is a kind of validation insofar as it attempts to establish the soundness or corroborate a practice. Yet legitimation is not the sole form of validation available.

Now, critique, it is true, can be seen as a method of validation in a certain sense. Surviving critique, does, after all, serve to support a theory. But it is not the case that there is only one right way of critiquing a view. The methods of Plato, Aquinas, Hume, Nietzsche, Schlick, and Derrida (to say nothing of Asian traditions) are

putting down those with whom one disagrees, and so on. (See Priest 2006, 207.) Such an attitude is, in fact, detrimental to genuine and productive critique.

⁹ She also flags another possible criticism of my view which might be raised (23), to the effect that permanent critique may paralyse action. This is no part of the view at all. All views are provisional in a certain sense. We need to act on them none the less.

obviously radically distinct. Any way of critique that is cognitively cogent falls within my definition.¹⁰

Immediate after raising her concern, Dotson appears to pull back a little (26):

Answers to the question, “what is philosophy,” like Priest’s definition, imply a delimiting perspective on disciplinary engagement. However, this is only an implication. It actually becomes a delimiting perspective if we take Priest to be offering a universalizable definition of philosophy, i.e., critique as a univocally justifying norm. That is to say, within a culture of justification that admits one set of justifying norms, Priest’s account of philosophy as critique could easily become a constrictive definition of philosophy.

Well, I do take critique to be a defining feature of philosophy. But it seems to me that this is as much a limitation as moving your body is a limitation on communicating. There are many ways of communicating (speaking, writing, sign language, even blinking), but they all use the body in some way. Similarly, the fact that philosophy involves critique necessarily limits *philosophy* in no way whatever. *Any* account of philosophy, unless it be entirely vacuous, is going to put some constraints on what counts as philosophy. Indeed, Dotson’s account is *absolutely no different* in this regard. And if anything is to be ruled out in philosophy, it is surely the mindlessness of blind, uncritical, acceptance, more at home in religion and political ideology than in thoughtful investigation. Indeed, such activities can hardly be called *investigations* at all.

I add, also, that I do not expect my account of philosophy to be taken as a piece of dogma, any more than any other part of philosophy.¹¹ It is as critiqueable as anything else in philosophy. *A fortiori* it cannot constrain and ossify the subject.

5. A RAPPROCHMENT?

Having said this, it is not clear to me that Dotson and I disagree all that much.¹² She thinks, if I may put it in my own words, that my account of philosophy is unacceptable only if it is wielded by an entrenched and elite orthodoxy in such a way as to become unduly constrictive. I agree that it should not be so taken. For my part, I see no reason to disagree with what she says about philosophy – or at least my understanding of her thoughts. It is but an aspect of things which I take to be more fundamental.

Indeed, it seems to me that Dotson’s paper itself fits into precisely the definition of philosophy which I have given. She provides a critique of a certain

¹⁰ The adjectival phrase here is meant to rule out personal abuse, bribery, deceptive advertising, etc., which may all be very effective at a personal level.

¹¹ See Priest 2006, 207. The question ‘What is philosophy?’ is of course itself a philosophical question.

¹² Much of what she is reacting against, is, I think, the negative connotations of the term ‘critique’. She suggests (in correspondence) that ‘scrutiny’ is a term she can live with. So can I: the definition of philosophy given in Priest 2006 is actually as follows (202, italics original): ‘[P]hilosophy is precisely that intellectual inquiry in which *anything* is open to critical challenge and scrutiny’.

social/philosophical practice, articulating a different account, and arguing that it is preferable. That is exactly what I take philosophy to be. So, how is Dotson's paper philosophy? In that way. In the same way, so is this one. Critique and counter-critique go hand in glove. Nor, as I hope I have shown, does critique have to be confrontational. With an open-minded spirit, critique helps us all to understand better.¹³

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¹³ Many thanks to Kristie Dotson for very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE (1.2)

WELL, YES AND NO: A REPLY TO PRIEST

KRISTIE DOTSON

It is rare to have an occasion to discuss one's ideas with an interlocutor with the generosity and rigor of Graham Priest. I have genuinely enjoyed our exchange and how Priest has pushed me to clarify the scope of my analysis. In contemplating Priest's reply and our informal correspondence, it has become clear to me that Priest and I share a great many ideas and orientations. For example, we both appear to be allergic to orthodoxy, i.e. gate-keeping that does not let in all "legitimate traders" [4]¹. So, *yes*, it would seem that we both hold a concern that professional philosophy has an unpleasant proclivity towards the development and sustenance of orthodoxy. And, I assume, we are both committed to contributing towards understandings of professional philosophy that counter this proclivity.²

There are, however, points where Priest and I part company and these points of divergence are significant. For example and, perhaps, most significantly, Priest and I disagree on *how* our respective positions impose limitations on actual philosophical engagement. Where Priest's article, "What is Philosophy?", is specifically concerned with offering an account of philosophical engagement, my article, "How is this Paper Philosophy?", is concerned with values that orient the institutionalization of philosophical engagement. There is a fundamental difference between having one's analysis target the institutionalization of philosophical practice versus philosophical practice as such, a difference Priest acknowledges early in his reply [3]. However, this point of divergence is far more significant than Priest appears to appreciate. That is, a standard for a given practice functions very differently than a set of values aimed at orienting those standards. So, *no*, our accounts do not delimit in similar ways as

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¹ The page numbers of Priest's citation references in the current issue are given in bracket parentheses.

² Priest is also correct in pointing out that different geographical locations have different professional philosophy cultures. It is for this reason in my original paper and in this reply I will confine my remarks to professional philosophy in a U.S. context. As such, all references to professional philosophy refer to professional philosophy within the U.S.

Priest claims, though we do both offer delimitations [8].

In what follows, I will briefly develop significant convergences and divergences between Priest's and my positions. The convergences illustrate a similar issue, i.e. lessening the effect of orthodoxy in professional philosophy, whereas the divergences illustrate a disagreement over the preferable strategy towards achieving this aim, i.e. the kind of delimiting strategy that would facilitate the lessening of orthodoxy. Ultimately, I indicate that when grappling with tendencies towards orthodoxy in a profession it is preferable to propose revisions at the level of institutionalization versus a standard at the level of practical engagement.

1. THE YES:

It should come as a surprise to no one that Priest is able to identify my paper, "How is this Paper Philosophy," as philosophy according to his own standard of philosophy as critique. I received my philosophy training in the U.S, where criticism is still the "life-blood of the discipline" (Priest 2006, 203n9). So to this observation, I can but shrug my shoulders, agree, and point to a reality that may be startling for some, though clearly not Priest. I am not a paradigmatic example of the many varied diverse practitioners that I am championing. Though I am a black woman employed in professional, academic philosophy in the U.S., I know I am not, by far, representative of the most diverse philosophical practitioners.³ And though I may represent diversity in professional philosophy in many respects, the same could not be said of all points where differences become salient. What this indicates is that what counts as diversity in professional philosophy is a complicated affair, which Priest demonstrates an appreciation for with his extension of my observations to paraconsistent logic [4-5].

Priest is also correct in identifying my problem with orthodoxy. Orthodoxy here is defined as gate-keeping that does not let in all legitimate traders. Priest calls this kind of gate-keeping "unhealthy." On this he and I agree [4]. I do have a problem with unhealthy gate-keeping or orthodoxy. We should all have a problem with orthodoxy, in my opinion, if for no other reason than, as Priest states, "orthodoxy is rarely right" [4]. In my paper, I attempt to demonstrate that professional philosophy in the U.S. shows the earmarks of a climate rife with unhealthy gate-keeping.⁴ Given that issues of diversity in professional philosophy are complicated and professional philosophy can be seen as riddled with orthodoxy, my project is to consider options for professional philosophical comportment that can address these two realities. As a result, I propose a shift in professional culture away from valuing narratives of legitimation to narratives of contribution, which I call a culture of praxis.⁵

³ I think here of diverse practitioners like Africana philosophers Bill Lawson (2012), Leonard Harris (1997), Donna-Dale Marcano (2010), and John McClendon III (2012), to name a few, who all demonstrate diversity not only in their social identities, but in their methodologies, writing styles, and/or targeted research areas.

⁴ See also (Dotson 2011).

⁵ I use the term praxis here in line with U.S. black feminist deployment of the term to refer to the ways our actions and practice are infused with beliefs, desires, and theoretical orientation, but also to

2. THE NO:

There are two important points of divergence between Priest's position in his reply and his essay, "What is Philosophy?" and my paper, "How is this Paper Philosophy?" The first concerns the target of our inquiry, whereas the second concerns the kinds of delimitations our different accounts impose given our different targets. Priest, in answering the question, what is philosophy, offers a standard for philosophical engagement as such. In contrast, by inquiring into the question, how or in what manner a paper is philosophy, I propose a set of values that can orient the creation and application of standards for philosophical engagement. There is a difference between specifying philosophical engagement, i.e. proposing that philosophy is x , and orienting specifications of philosophical engagement, i.e. content and application of philosophical standards should accord with x value. The former performs the task of determining what counts as philosophy, whereas the latter orients such standards. Priest in taking criticism to be a fundamental feature of philosophy, offers a filter standard on philosophy and philosophical engagement. Whereas I, as Bo Mou indicates, address "meta-methodological/meta-philosophical" issues for professional philosophy (2012, 1). I am not aiming at providing specifications for philosophy as such, but rather a set of values that can orient such specifications and their application. The values I propose have a specific aim, however. They aim to enable greater diversity within professional philosophy in the U.S by providing a means for addressing persisting orthodoxy. In accordance with this difference, Priest and my account do not delimit in similar ways.

By providing a filter standard on philosophy as such, Priest offers a criterion that can be used to judge whether something is a certain kind.⁶ When Priest explains that he takes "critique to be a defining feature of philosophy," he offers a filter standard for "philosophy" [8]. That is, what makes philosophy "philosophy" is critique. In contrast, I advocate a value and a point of recognition to orient standards for

understand the ways that even the most obscure ideas once adopted can affect our actions and lives. For many black feminists, our actions and contributions are theory producing insofar as they both orient and transform our theoretical understandings of the world (Collins 2000, Cooper 1992). And, in turn, our theories are actions producing (McClaurin 2001).

Now one would do well not to over simplify this orientation. It is not the case that every idea or inquiry needs to promote or encourage some specific course of action, though many theories do. Rather, it is an understanding that what questions become salient to us, what domains of inquiry prick our interests, or what kind of answers we seek do not emerge arbitrarily. They are often times pertinent to our, even if the "our" refers to "one's own," living. For example, I do not see the difference between "issues pertinent to our living" and "live matters" quite as clearly as Priest (p. 4-5). Even relatively obscure domains of inquiry are enabled by, at the very least, social conditions (e.g. the time and privilege to indulge in obscure inquiries), political conditions (e.g. the space to conduct one's inquiries), and personal interests that render live matters "live." In this vein, I see every inquiry as action in space, whether the inquiry recommends a particular action or not; and do not so clearly demarcate the difference between actions and theory production. I am not alone in this proclivity. It is a common U.S. Black feminist orientation, which, I admit, may have nothing in common with the Yugoslavian Praxis group (p4n6).

⁶ This understanding of "filter standard" borrows heavily from (Whyte and Thompson 2010, 80).

philosophy *and* the application of those standards. First, I advocate for a “value placed on seeking issues and circumstances pertinent to our living” for guiding the creation of standards themselves. Each issue and inquiry may have its own set of standards given the topic, audience, and goals of the research. Second, I urge “recognition and encouragement of multiple canons and multiple ways of understanding disciplinary validation” for the application of standards. This includes the recognition that if the actual contributions we make have certain demands for engagement, then not all standards are equally applicable to all forms of philosophical engagement and, hence, cannot be applied universally (2012, 17). These values, however, are not standards aimed at identifying philosophical engagement itself, i.e. what is philosophy.

To say that I am not offering a standard for philosophical engagement itself does not mean I am not proposing a standard. I may, and I concede Priest’s point here, be offering a standard just the same. However, I am proposing a set of values that could act as a meta-standard, i.e. at the level of standards for philosophical engagement themselves. Hence, if a given standard does not demonstrate value placed on live matters and/or the application of a given standard does not include recognition of multiple canons and disciplinary validation, then it is not, according to my proposal, an appropriate standard, nor application of a standard for the institutionalization of philosophy. As such, the values I propose *would* impose restrictions. But they would restrict the creation and application of philosophical standards themselves. In this way, the set of values I propose would have an indirect effect on professional philosophical engagement, but they would not dictate precisely how philosophical engagement will manifest. The latter, I believe, is an unfortunate outcome of Priest’s conception of philosophy as critique.

So though delimitations exist in both Priest and my respective accounts, they do not delimit in the same way. It *would be inappropriate* to ask of every philosophy paper or project, does your paper *place a value* on live matters and/or does it *recognize* multiple ways of disciplinary validation. It would be appropriate, in my estimation, to inquire after a standard for philosophical engagement and every application of philosophical standards in this fashion. The same cannot be said of Priest’s understanding of philosophy as critique. It is unfortunate, though probably not intentional, that it *would be appropriate* to ask of every would-be philosophical paper or project if it includes or implies criticism.⁷ It would be, quite possibly, inappropriate to ask of every standard for philosophical engagement whether it includes or implies criticism. By placing restrictions on philosophy at the level of a philosophical practice, Priest and I are not playing the same game at all. His standard runs the risk of being taken as a universal, univocally relevant justifying norm for

⁷ It is important to note that Priest does explain that every philosophical project does not have to be a critical one. He highlights the possibility of “a professional division of labour” between those who engage in critique and those who “who build the different views which make critique bite” (p.6 & 2006, 206). However, that all aspects of philosophical engagement have to either offer a critique or imply a critique is still part of this conception of philosophy and is a particular orientation and strategy that may or may not be shared by all would-be philosophical practitioners.

philosophical practice, which, if adopted, would most likely produce an orthodoxy that would exclude philosophical practitioners inspired by Audre Lorde, for example. This is an unacceptable outcome. I know several philosophical practitioners who are Lordeian in ways that make Priest's proposal unacceptable.

I openly concede that I am offering a delimiting standard, but it is a standard for standards. Hence, the difference in how our accounts offer restrictions is reflected in where our respective standards apply. Every project called "philosophy" would need to answer to Priest's standard of philosophy as criticism, if it were taken to orient all philosophical engagement. By contrast, every standard for philosophical engagement would need to comply with my evaluative standard. I am fine with this implication.

2. THAT SAID...

Do my remarks mean that Priest's account of philosophy as critique is horribly flawed? Not really. In fact, the differences between Priest's and my projects illustrate a point I wanted to press in my paper, "How is this Paper Philosophy?" Priest's account is not, by itself, problematic (Dotson 2012, 26). It only becomes problematic to the degree his understanding of philosophy as criticism is seen as a means for orienting the institutionalization of philosophy. It is a good description of some, quite possibly most, forms of philosophical engagement today. Should it be allowed to serve as a fundamental feature of all philosophical engagement, it would propagate "unhealthy" gatekeeping or orthodoxy [4] that would serve to quell important diversity, e.g. Lordean orientations. This observation does not appear to be incompatible with Priest's own intent. He explains that he never intended his understanding of philosophy to be "wielded by an entrenched and elite orthodoxy" (p. 8). To stop this from happening, however, I propose we place Priest's account in perspective. It is not a universal standard. It is also compatible with my proposal for a culture of praxis. It is compatible with a value for contributing live issues and, as long as the interlocutor applying the standard is not overzealous, it is perfectly compatible with recognition of diverse canons and disciplinary validation. It is not a standard for all philosophical engagement, however. It is, as he explains, a part of philosophical engagement today that *he takes* to be more fundamental [8], though not every philosophical practitioner is going to agree with this, nor believe it their duty to critique it. And as long as we, professional philosophers, are sensitive to the places where his conception of philosophy is relevant and the places where it is not, then it strikes me Priest's conception does little harm and a great deal of good.

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CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE (2.1)

PRÉCIS OF REASON UNBOUND: ON SPIRITUAL PRACTICE IN ISLAMIC PERIPATETIC PHILOSOPHY¹

MOHAMMAD AZADPUR

This work is a critique of the modern receptions of Islamic Peripatetic philosophy and a justification of the importance of Islamic Peripateticism for modern philosophy. Islamic Peripatetics are represented by Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī (Alfarabi) as the primary architect of this philosophical project and Abū ‘Alī Ḥussain ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), as the one in whose work the project came to fruition. These Peripatetics are in alliance with their Greek predecessors in their understanding of philosophy as a practice of spiritual exercises. However, they differ from the Greeks in the importance assigned to prophecy. The Islamic philosophical account of the cultivation of the soul to the point of prophecy unfolds new vistas of intellectual and imaginative experience and allows the philosopher an exceptional dignity and freedom.

It is perhaps undisputed that certain forms of Islamic philosophy stress the connection between spiritual practice and philosophical discourse, but Islamic *Peripatetics* are often understood as philosophical rationalists pure and simple. In order to establish this form of Peripateticism as inextricably bound to the practice of spiritual exercises, I draw from Pierre Hadot’s insightful readings of Greek philosophy. To put it rather briefly, Hadot advances the view that, for the Greeks, philosophy – Aristotelian and otherwise – was primarily the practice of spiritual exercises aimed at the transformation of the self and the acquisition of wisdom.² I accept this account, which seems to fly in the face of the modernist understanding of philosophy – past and present – as abstract rational discourse, and interpret it as privileging ethics in the thought of the ancients and assigning it a foundational role vis-à-vis the other so-called “fields” of philosophy. I then place the Islamic Peripatetics, the inheritors of the Greek philosophical tradition, within this

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¹ Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011.

² See Hadot 1995 and 2004.

interpretative framework. I submit that the Peripatetic philosophers are in alliance with the Greeks in their commitment to the practice of spiritual exercises for the transformation of the self and its orientation towards the things themselves.

I relate this conception of philosophy to an Aristotelian account of ethical expertise as involving a kind of knowledge, in order to overcome the modernist's divide between mind and world. In this view, virtue involves a sensitivity to the ethical requirements imposed by the situation. But this is not a naïve realism, because the virtuous judgments, as the active exercises of our relevant concepts, are answerable to a world that is experienced by means of a passive operation of those concepts.³ This refined realism contains important consequences for modern ethical theory as well as (the crisis-ridden) modern foundationalist epistemology (and its opponents who deny the rational bearing of the world on the mind).⁴ In this relation, I explore Heidegger phenomenology – through the readings of Islamic philosophy set forth by his disciple, Henry Corbin – for a pertinent account (inspired by Aristotle) of the mind that is always already in unmediated contact with things in the world, but requires the practice of philosophy to scour the obfuscations clouding its awareness. I argue that a more refined version of Heidegger's view is available in the texts of the Islamic Peripatetics.

In their concern with philosophy as the practice of spiritual exercises and a metaphysics that does not eschew access to things themselves, Islamic Peripatetics draw from Greek philosophy. However, to repeat, they differ from their Greek predecessors and their modern successors in the importance they assign to the power of prophecy. This is how they bring the Greek philosophical tradition into contact with the Islamic tradition. Prophecy bridges the divide between the human and the divine, the rational and the super-rational; it is what Muhsin Mahdi refers to as the unity of the rational and the poetic and the imaginative.⁵ Prophecy has legal, ethical, intellectual, and imaginative dimensions, and the treatment of each of these dimensions enriches the philosophical tradition inherited by these thinkers.

Islamic Peripatetics give a psychological account of the various dimensions of prophecy, drawing on the Peripatetic accounts of the faculties of practical and theoretical intellect, and the imagination. In this work, I discuss each dimension of prophecy in relation to the relevant psychological faculties and the notion of philosophy as fundamentally transformative. In this connection, I bring out a heretofore unappreciated aspect of the Peripatetic account of prophecy which is a philosophical appropriation of the Islamic art of interpreting (*ta'wīl*) the figurative dimension of the Qur'an. Beginning with Avicenna, a significant moment in the Peripatetic cultivation of the soul involves the use of sacred poetry and philosophical symbolism. In my analysis, I relate this aspect of Islamic Peripateticism to the

³ See McDowell 1998a.

⁴ In his Locke lectures: *Mind and World*, 1994, and his Woodbridge lectures: "Having the World in View: Sellars, Kant, and Intentionality," 1998b, McDowell has attempted to steer a course between the Myth of the Given (e.g., the empiricist's appeal to sense-data) and the efforts to recoil from the Given into an epistemological coherentism (advocated by philosophers like Rorty and Davidson).

⁵ Mahdi 1990, 97.

modern European philosophical exploration of the faculty of the imagination and the analytic of the concept of the sublime. I maintain that Islamic philosophers, following Avicenna, develop a transformative way of engaging the sublime that bypasses the Kantian paradox (imagining the unimaginable) without historicizing the sublime (*pace* Hegel). For the Islamic Peripatetics, the hermeneutical engagement of the sublime liberates the interpreter from the grip of the mundane and, in refining her feelings of pleasure and awe, culminates in an experience of the unconditional good.

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CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE (2.2)

SOME THOUGHTS ON TRANSCENDENCE AND THE “VETULA”

THERESE SCARPELLI CORY

1.

In contemporary political, philosophical, scientific, and religious circles, one pervasive paradigm crosses many otherwise uncrossable divides: namely, the notion that rationality and religion occupy mutually exclusive and even antagonistic spheres. This post-Enlightenment paradigm has its roots in an impoverished view of reason as a calculative processing of empirical data, and an equally impoverished view of religion as a subjective and unverifiable experience of the non-empirical. The subliminal influence of this paradigm leaves the philosopher wandering homeless between two incompatible realms, too concerned with the non-empirical for “reason” and too concerned with argumentation for “religion.” The philosopher, then, seems to hold two contradictory and unfortunate posts: the irrational pseudo-scientist and demysticizing mystic.

Mohammad Azadpur’s thought-provoking new book, aptly titled *Reason Unbound*, argues that the Islamic Peripatetics rehabilitate the philosopher by providing a richer conception of reason and its relationship to religion. First, against the inherited Enlightenment view of reason as calculative and religion as emotional/practical, the Islamic Peripatetic paradigm views *both* philosophy and religion as having ascetic and cognitive dimensions. Second, against the strict segregation of reason from religion, the Islamic Peripatetic paradigm insists that philosophy and religion are engaged in the same project: i.e., an ascetic/cognitive quest for the divine. The difference is simply that their practitioners approach the divine by different paths: philosophers follow an intellectual path, whereas believers are led by images, poetry, and metaphors. Third, against the view that reason relies on empirical evidence while religion relies on emotion, the Islamic Peripatetic paradigm holds that both philosophers and believers ultimately derive their knowledge and way of life from the same transcendent Intellect, though in different

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ways. The philosopher knows this transcendent Intellect as the Separate Intellect, the source of emanates intelligibles. The believer knows this transcendent Intellect as God, who emanates images into the prophet's imagination that metaphorically represent these intelligibles in ways that are useful for drawing nonphilosophers to the divine. But in some cases, the philosopher may be able to substitute for this direct prophetic emanation of images, if he has a skill for translating intelligibles he has received into suitable images and poetry. Azadpur argues that this Islamic Peripatetic paradigm resolves the presently troubled relationship of reason and religion, by freeing reason from its bondage to the quantitative and eliminating any grounds for competition with religion.

Reason Unbound is an impressive book for its sheer scope and implications. In a relatively short space, Azadpur is able not only to unfold the Islamic Peripatetic view, but to integrate it into a wide range of philosophical conversations, from the ancient Greeks to the medievals, to Kant and Heidegger and Corbin, from philosophy of religion to cognition theory to ethics to phenomenology. I want to restrict my comments to just one of these areas, which is the one with which I am most familiar: namely, Islamic and Latin medieval philosophy. In the first part of this paper, I will highlight two exciting new paths of inquiry that I believe Azadpur's work opens for understanding Islamic and Latin medieval thinkers. The second part of the paper will discuss some difficulties that arise, in my view, from Azadpur's construal of the underlying cause of the split between reason and religion, and the Islamic Peripatetic solution that he proposes.

2.

In studies of medieval philosophical psychology, Alfarabi and Avicenna are well-known for their sophisticated accounts of how raw sensation is refined to produce an image that is the precondition for intellectual understanding. As Azadpur points out, however, the psychological refining of the image is equally an ethical ascent, whereby the soul increasingly purifies the image of its power to move physical desires in the wrong way. Thus, as Azadpur notes, the Islamic Peripatetic view of imagination stands squarely in the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition of philosophy as a transformative purification of knowledge and appetite. In fact, I am struck by the parallels between Alfarabi's description of the vain and counterfeit philosophers, and Plato's description in the *Seventh Letter* of those who are "not genuine converts to philosophy," who lack the discipline and virtue necessary for philosophy, or who have no "natural aptitude for and affinity with justice."¹ One might also note the similarities between the purification of imagination in Avicenna, and the Plotinian view that in order to reach the intelligible realm, the soul must "cut away [from itself] all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast,

¹ Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 340d-341b and 344a-b; compare to Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, cited in Azadpur, 40. Alfarabi himself cites the *Republic*.

labor to make all one radiance of beauty” until it sees intelligibility shining out from itself.²

This interpretation helps to dispel the common misconception that for medieval Peripatetics (both Islamic and Latin), cognition is a sort of data-processing, the work of an absurdly complicated “Rube Goldberg” psychological machine that repackages raw sense data and hands it off in various forms to various cognitive powers. By recognizing knowledge as a “transformative spiritual exercise,” Azadpur helps us recognize that for an author like Avicenna, the function of this psychological “machinery” is to purify the knower so as to achieve an increasingly intense union with the real. For the Islamic Peripatetics, knowledge acquisition is not *interiorizing of data*, but an *emergence from distortion into reality*, i.e., an increasingly perfect assimilation of the knower (via knowledge and virtue) to the really real. Once the ethical dimension of cognition is illuminated, we can see why medieval Peripatetics insist on defining thought as a union, identity, or communion with pure intelligibles. The philosopher is engaged in a project of “healing” the soul, adjusting his vision, breaking out of the realm of appearances into reality. Understanding and virtue, theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom, are thus simply two aspects of the same transformative project.

In addition to shedding light on Islamic Peripatetic theories of cognition, I think that Azadpur’s insight into the ethical dimension of cognition has the potential to open a new chapter in the study of Latin medieval theories of cognition (whose dependence on Islamic philosophers like Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, is now

² Plotinus, *Ennead* I.6.9 (from *The Essential Plotinus*, trans. Elmer O’Brien [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1964], 42-43): “What, then, is this inner vision? Like anyone just awakened, the soul cannot look at bright objects. It must be persuaded to look first at beautiful habits, then the works of beauty produced not by craftsman’s skill but by the virtue of men known for their goodness, then the souls of those who achieve beautiful deeds. ‘How can one see the beauty of a good soul?’ Withdraw into yourself and look. If you do not as yet see beauty within you, do as does the sculptor of a statue that is to be beautified: he cuts away here, he smooths it there, he makes this line lighter, this other one purer, until he disengages beautiful lineaments in the marble. Do you this, too. Cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labor to make all one radiance of beauty. Never cease ‘working at the statue’ until there shines out upon you from it the divine sheen of virtue, until you see perfect ‘goodness firmly established in a stainless shrine.’ Have you become like this? Do you see yourself, abiding within yourself, in pure solitude? Does nothing now remain to shatter that interior unity, nor anything external cling to your authentic self? Are you entirely that sole true light which is not contained by space, nor confined to any circumscribed form, not diffused as something without term, but ever unmeasurable as something greater than all measure and something more than all quantity? Do you see yourself in this state? Then you have become vision itself. Be of good heart. Remaining here you have ascended aloft. You need a guide no longer. Strain and see. . . . No eye that has not become like unto the sun will ever look upon the sun; nor will any that is not beautiful look upon the beautiful. Let each one therefore become godlike and beautiful who would contemplate the divine and beautiful.” See also Plato, *Symposium* 210a-211d, where Socrates outlines a path of purification whereby human souls are drawn toward Beauty itself by means of increasingly refined images of beautiful things that gradually wean the soul away from its distracting desire for sights and sounds; or; see also the famous *Seventh Letter*. Compare to Avicenna, as discussed in Azadpur, §4.1 and 4.4.

increasingly recognized). What might we learn about Latin Scholastic views on virtue, grace, cognition, and free will, if—adopting Azadpur’s methodology—we approach the Latin texts freed from the Enlightenment-era identification of cognition with ratiocination? Certainly Latin theologies of grace clearly present human transformation as a cognitive-affective process of becoming increasingly “deiform.”³ But what about Latin philosophical psychology? Scholars have noted a few cases in which virtue involves a cognitive dimension and vice versa (such as Aquinas’s claim that virtuous habits provide a connatural knowledge of the corresponding realities,⁴ or his description of virtuous practice as a ordering of the passions and taming of phantasms which prepares for contemplation⁵). But not enough research has been done in order to know whether these themes represent a broader commitment to the spiritually transformative character of knowledge among the Latin medievals. And even if not—for instance, if it turns out that the Latins preferred to speak of spiritual transformation as a kind of knowing, rather than construing knowledge as a kind of spiritual transformation—this raises the question of why. While Azadpur suggests a political reason [“it threatened to undermine the church and its monopoly over spiritual salvation” (107)], I wonder whether a quite different issue might be at stake: i.e., the Latin medieval tendency to insist that an uneducated little old lady (the *vetula*) can be just as virtuous as the philosopher (and I will come back to the *vetula* in a moment). In any case, these sorts of questions are long-overdue for investigation, and they have important implications for medieval perspectives of understanding, free will, and happiness.

A second way in which Azadpur's study furthers our understanding of medieval philosophy is in his challenge to the standard narrative concerning the Latin faith-and-reason debates toward the end of the 13th century. This standard narrative runs as follows: Since the early days of Christianity, Christian thinkers had struggled with the question of how to integrate philosophy and its teaching into Christian theology and practice.⁶ The most successful answer was given by Thomas Aquinas, who describes

³ See especially Bonaventure’s discussion of wisdom in *Quaestiones disputatae de scientia Christi*, q. 7.

⁴ Caldera 1980; Miller 1959.

⁵ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* IIa-IIae, 182.3: “The active life can be considered in two ways. In one way, with respect to the study and exercise of exterior actions. And thus it is clear that the active life impedes the contemplative, insofar as it is impossible to occupy oneself with exterior actions and give oneself over to divine contemplation. In another way the active life can be considered with respect to its composing and ordering the interior passions of the soul. And with respect to this, the active life assists contemplation, which is impeded by the disordering of the interior passions . . . So the exercise of the active life strengthens the contemplative, because it quiets the interior passions, from which phantasms come forth, by which contemplation is impeded” (my translation).

⁶ In addition to helping us understanding the paradigm of Islamic philosophy as a way of life, Azadpur’s insights, I think, can be extended fruitfully to shed light on the tension among the Christians of late antiquity, between faith (Divine wisdom) and pagan philosophy (human wisdom). Reading back enlightenment models of philosophy into the past, this tension is easily misconstrued as a religious fear of being challenged by rational discourse. But if we keep in mind that ancient philosophy construed itself not merely as a system of rational beliefs but as an ascetic way of life, the initial hesitance of Christians to incorporate philosophy into the life of faith takes on quite a different color.

faith and reason as cooperators in a single quest for truth. Faith builds on the discoveries of reason and grants the human mind access to divine intelligibilities that it could never have attained on its own; conversely, reason helps the believer gain deeper understanding into revealed truths. Faith and reason can never truly conflict because they are given to human beings by one Creator as complementary means of returning to him (the Neoplatonic *reditus*).⁷

But this harmonious relationship was threatened by “Latin Averroists” such as Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia, who held that philosophy is superior to theology, and that theology and philosophy necessarily arrive at conflicting conclusions. The Bishop of Paris, sought to address the perceived threat to faith by issuing the famous Paris Condemnations of 1277, which only served to widen the rift. Subsequently, philosophy became increasingly methodologically reliant on demonstrative proof; theology was afflicted by a growing skepticism in reason’s ability to provide insight into the mysteries of faith.⁸ According to this narrative, then, Aquinas stands as the last champion of a harmonious relationship between faith and reason, before a long, slow period of estrangement leading up to divorce in the Enlightenment.

Azadpur challenges this narrative, however, arguing that Aquinas bears responsibility for the eventual divorce, as the first Latin medieval thinker to deny that human thinking requires the external assistance of a separate Agent Intellect. Aquinas argues that the agent intellect plays an essential role in the act of thinking—namely, it is the mental power that renders objects intelligible—and thus we cannot be the authors of our own thoughts unless each of us has his or her own agent intellect.⁹ Following Pierre Corbin, Azadpur argues that Aquinas’s immanentization of the Agent Intellect effectively strips philosophy of its ability to attain the transcendent, leaving religion as the sole access point to the Divine (107).

Now in a moment I will articulate some reasons that I think this critique is misdirected. But nevertheless I believe that Azadpur makes an extremely important point, one often overlooked by readers of Aquinas: in order to overcome the contemporary split between reason and religion, it is not enough simply to posit *a priori* that they must be in agreement. The key to overcoming the split, as Azadpur

⁷ Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* I.3-7 and *Commentary on Boethius’s “De Trinitate”*, qq. 2, aa 1-3.

⁸ Although 14th-century theology is often thought to have retreated into fideism (see Etienne Gilson 1938), Russell Friedman has recently convincingly argued that the shape of 14th-century theology is governed instead by a quest for divine simplicity, which precipitated a turn toward negative theology (Friedman 2010, ch. 4). One could also mention the epistemological skepticism of thinkers like Henry of Ghent as a possible factor.

⁹ See Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* II.76 (cited by Azadpur, 106); *Quaestiones disputatae de anima* 5; *Summa theologiae* Ia.79.3. Aquinas thus rejects Avicenna’s separate Agent Intellect, but as Azadpur and others have noted, this is because he fails to realize that the separate Agent Intellect performs a different role in cognition, for Avicenna (see Azadpur, note 53 to chapter 6). The same applies to Aquinas’s critique of the Averroist doctrine of “one possible intellect for all humans”—Aquinas thinks that this would destroy the possibility of each person having his or her own individual thoughts, but he seems to be unaware that he and Averroes have very different interpretations of what it means to think about an essence; see Deborah Black 1993, 23-59; and Richard Taylor 1999, 147-177.

recognizes, lies more fundamentally in some sort of rehabilitation for both reason and religion, in which reason's transformative access to the transcendent is affirmed, and faith is recognized as an affective and cognition relationship. Defenders of Aquinas thus need to examine instead how Aquinas contributes to this project of rehabilitation.

3.

I now want to turn to two points on which I have reservations concerning Azadpur's characterization of the root of the modern split between reason and religion, and his solution to this split.

First, I am not convinced by Corbin's and Azadpur's argument that the immanentization of mental powers necessarily threatens the integrity of philosophy as a transformative spiritual exercise directed toward "the unforeseen beyond."¹⁰ It seems to me that an immanentist *mechanism* of cognition need not restrict the mind to this-worldly *objects* of thought. For instance, a defender of immanentized mental powers like Aquinas might hold that the mind is naturally ordered toward the divine, possessing an innate ability to attain a cognitive union with God and to illuminate the natures embedded in individuals. In short, the claim that the mind can think on its own using its own native powers without *assistance from the divine* need not entail the claim that the unaided mind cannot *attain God or objects of cognition that transcend the merely empirical*, such as justice or beauty itself.¹¹

In fact, as Azadpur recognizes, Avicenna himself does not outsource any of the activity of human thinking to the separate Agent Intellect [and Azadpur rightly criticizes Aquinas for misinterpreting Avicenna on this point (106 and 152n53)]. For Avicenna just as much as for Aquinas, the act of thinking is the *individual human's own act*, the act of our own immanent mental powers. I wonder, then, if Azadpur's objection is really directed, not at immanentized psychologies, but at *abstractionist* theories of cognition. In other words, perhaps his objection ought to run something like this: If intelligibles are cognized only by abstracting them from extramental sensible objects (rather than by receiving them directly from a separate Agent Intellect), then the human intellect seems to be restricted to this-worldly, empirical objects.¹² Now I think an abstractionist could find ways around this objection—for instance, a) by arguing that we cognize intelligibles like *humanity* or *justice* by abstracting from sensible instances of these kinds, but that we have a different, non-

¹⁰ Corbin 1993, 173-74.

¹¹ Just one example of Aquinas insisting that the goal of human existence transcends the merely human, in *Summa theologiae* Ia-IIae.3.5, ad 3: "[Human beatitude would be an operation of the practical intellect] if man himself were his own ultimate end; then indeed the considering and ordering of his own acts and passions would be his beatitude. But because the ultimate end of man is a good outside himself—namely, God, whom we attain by an operation of the speculative intellect—therefore the beatitude of man consists in the operation of the speculative intellect rather than in an operation of the practical intellect" (my translation).

¹² Given the context of his argument, it is interesting that Azadpur does not hold that intelligibles must be *only* received directly from the Agent Intellect; instead, he agrees with Hasse that for Avicenna, intelligibles are both received via abstraction and by emanation from the Agent Intellect (see 55).

abstractive mode of access to higher, divine realities, and/or b) by arguing that abstracted intelligibles are themselves a participation in the Divine Ideas. But it remains true that it is easier for a theory of cognition by direct reception from a separate intellect to show that all cognition involves some access to a divine reality.

The second point on which I have reservations is Azadpur's argument that the integrity of philosophy and its harmonious relation to religion is best safeguarded by construing reason and religion as the intellectual and the imaginative approaches to a transcendent reality. Now at first glance, this solution appears to place reason and religion on a friendly footing. If the same reality can be reached either intellectually or imaginatively, these approaches need not be in competition, any more than a history of Rome and Virgil's *Aeneid* are in competition.

But it seems to me that this approach has two troubling implications. First, under this model religion can only coexist peacefully with philosophy if it is willing to be constrained by the image-weaving role that philosophy defines for it. In fact the Islamic Peripatetic model sets up a hierarchical relationship in which philosophy defines and restricts religion—precisely the reverse of the situation that Hadot critiques so strongly in the Latin medievals. According to Hadot, in the Latin West, religion constricted philosophy and limited its objects of inquiry, so that philosophy became a mere argumentative technique useful to theologians.¹³ Azadpur explains that the restriction resulted from fear of religious heresy, i.e., the fear that “the philosopher would be carried away . . . to an unforeseen beyond, and certainly beyond established dogma” (107). I think that this interpretation of the Latin medievals neglects an important aspect of their theory,¹⁴ but let us simply accept it as given for the present purposes.

Now if we turn to the Islamic Peripatetic model, we find the same kind of relationship, in which one discipline controls and defines the nature of the other. For the Islamic Peripatetics, it is philosophy that stands outside religion, constricting and defining it. Certainly philosophy does not restrict the *objects* of religion (since they both approach the “holy things”), but it does categorically restrict religion's *mode of access* to those objects, which is no small matter. Under the Islamic Peripatetic model, religion can tell instructive stories that truly imitate reality, but it cannot make truth claims about reality. Religion is thus for adults what classic fairy tales are for children—namely, Tolkien's “true myths,” or the “noble lies” of Plato's *Republic*, meant to initiate the listener into the mysteries of life, death, good, evil, love, and

¹³ “[P]hilosophy's role was henceforth to furnish theology with conceptual—and hence purely theoretical—material” (Hadot 1995, 107-08).

¹⁴ On my view, Aquinas construed the quest for God (perhaps not entirely accidentally) in a way that is very similar to the Islamic Peripatetic quest for the divine, i.e., as a process of purification involving religious and ethical practices in which knowledge and virtue are co-developed, culminating in an intimate union with the divine essence. The difference is that for the medievals, natural reason and virtue cannot get the human soul all the way to the end of this trajectory. To complete the journey Divine intervention is needed in the form of grace, which grants the soul a divinized nature whereby it can then attain perfect union with God. Nothing in this paradigm suggests that reason must be relegated to a mere ratiocinative device (although this sort of thinking was arguably common in 14th-century theology).

suffering. Now certainly Azadpur rightly points out that under this model, prophetic symbolism is not a “ploy to make the meaning inaccessible to the average audience”; instead “the hermeneutics of the inspired symbols brings us to imaginatively entertain what the philosopher’s intellectual hermeneutics aims to behold intellectually” (88-89). But even so, religion is barred from providing access to reality *as it is in itself*—only reality under the guise of images suited to the masses. Only the philosopher, who has *intellectual* access to the “unforeseen beyond,” can recognize the true meaning of those images.

As a result, I do not find Ghazali’s resistance to the Islamic Peripatetic solution at all surprising. According to Azadpur, Ghazali simply failed to notice (or was politically motivated not to notice) that philosophy was a way of life in which the intellect cultivates the imagination for the sake of conjunction with the separate Agent Intellect, entirely compatible with the believer’s path toward “divine things” via Islamic religious practices (93). But I would argue that Ghazali (and later, the anti-Averroist Latin medievals) clearly recognized what religion loses under this model: The philosopher claims for himself a superior mode of access to divine things, and even the ability to judge religion’s success in imaginatively representing the truths that he accesses directly. Religion might well resent being dismissed to the children’s table.

This leads us to the second difficulty with the Islamic Peripatetic model: i.e., its reliance on a certain philosophical elitism.¹⁵ Along their different paths to union with the divine, the philosopher and the uneducated believer both attain perfection, but only the philosopher is perfected at the highest level of his being, i.e., the intellectual. The uneducated believer necessarily falls short of such perfection, remaining within the realm of images and attaining a certain remote conjunction with the Agent Intellect only via the imagination. (And thus it makes sense for Avicenna to describe himself as the most perfect believer—philosophy is the intellectual unveiling of what the believer grasps imaginatively, and the philosopher must engage in religious practices in order to cultivate the practical virtue leading to theoretical virtue.¹⁶) Now I would agree with Azadpur that one could rank a way of life as objectively higher than another way of life due to its mode or objects, without necessarily denigrating those who occupy the lesser state of life. But I am not so sure about the claim that the status of one’s way of life determines one’s degree of union with the divine. If union with the divine is the highest goal and fulfillment of human existence, there is something deeply counterintuitive about the claim that factors largely outside one’s control—education and intellectual ability—are what determine the soul’s closeness to God and even the attainment of immortality (see 101). Certainly the philosopher works hard to cultivate virtue, since that is the only way to gain the immortal “acquired intellect.” But what about the little old lady who is equally assiduous in cultivating virtue? Through no fault of her own, according to the Islamic Peripatetic

¹⁵ The same philosophical elitism appears in Moses Maimonides, as well as in Boethius of Dacia.

¹⁶ See Avicenna’s response to accusations of heresy, cited in Azadpur, 92.

model, she is denied perfect union with God in this life, and loses the opportunity for immortality.

In fact, the problem of the “little old lady” (*vetula*) is, I believe, one of the key motivating factors in the Latin medieval inversion of the Islamic Peripatetic model. For the Latin medievals, faith is superior to reason because faith provides the deforming grace of charity, by which the soul is elevated to a supernatural mode of union with God. In this way, the little old lady and the believing philosopher can be equally perfectly united to God. For instance, Bonaventure (Aquinas’s contemporary) writes, “Whence neither justice nor miracles nor knowing (*scire*) mysteries are advantageous without charity. And all the doctors and Saints judge this to be the case. For behold, a little old woman (*vetula*) who has a small garden has better fruit from possessing charity alone, than a great master who has the biggest garden and knows (*scit*) the mysteries and natures of things.”¹⁷ In short, one might object—and many 13th-century Latin masters would certainly have objected—to the Islamic Peripatetic model on the grounds that it denies to the little old lady any possibility of reaching the highest mode of union with God.¹⁸

¹⁷ Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* 18, no. 26 [Quaracchi 5.418, my translation]. The charism of the Franciscan order seems to have made it particularly resistant to any philosophical elitism. For instance, Johannes Jörgensen’s *Saint Francis of Assisi: A Biography* (Jörgensen 1911, 238) reports a story by an early biographer of Francis about a concern among early Franciscans that their charism of simplicity and poverty might be threatened under the leadership of Bonaventure (one of the great minds of the 13th century, educated at Paris before entering the Franciscans): “But soon Brother Giles awakened from his memories and dreams and saw that the good old times were irrevocably gone, that Francis was dead, and he himself an old man whose ideas did not interest anyone. . . . Then Brother Giles sighed deeply and long: ‘Our ship leaks and must sink; let him flee who can! Paris, Paris, thou ruinest St. Francis’ Order!’ . . . And when Giles in his old age was placed before the General of the Order, St. Bonaventure, the first question he asked this learned man was the following: ‘Father, can we ignorant and unlearned men be saved?’ ‘Certainly,’ answered St. Bonaventure kindly. ‘Can one who is not book-learned love God as much as one who is?’ asked the old Franciscan again. ‘An old woman is in a condition to love God more than a master in theology’ was Bonaventure’s answer. Then Giles stood up, went to the wall of his garden and called out to the wide world, ‘Hear this, all of you, an old woman who never has learned anything and cannot read can love God more than Brother Bonaventure!’”

See also Aquinas, *Symbolum Apostolorum*, prooemium: “No philosopher before the coming of Christ could know (*scire*) as much about God and what is necessary for eternal life, even by striving with all his might, as a little old lady knows (*scit*) after the coming of Christ; and thus Isaiah says (11:9): “The earth is full of the knowledge (*scientia*) of God” (my translation).

The strength of 13th-century opposition to any philosophical elitism is evident in the fact that in the Paris Condemnations of 1277, the first two condemned propositions on the list are “That there is no more excellent state than to study philosophy,” and “That the only wise men in the world are the philosophers.”

¹⁸ One wonders whether this problem is intensified or ameliorated by Alfarabi’s lesson or only intensify the problem by uniting the philosopher and prophet in a single person? As Azadpur explains in ch. 3, for Alfarabi, philosophical excellence and prophetic excellence are necessarily united in a single person, who “holds the most perfect rank of humanity and has reached the highest degree of felicity.” Could this state be reached via religious practices as well (in which case a more egalitarian approach to perfect happiness would be available)? Or is it available only to the philosopher (in which

In opening up these and other topics for discussion, *Reason Unbound* provides a valuable service to a historically to the relationship between philosophy and religion. Rehabilitating philosophy as a way of life, and recovering the relevance of Islamic and medieval thought to contemporary philosophy of religion, *Reason Unbound* offers a much-needed reflection on the richness of reason.

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case the problems mentioned above are only intensified, since then the philosopher not only leads a life superior to that of the believer, but even serves as the conduit for religious revelation)?

CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE (2.3)

SPIRITUALITY IN THE PERIPATETIC PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS OF ISLAM

NADER EL-BIZRI

It is a daunting experience to attempt to reflect on spirituality, or on spiritual matters and exercises, from the standpoint of philosophy. This is especially difficult in an era that calls into question the validity of philosophical thinking altogether in the age of modern techno-science. It is precisely this burden that is boldly shouldered by Mohammad Azadpur in his *Reason Unbound*, whilst his reflections on the question concerning spirituality are mediated via the channels of interpreting the Peripatetic traditions in the intellectual history of Islam. The scope of his endeavour is not restricted to historiography and philology, which are usually transformed into projects of documentation within the mediaevalist division of the broad area of Islamic Studies, even when approaching the investigation of philosophy in pre-modern Islamic civilization. After all, the academic methodologies that dominate the conventional approaches of mediaevalists in studying the history of ideas in Islam are predominantly archival in scope. Azadpur avoids these traps by offering us interpretations of philosophical thinking in Islam that are informed by contemporary philosophical reflections, and particularly by those that have been orientated by the perspectives of the so-called 'Continental Thought', and more specifically from the viewpoint of Martin Heidegger's fundamental ontology and its critique of the history of European metaphysics. This approach in studying the philosophical legacies of pre-modern Islamic civilization is rather rare. Such pathway in interpretation runs along the trails of an intellectual landscape that I journeyed through elsewhere in reading the metaphysics of the eleventh-century polymath Ibn Sina (Avicenna) from a phenomenological vantage point that was guided by Heideggerian ontological leitmotifs. The resistance to such approaches in the academic and scholarly circles of Islamic Studies is poignant. The strictures are ultimately executed on the grounds of avoiding anachronism, and in the name of maintaining authentic expressions of fidelity to the ancient texts and their original authors. In general, this outlook

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censors original critical thinking, and at times, it also arrests the impetus of hermeneutic and exegetical interpretations, which aim at surpassing the confines of the prevalent archivist practices in Islamic Studies. It is refreshing and informative to witness another attempt by a kindred thinker to undertake the pathways of contemporary philosophy in securing new channels of accessibility to renewed interpretations of the history of philosophical ideas in Islam, and the exploration of their relevance to modern thought and culture. This refined undertaking is furthermore strengthened by serious reflections on the spiritual legacies that animated the corpus of *falsafa* (Islamic Philosophy), and running by this the risks of alienating most modern philosophers and academic thinkers who are unaccustomed to such uncommon modes of philosophizing, which seek the revival of spirituality in a sapiential quest within philosophy.

Azadpur's *Reason Unbound* critically re-assesses the modern receptions of Peripatetic Islamic philosophy through convincing surveys. He also examines the role that this pre-modern intellectual tradition can potentially perform in inspiring the possible emancipation and resolution of the elements of crisis that compromise modern naturalistic rationalism. This endeavour is situated within the broader cultural critique of the quandaries of Orientalism, which originated with Edward Said and was furthermore accentuated in the context of studying the intellectual history of Islam by Muhsin Mahdi (1). Azadpur aims at going beyond the doctrinaire stances of Orientalism and the methodological strictures of philosophical rationalism in the reception and interpretation of Islamic philosophy within contemporary academia. He seeks to reveal the centrality of the practice of what he refers to as 'spiritual exercises' in pre-modern Islamic Peripateticism (Aristotelian and imbued with Platonism motifs), while partly building his case on Pierre Hadot's interpretation of ancient Greek philosophy (8-11) as being primarily a mode of praxis that rested on spirituality and aimed at cultivating self-transformations as prerequisites for the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and the attainment of wisdom. However, unlike their Greek predecessors and counterparts, the Peripatetic thinkers of Islam assigned a great importance to the monotheistic exemplar of Prophethood, while also picturing it as an ultimate aim behind the philosophical-spiritual nurturing of the soul. This pre-modern outlook is reinforced by Azadpur's reading of Henri Corbin's oeuvre in conjunction with phenomenological analyses that were inspired by Heidegger, especially in the context of the latter's fundamental ontology and its existential analytic of *Dasein*, as principally set in *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time). Azadpur's critique targets what he refers to as the 'limited scope' of the rational impetus in philosophizing, which censors the imaginative, poetic, and intuitive modes of thinking. He notes that the phenomenological surpassing of the divide between mind and world constituted an insight that was already anticipated by Muslim Peripatetic philosophers (4). Azadpur places a special emphasis herein on the symbolic order of Prophetology, which on his view underpinned the significance of the practice of spiritual exercises in the modes of thinking of the Peripatetic philosophers in Islam; and that it demarcated by this a distinctive trait in thought that was not witnessed before within the antique Greek legacies. Philosophy is pictured in this context as a

way of life, and not only as the kernel of demonstrative reasoning, which merely seeks the rational discursive production of knowledge in the composition of theoretical and logical treatises. Philosophy also becomes phenomenological in the way it calls for getting to *things themselves*. This maxim, which was announced by Edmund Husserl in articulating the agenda of phenomenological research and its directives of method, is presented by Azadpur from the perspective of Heidegger's analysis in *Sein und Zeit*, and as mediated also by the radical divergence from phenomenology that we witness with the esoteric turn in the thought of Corbin who eventually cultivated a mystical mood in thinking. Self-awareness and the promise of an elevated mode of sapiential metamorphosis is embedded within the Socratic evocation of the Delphic injunction of Apollo: 'Know Thyself!' This call destines the seeker to excellence in nurturing the virtues in the quest for wisdom that overcomes the reductive construal of philosophizing as a theoretical mode of thematic abstract rationalistic deliberation. This antique outlook, which accentuated the primacy of virtue-ethics, had resonances within Islamic mysticism; which, on Azadpur's view, ought to be restored as a prolegomenon to philosophical thinking.

Azadpur argues against the modern academic interpretative emptying of Islamic Peripatetic thought from its spiritual content (16). Based on the fuller logical unfolding of the bearings of such perspective, one would uphold the view that Islamic philosophy was inherently a religious mode of thinking, which focused on the practice of spiritual transformative exercises that severed the attachment to worldly things and withdrew from being caught in the thicket of vain desires. Philosophizing in Islam would therefore be destined on the straight path of the beckoning messengers of divinity in leading a God-fearing way of life that is also motivated in faithfulness by piety. Azadpur's authorial mood belongs in this regard to the genre of literature and prose that marks the works of traditionalists such Seyyed Hossein Nasr and William Chittick. Philosophy is depicted through the lenses of esotericism and asceticism, in seeking the realization of self-purification and self-perfection, by emulating or aspiring to reach the station of prophecy by way of approximations in the nurturing of the soul within the quests for wisdom. Azadpur aims at resuscitating a *Sophia perennis* that discloses truth through self-discovery. His endeavour is inspired by rethinking of the significance of prophecy in the reflections of Alfarabi and Ibn Sina (18-19). Self-cultivation is not only paramount in ancient Greek wisdom or in Islamic Peripateticism, it is also witnessed in phenomenology of the Heideggerian variety as it was adaptively assimilated within the syncretic symbolisms of Corbin's teachings. Ethics becomes a gateway to theoretical investigation, and religious mysticism is posited as an intrinsic trait of philosophizing in the Islamic Peripatetic *milieu*, which applies to the thought of Alfarabi and Ibn Sina. Azadpur sees parallels therein with phenomenology in saving the appearance by way of unveiling the hidden that self-shows itself beneath it. This calls to get to the things themselves (22-23) as mediated via the authenticity of *Dasein* (27), specifically in being away from the distraction, comfort, and idiosyncratic public possibilities of being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-Sein*) under the influence of the neuter *Das Man* (They). Azadpur detects in this the workings of ethics. He also appeals herein to

McDowell's reflections on the actions of the righteous persons who supposedly get things right due to the impress of virtuousness on their character traits (33). The authenticity of *Dasein* is grasped as an autonomous dwelling amongst entities and beings in the world; namely, of being at home amidst things by which we dwell. This Heideggerian picture is judged by Azadpur as being restricted, or possibly truncated, since the Peripatetic thinkers in Islam aimed further at executing spiritual exercises, which seemingly opened up experiential vistas and unveiled intellectual horizons that surpassed the inner-worldly limits of Heidegger's take on *Dasein*'s solitary authenticity (39-40). Cultivating virtue and the struggle for excellence in character belong to the propaedeutic practices preceding theoretical inquiry (41). This state of affairs points to the perfection of practical reason in aiming at the realization of the image of the perfect human being as a philosopher-prophet-lawgiver, which gives prominence to the prophetic exemplar in Peripatetic Islamic thought (51-52), whilst being inspired by the Platonist outlook on the *polis*. However, the attainment of happiness and the quest for this prophetic idealized paradigm can be optimally mediated via the conduits of a political life that is conducted in a virtuous city. Excellence and virtue necessitate the social context for their practice in deeds and comportments, instead of being nurtured in solitude (53), or by fleeing our time-consuming everyday commitments and the dutiful attending to our responsibilities. This inclination in thinking is not far removed from the Aristotelian take on ethics, albeit the emphasis on being guided by the prophetic legacy in enacting spiritual exercises is distinctively Islamic.

The practice of spiritual exercises purifies the self from its worldly attachments by curtailing appetites, passions, desires, and ambitions (77-78). Whilst such exercises are continually mentioned in connection with Islamic Peripateticism, it is unclear how these were manifested in concreteness. Did they necessitate acts of worship and supplicant invocation, or the enactment of canonical ritual prayers, of fasting, or of meditative contemplation in prolonged periods of solitary silence, or the resolute training of the mind to empty thoughts from anything but the remembrance of God, or the kinaesthetic motion of bodily limbs in whirling cyclic revolutions? For instance, we witness detailed descriptions of such spiritual exercises in allegorical terms with Ibn Tufayl's tale of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*; and yet it is not too clear what Azadpur meant by *spiritual exercises* in relation to the Peripatetic philosophers in Islam.

Azadpur indicates that the spiritual exercises aim at enhancing the quality of the potential connection with what pre-modern Peripatetic Muslim thinkers referred to in an antique Neo-Platonist *parlance* as the: 'Active Intellect'; namely, the source of practical and theoretical intelligibility. Disciplined imagination was seen herein as a pivotal faculty in the unfolding of the workings of prophecy and philosophy (63). Azadpur mediates his analysis of this phenomenon in Chapter 4, by way of reflections on the beautiful and the sublime in Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, and also through a brief appraisal of Hegel's *Aesthetics*.

Azadpur aims all along at showing that Islamic Peripateticism offers a *genuine* form of rationalism that is not constrained by an excessively narrow construal of reason (81). The intellect is not restricted to discursive and demonstrative reasoning,

or to dialogical deliberation. Imagination and dream carry cognitive and epistemic weight in the way imageries are transmitted into the soul from the heavenly spheres and the separate [disembodied] intelligences (84-85). Whilst Azadpur evokes the poetics that are suggested by this classical picture, it remains unclear how this mythic cosmology of Neo-Platonism can still be sustainable, even at an inspirational suggestive level, in our age of modern techno-science.

It is accepted as a convention in the esotericism of modern traditionalist writing to use the symbolic devices of rhetoric and poetics in view of retaining the Neo-Platonist leitmotifs that animated Islamic Peripateticism within the current promotion of mysticism, gnosis and Sufism. However, such forms of traditionalism tend to be reactionary towards modern science or in the interpretation and reception of the history of the exact sciences in Islamic pre-modern civilization and material cultures. Scenes of instruction can indeed be derived from these pre-modern cosmologies, epistemic paradigms, and onto-theological outlooks. Nonetheless one has to be guarded against the impress of the mythical-poetical modes of picturing reality, without necessarily losing sight of the importance of the practice of spiritual exercises. One can still evoke the significance of virtue-ethics and stress its primacy in preceding intellectual inquiry (104) or scientific research. This aim does not anymore require the continuation hitherto of conversations about an Active Intellect within our contemporary intellectual settings. It is not also a well-founded critique to level against Heidegger that he was reductive in his approach by doing away with the notion of a separate intelligence, and by following the footsteps of his predecessors that went down the route of Thomism (105-107).

Heidegger's thought unfurled against the background of his preoccupation with the question of the meaning, truth, and place of being in a scientific age that is marked by the unfolding of the essence of modern technology. His fundamental ontology, his call for thinking, his existential analytics of *Dasein*, and his reflections on *Ereignis* (as appropriative event?) all required a disciplined approach in freeing thought from its doctrinal bondage to metaphysics, and from its non-philosophical commitments to what was handed down over from the past regions of *mythos*. Having said that, one ought to indeed reflect on the phenomenon of the spiritual incapacitation of philosophy (108); albeit, this can be done by accentuating the primacy of ethics over ontology, over cosmology and epistemology, without retaining a nostalgic poetizing imagery at the roots of one's own thinking, or promoting reactionary or relativistic commitments to Peripatetic or Neo-Platonist pictures that are no longer sustainable in our epoch.

Azadpur composed his book with the principal aim of re-interpreting Islamic Peripateticism from the standpoint of accentuating the centrality of the practice of spiritual exercises within its teachings and sapiential quests. However, his complementary and intriguing task of appreciating how such endeavour can be furthermore applied to a resolution of the problematic crisis that underlies the fissures of modern naturalistic and rationalistic philosophizing remained underdeveloped and ambiguous. Azadpur gravitated in this aspect towards traditionalist literature, which poetizes the pre-modern cosmological doctrines.

Peripateticism in Islamic thought avoided the pull of irrationality, by moderating the mind's reflections, with reasoned balance, on the randomness that can be detected in causal worldly and cosmic irregularities, and by eschewing blind faith and dogmatic superstitions. Its moderation reflects nonetheless the particulars of its epistemic pre-modern age and its associated worldviews. As Azadpur convincingly noted with eloquence, we can possibly liberate modern philosophy by taking unprejudiced looks at the pre-modern conceptions of philosophy; in his case, he gazes at Islamic Peripateticism (112). This calls for thinking about the prospects of grasping philosophy not merely as a production of rational discourse, but also as essentially consisting of a practice of spiritual exercises, which assist in gaining access to things themselves (112). If Islamic Peripateticism intersects in this regard with the maxims of phenomenology, this may grant our reflections on it a viable path of accessibility into contemporary philosophical thought; at least in the so-called 'Continental' modern division of philosophy. Emmanuel Levinas might have been a potential thinker to be considered herein in the accentuation of the primacy of ethics in philosophizing, which would have presented Azadpur with another voice besides that of Corbin to articulate an informative critique of the limitations in Heidegger's thought.

In all of this, the notion of spirituality and the nature of spiritual exercises remain ultimately obscure, and the same applies to the sphere of their praxis in modern academia. Should it not be the case that prior to exploring the lessons that modern Continental and Analytic rational philosophy can learn from pre-modern Islamic Peripateticism, one ought to focus the initial foundational efforts on renewing the impetus of philosophical thinking in contemporary Muslim thought? Is the call for spiritualizing philosophy a modern form of mysticism, or of the implementation of Sufi ethics, or of advocating gnosis? In what way would the modern expressions of spiritualism differ from those of past traditions while surpassing the mythic pronouncements of traditionalists and the superstitious randomized eclecticism of new age spirituals? What is spirituality, and what constitutes spiritual exercises? These notions were presupposed throughout the propositions of the book without being explicated in concreteness. Nonetheless, Azadpur initiates the interrogations that establish the preliminary conditions for further disputations around them.

In retracing some of the steps that we have undertaken earlier, Azadpur's conception of a transcendent and separate Active Intellect was not only sustained in the context of his reflections in historiography or within the parameters of historical analyses, he rather advanced an implicit suggestion that aimed at presenting this notion as a valid image, which may inspire contemporary philosophizing in the cultivation of the intuitive faces of thought. Azadpur's endeavour became obscured by this traditionalist penchant. What is pictured as a crisis in modern rationalism turns also into a mirrored predicament that shows traditionalism as reactionary and seemingly relativistic in our age of techno-science. Heidegger's existential analytic of *Dasein*'s mode of being-toward-death is approached from inner-worldly experiential manners, but being-toward-*beyond*-death, as pronounced by Corbin, remains a mystery of the future, which is marked by its utter *otherness* that cannot be

determined in affirmations nor surpassed by negations. The poetizing turn in philosophizing becomes thusly confusing.

Azadpur tacitly calls for a philosophy that is inspired by prophetology, which he sees its relevance today in the (mystical?) prolongation of Heideggerian phenomenology and in the extension of the teachings of the schools of Isfahan and Tehran up till the present day, as these are primarily embodied in the curricular activities of the seminaries in Iran. This is a noble aim, but it does not yet accomplish the promised task of overcoming the gapping divide between religion and science, between theology and philosophy, faith and reason.

Azadpur's *Reason Unbound* is a preparatory work that paves the way for future inquiries that will be driven by the cultivation of the cognitive powers of imagination. This book reveals excellence in historiography and textual interpretation, but nonetheless its thought-provoking thesis remains to be debated in terms of rethinking the end of philosophy in relation to sapiential pursuits that are animated by spiritual leanings in the quest for wisdom. It therefore remains unclear how Islamic Peripateticism offers an antidote to some of philosophy's current universal problems, and how philosophizing needs beforehand, or at least in parallel, to be actively resuscitated by Muslim thinkers from within the unfolding of modern Islamic thought.

In the poetizing turn in thinking, and like Azadpur, I have been at home amidst the same constellation of texts. The territory that he partly surveyed is the landscape that is being traversed in our shared pilgrimage journeys. The more we travel through its regions and dwell in it, the more we relegate our tales about its locales and the promise of unearthing its riches. This enhances our experiential rooted familiarities with its features, with the hope that one day it may indeed become again a fragrant abode of orchards to be safeguarded by posterity, and to be cultivated by those who are yet to come...

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CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE (2.4)

SOME THOUGHTS ON IDENTITY OF ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

BO MOU

I do not pretend to be an expert in Islamic philosophy that is the central subject of Dr. Mohammad Azadpur's book, and I have thus learnt a lot from his book. Although I am not qualified to comment on the details of the author's account concerning the distinct resources of Islamic philosophy, I would like to make several comments on some general points concerning the identity of Islamic philosophy with regard to the identity of philosophy, methodological strategy, and the relationship between philosophy and religion. With consideration of the critical-engagement purpose of the "constructive-engagement dialogue" section, these comments are critical in nature for the sake of further exploring some involved philosophically interesting questions.

According to Mohammad, if my understanding is correct, what is called 'Islamic philosophy' or 'Islamic Peripatetic (philosophical) tradition' referentially designates what Muslims inherited from the Greeks. So it is one key issue how to understand the identity of the philosophy by the Greeks. However, there are distinct modern readings or interpretations of the identity of Islamic Peripatetic philosophy (given that one literal sense of 'Peripatetic' is "of or pertaining to the Aristotelian school) or of what Muslims inherited from the Greeks. The author challenges "the standard, modernist interpretation of what Muslims inherited from the Greeks" and renders it involving "a fundamental misunderstanding" (7): "These modernist historians of Islamic philosophy consider Greek philosophy to be comprised of systems of rational knowledge formulated by different philosophers or schools of philosophy" (*ibid.*); the author adopts Pierre Hadot's interpretation to the effect that the Greeks saw philosophy primarily as the practice of spiritual exercises aimed at the transformation of the self and the acquisition of wisdom; the author intends to argue that "this is how 'Islamic' Peripatetic philosophers understood what they inherited from the Greeks" and thus that Islamic Peripatetic philosophy means "an Islamic practice of philosophical spiritual exercises". If so, then the next question is this: what has made Islamic way of the Greeks-style practice of philosophical spiritual exercises distinct and unique? The author argues that "what makes the philosophical way of life

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advanced by Islamic philosophers unique is the appropriation of this Greek tradition into a legacy of Islamic prophetology” (*ibid.*). My subsequent comments focus on several metaphilosophical and methodological issues involved in the foregoing approach, in view of similar concerns in some other major philosophical tradition (Chinese philosophy, in this case).

1.

My first comment is on the philosophical identity of Islamic Peripatetic tradition. Many think that the critique (taking nothing absolutely immune from criticism and without blindly claiming anything) and justification (understood in a broad way) constitute two closely-related (prescriptive) defining features of philosophical inquiries in treating a series of fundamental issues, which might be jointly concerned by philosophy and religion. For those who subscribe to and maintain the foregoing crucial nature of philosophical inquiries, whether philosophy should be “the practice of spiritual exercises aimed at the transformation of the self and the acquisition of wisdom” or in “the production of abstract rational discourse” would not be a controversial issue; for such a type of critique/justification inquiries can be present in both kinds of activities. To this extent, and in this sense, those philosophers would agree with the author to his rejection of the account that takes philosophical activity merely or exclusively “as the production of abstract rational discourse”; they would also agree with the author to his inclusion of “the practice of spiritual exercises aimed at the transformation of the self and the acquisition of wisdom”. For instance, this is true to many scholars in studies of Chinese philosophy, as classical Chinese philosophy (or philosophical “critique/justification” strands/parts of Chinese tradition of thought) is largely not the “professional” production of abstract rational discourse. However, given the foregoing prescriptive “critique/justification” character of philosophy (or if this understanding of the identity of philosophy is reasonable), for those who maintain the critique/justification nature of philosophy, what is really at issue would lie in the critique/justification character of Islamic philosophy, whether it is taken to be the activities and production of a systematic abstract rational discourse or the practice of spiritual exercises, whether one focuses on its “rational” layer or “imaginative” layer, and whether one pays more attention to its theoretical dimension or its practical dimension. Actually, both the production of the abstract rational theory account and the practice of spiritual exercises can go in distinct directions: either in the critical/justification direction or in the faith-based divinely direction. At this point, how to understand and appreciate the nature and features of the legacy of Islamic prophetology in Islamic Peripatetic tradition is one key indeed.

There is another concern about the author’s characterization of the identity of Islamic philosophy in terms of an Islamic practice of spiritual exercises aimed at the transformation of the self and the acquisition of wisdom: it seems to be both too narrow (i.e., excluding what is expected to be included) and too broad (i.e., including what is not expected to be included) [or either the former case or the latter case for the consideration to be addressed]. Given that some products of abstract rational

discourse, such as many resources in philosophy of language, philosophy of mathematics, etc., including those (if any) in Islamic Peripatetic tradition should not be excluded from the result of philosophical inquiry, they would be nevertheless excluded by the current characterization, as they were carried out without aiming at the transformation of the (moral or other dimensions of) self of their practitioners. On the other hand, many of those mental or “spiritual” exercises in other intellectual activities (such as some of those in math and science) do aim explicitly at improving or “transforming” the intellectual-capacity dimension of the self and the acquisition of human wisdom involved in those activities, given that such intellectual activities constitute one substantial dimension and layer of the human meaningful life; but they themselves are not *philosophical* inquiries due to the nature of the intellectual issues or topics under such exploration. One might object that the discourse of “the transformation of the self and the acquisition of wisdom” here is restricted to those concerning human morality; nevertheless, this would block one possible way-out modification for the former case (i.e., seeming to be too narrow).

2.

My second comment or question is related to one point of the foregoing comment: given that Islamic Peripatetic tradition includes the prophecy discourse as its crucial portion, how can one look at the due relationship between the critique/justification character of philosophical activities and the imagination power of prophecy? Should such imagination be regulated by adequate critique/justification or eventually be based on religious faith in God (in the Islamic sense of the term)? If the imagination power of prophecy is to be regulated by adequate critique/justification, then both can be compatible or even somehow mutually enhanced. If the imagination power of prophecy is supposed to be regulated *merely* or *eventually* by God or the *absolute* faith in God, one would further question the *philosophical* nature of Peripatetic tradition while acknowledging and appreciating the value of the prophecy.

It is true that, historically speaking, philosophy and religion were not separated from each other at earlier (or even recent) stages of development of various (culture/region-associated) philosophical traditions as writers (say, in ancient times) did not make the conceptual distinction between intellectual disciplines that we do; it is also true that some religion-related discourse (topics and resources) might be closely related to a philosophical movement in some traditions (for example, the current case concerning the prophecy discourse in Islamic philosophy). Nevertheless, this amounts to saying neither that there are no significant conceptual distinctions between those inquiries, nor that we cannot reflectively and effectively focus on one dimension of the whole in the subsequent reflective examination (say, its philosophical dimension) nor that we cannot creatively transform a historical religiously-oriented discourse into a philosophically-oriented discourse employing some relevant and philosophically interesting resources from the previous discourse. We *can* do that, depending on the primary purpose of a project in reflective examination. For one thing, if one’s primary purpose is to examine how an idea or

approach in one tradition could contribute to some philosophical issue together with some other approach (either from the same tradition or from another tradition) instead of just giving a historical description, then one is entitled to focus only on the philosophical dimension or even only on some aspect(s) of the philosophical dimension most relevant to the current concern. For another thing, scholars in contemporary studies of Islamic philosophy are indeed entitled to distinguish two kinds of prophecy discourse, i.e., (a) the (philosophically-oriented) prophecy discourse that is supposed to be regulated by adequate critique/justification, and (b) the (religiously-oriented) prophecy discourse that is supposed to be regulated merely or eventually by God or the absolute faith in God, even if it might be the case that the former prophecy discourse, (a), was not historically produced but is reflectively and creatively produced by contemporary scholarship in Islamic philosophy for the need of philosophical inquiry.

Applying that distinction to ancient Islamic materials reveals the similar degree of overlap and distinctiveness as it does to ancient Western materials or ancient Chinese materials, which also did not distinguish what we now call ‘philosophy’ from what is called ‘natural philosophy’ (incipient science) or what is called ‘Chinese thought’. In keeping with this consideration, we can soundly and reflectively focus on the philosophical aspects and dimensions of texts that also have historical, literary or religious value and content. So nothing in this observation about Islamic thought prevents us from reflecting on the philosophical significance of an idea or approach in the tradition where its philosophical value and inferential connection with other concerns, issues, ideas or approaches could also be given a historical, literary or religious description. When providing the philosophical dimension, we legitimately focus one type of reflective interest or agenda in trying to understand one significant aspect of Islamic culture; we can do so without denying that other kinds of understanding and elaboration are possible. We have the conceptual resources to distinguish between thinkers, themes, ideas and arguments that are more or less philosophical or religious. Given our understanding of philosophical inquiry and how its methodology differs from a religious methodology, the overlap of subject matter and the fact that the methods are mixed does not prevent our highlighting and discussing the philosophical distinctions and reflecting on how the overlap might and might not be relevant to proper understanding of both ancient Islamic philosophy and religion. Indeed, for this reason, what is under our current focus is called ‘Islamic philosophy’ and not ‘Islamic thought’ or ‘Islamic religion’, given that we do not want to conceptually conflate them and take these labels simply as each other’s nicknames or alternative titles.¹

3.

My final question about which I would like to consult Mohammad is this: If the very

¹ For my earlier (more comprehensive) discussion of some general methodological points involved here, see Mou 2009, sections 1 and 3.

conception of Islamic philosophy is not limited to that of Islamic Peripatetic tradition but broadly includes all reflective activities or strands of critique/justification in treating various fundamental concerns in human moral or other intellectual life within the Islamic tradition (whether they are presented in “the practice of spiritual exercises aimed at the transformation of the self and the acquisition of wisdom” or in “the production of abstract rational discourse”, and whether they occur in Islamic Peripatetic tradition or in some other Islamic movements of thought), what would result in from this conception of Islamic philosophy? Would this conception of Islamic philosophy result in damaging some core ideas of Islamic Peripatetic tradition or exclude some significant philosophical resources? Would this conception of Islamic philosophy be reflectively more constructive and philosophically more inclusive? [The case might be similar to that concerning the identity of Chinese philosophy in this connection: Chinese philosophy, as widely realized, intrinsically includes philosophical resources from diverse engaging movements of thoughts instead of, say, Confucian tradition only or even ancient (or classical) Chinese philosophy only, as one of the intrinsic defining features of Chinese philosophy lies in the critical engagement between its distinct parts (such as that between the Confucian and Daoist thinkers during the pre-*Han* period and that between the traditional Chinese philosophy and its contemporary critique). That is one of the sources where the critical while constructive potential of Chinese philosophy lies.]

Let me highlight the points of my foregoing comments in this way. I have no doubt about the *philosophical* nature of Mohammad’s book: indeed, it seems to me that the author’s book itself fits into the foregoing defining character of philosophy which has been characterized above. He presents a *critique* of certain understandings/interpretations of what Islamic philosophy is and makes an *argument* for a distinct account. One question is thus this: may one or should one apply these features to characterize the identity of Islamic philosophy, both at the level of the practice of spiritual exercises and at the level of the production of abstract rational discourse (whether within or beyond but still within the Islamic tradition)? In other words, can one say that reason and imagination in philosophy should be both unbound to any *ad hoc* activities/boundaries (say, “the production of abstract rational discourse”) and should be bound in the sense that philosophical inquiries are to be subjected to and regulated by adequate critique and justification (whether they are in Western philosophy, in Chinese philosophy or in Islamic philosophy)?

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CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE (2.5)

THOUGHT-SPACES, SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AND THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF *TA'WĪL*

SARAH PESSIN

In *Reason Unbound*, Mohammad Azadpur provides an engaging and thought-provoking study of medieval Islamic philosophy, finding in the pages of such thinkers as Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes grounds for dissolving a number of problematic modern philosophical dualisms between intellect and imagination, imagination and spiritual practice, intellect and spiritual practice, and philosophy and mysticism.

In reflecting on Azadpur's project, I offer three considerations:

First, I address Azadpur's opening question of Orientalism, and ask us to put that into conversation with his closing consideration of Corbin's critique of Aquinas' critique of Avicenna. In particular, I ask us to consider the possibility that there is a tacit Christian (Thomist or other) orientation to the Western Academic "thought space" that can limit the way we read texts and tell the history of philosophy within the Western academy. Thinking more broadly about the question of limiting lenses, I also question the role of Heidegger in Azadpur's project.

Next, I examine Azadpur's classification of spiritual practices throughout his project and I ask for clarification about the precise nature of and relationship between such practices in medieval Islamic philosophy.

Lastly, I address a *prima facie* difference between Azadpur and Corbin on symbolic transformation's relation to reason, highlighting what appear to be their two competing senses of *ta'wīl* (the interpretive act of "returning a text to its origin" which Azadpur addresses throughout his study).

1. FROM ORIENTALISM TO AQUINAS?: APPROACHING ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY FROM WITHIN THE WESTERN "THOUGHT SPACE"

In the opening pages to his study, Azadpur reflects with Muhsin Mahdi and Edward Said on a problematic sense of Orientalism according to which Islam "has been fundamentally misrepresented in the West" (Said 1979, 272) itself as a result of

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...Orientalist discourse [being] the systematic academic discipline of dominating, controlling, and managing the so-called Orient for the sake of the Western imperial political agenda.... (Azadpur 2011, 1)

Said goes on to describe:

...a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shared by the three great empires—British, French, and American—in whose intellectual territory [various Islamic writings] were produced. (Said 1979, 14-15)

Along these lines, Azadpur highlights Mahdi's further elaboration that

Oriental studies of Islam and Islamic civilization have been founded on a mixed bag of religious, cultural, ideological, ethnic (in some cases even racist) and scientific prejudgments and practical political interests. (Mahdi 1990, 96)

Azadpur adds Mahdi's further sense that studies of Islam have been "guided by irrational motives and political interests" (Mahdi 1990, 96).

It is partly in way of counteracting this kind of trend in the study of Islam that Azadpur puts forth his own study of medieval Islamic philosophy, in particular following through on Mahdi's own hint that a close study of "pre-modern" Islamic rationalism can lead us to a more integrated and complete sense of "reason."

At the very end of his project, Azadpur turns to Corbin's critique of Aquinas' rejection of the Islamic philosophical theory of Active Intellect. Corbin reads Aquinas' critique through a religious lens, unpacking Aquinas' dissatisfaction with Avicenna in terms of Aquinas' own tacit Christian sense that it is the church—not a cosmic separate intellect—which mediates between God and human being. Corbin in this way contrasts a personal sense of salvation at the (tacit) core of Avicenna's Islamic theory of Active Intellect with a more social sense of salvation—rooted in Catholic views on the church—at the (tacit) core of Aquinas' rejection of Avicenna's theory of Active Intellect.

While Azadpur does not overtly ask his reader to link together this closing consideration with his opening reflection on Orientalism, I wonder if there is an important link here worth considering. Leaving aside Mahdi's and Said's political approach (i.e. their sense that misreadings of Islam are rooted in political interests with political implications), here I ask us simply to consider the possibility that certain Christian conceptual schemata have (at least at times) exerted tacit influence over the way that many of us read texts within the Western academy, including the way that many of us read and interpret medieval Islamic philosophy. I have in mind a certain Thomist methodology (practiced tacitly—or overtly—by some scholars and students) according to which a text of Islamic philosophy is criticized (or, is approached in a negative critical spirit) simply because (a) it is a text that was critiqued by Aquinas, or even because (b) it is a text that is not identical to Thomas' own writings. The worry here is not that some Thomists don't like Avicenna as much

as they like Aquinas; the worry here is that sometimes these scholars wind up writing versions of the history of philosophy that are informed by such preferences (without expressly stating that they are informed by such preferences), and then the students and other scholars who read these materials wind up being tacitly disposed to approaching Avicenna with some general sense that his philosophy is wrong. In this way, a lens of failure is tacitly applied to a text of Islamic philosophy, making it impossible for neutral readings and interpretations of these texts to take place.

Prompted by Azadpur's bookending his *Reason Unbound* with critiques of Orientalism and Aquinas, we might ask: Is it possible that Islamic philosophical concepts are sometimes overlaid by Thomist intuitions? Is it possible that textual misreadings (leading to misrepresentations) can occur when scholars and students tacitly (or overtly) approach texts of Islamic metaphysics already convinced that Aquinas' metaphysics are better?

My concern about the possible interference of Western methodological lenses in the study of Islam also leads me to question Azadpur's own recourse to Heidegger in the project: While the introduction of Heidegger allows Azadpur to engage readers of medieval Islamic philosophy with questions of human authenticity, it does seem—as seen even in Azadpur's emphasis on Corbin's own surpassing of Heidegger—that Heidegger is perhaps very much a lens that Islamic philosophy can do without. To be sure, Azadpur invokes Heidegger to help us approach Islamic philosophy: Azadpur uses Heidegger to help us focus on self's authentic move away from the "them" to the space in which things reveal themselves, itself linked by Azadpur to *phronesis* in Islamic philosophy. That said, Azadpur also emphasizes that Corbin dramatically goes beyond (and in this sense, we may say, goes against) Heidegger in replacing the end term of "being towards death" with the end term of "being towards beyond death" (35-7). But after introducing Corbin's own religious modification (and in some strong sense, rejection) of key elements of Heidegger, it seems that Azadpur might not even want to invoke Heideggerian ideas as any kinds of benchmarks against which to measure Islamic philosophy; for in the context of Corbin's rejection of a key Heideggerian insight, it seems that to the extent that something is truly Heideggerian, it will be devoid of precisely the kind of religious spirit that Azadpur's study is out to capture. In that light, perhaps it would be best for Azadpur to resist the Western academic temptation to use Heidegger at all in his project. Perhaps Azadpur's picture of Islamic philosophy, as rationalism-with-spiritual-practice, is precisely a picture which does not shine brighter through Heideggerian analysis; perhaps Islamic philosophy has more to offer Heidegger than vice versa, in which case we must ask Azadpur: Why invoke Heidegger in this project at all?

2. ON THE NATURE AND KINDS OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

I turn next to Azadpur's discussion of spiritual practices. One of the key goals of the project is to show the intimate link between philosophy (as an exercise of knowledge) and spiritual transformation. Extending Hadot's reading of ancient philosophy into the Islamic philosophical realm, Azadpur argues for Islamic rationalism as more than

just narrow theory construction or dry, disembodied knowledge acquisition; rather, Azadpur shows how in the very contours of their acts of mind philosophers such as Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes are able to manifest a rich engagement with deep wisdom, and as such, deep theological devotion.

Reading *Reason Unbound*, one can find at least five different senses of ‘spiritual practice’. It is worth thinking more about how these all work together for Azadpur, as it is worth thinking more about whether one (or more) is the more primary sense of ‘spiritual practice’ that Azadpur has in mind.

1) - 2) The first two senses of ‘spiritual practice’ are related to two different ethical points of emphasis, viz. (a) the importance of ethical training as preparatory for philosophizing, and (b) the Aristotelian notion of phronesis – a particularly context-sensitive (and as such, not simply theoretical) focus on ethics. Highlighting the first ethical emphasis, Azadpur notes:

According to Avicenna, the ethical training of the philosopher provides a gateway to the intellectual fulfillment of the individual by curtailing the appetites and passions.... (59)

Highlighting the second ethical emphasis, Azadpur goes on to explain that in so curtailing the appetites and passions, ethical training allows the soul

to achieve practical wisdom (i.e., to recognize the objective good and act for the sake of it). The practically wise soul perceives the relevant moral intentions enmattered in a situation and engages in action for their sake, rather than for the sake of values imposed on one’s actions external to that situation. Therefore, practical wisdom results in actions that have as their ends the unconditional good perceived in that situation of action.... (59; see too 76)

While Azadpur is clear on how the ethical training leads to the phronesis, I would ask him to clarify whether the initial training or the resulting phronesis is more properly illustrative of the spiritual practice that he has in mind when he emphasizes that Islamic rationalism is itself deeply tied up with spiritual practice.

I would also ask Azadpur to clarify how the ethical training and phronesis connect up with Islamic Law. To the extent that this ethical training is linked to the guidelines for living prescribed by Islamic Law (as emphasized, for example, in his analysis of Averroes at page 92), does this not in some sense trump the Aristotelian emphasis on phronesis? In other words, if the source of the ethical training is itself a divinely revealed Islamic Law, does that not put a kind of Divine Command Theory at the foundation, and does such a foundation not risk overshadowing the fluidity of Aristotelian phronesis with a more rigid mode of “following God’s law”? How would Azadpur advise us to think of revealed Islamic Law in a way that avoids having it (a) overshadow the fluid sense of an “ethical spiritual practice” with a system of rule-following, and (b) overshadow the very notion of rationalism with faithful devotion to a set of revealed guidelines?

3) A third sense of ‘spiritual practice’ seems to emerge from the integration of imaginative and intellectual endeavors, a point highlighted throughout the project but

seen succinctly in Azadpur's pointing to Mahdi's identification of the "harmony of the rational and imaginative aspects of the human life" as having "spiritual dimensions" (4). If we focus on the integration of imaginative and intellectual endeavors (as Azadpur shows is the spirit of a range of Islamic rationalists), do we have the core of the spiritual exercise, or just a spiritual byproduct of the above ethical preparations and / or outcomes? In other words: Does Azadpur see the integration of imagination and intellect as the core of the spiritual practice in Islamic rationalism, or are one or more of the above ethical points of emphasis the crux of what makes an Islamic rationalist's rationalism a spiritual practice (with the integration of imagination and intellect either as preparatory for one or more of the above ethical-as-spiritual modes of being, or perhaps as just an outcome of one or more of the above ethical-as-spiritual modes of being)?

4) A fourth sense of 'spiritual practice' seems linked to the philosopher's (or prophet's) ability to come closer to God's own reality through various activities of intellect and imagination. Is the capacity to draw nearer to God (or perhaps to God's truth) the core of what, for Azadpur, makes the Islamic rationalist's rationalism a spiritual practice, or is ethics (in one or both of the above mentioned senses) more primarily the marker of the spiritual practice? In other words, which is more foundationally a case in point of the kind of spiritual exercise that Azadpur has in mind: the phenomenology of experiencing God's reality or the reality of being ethically engaged in the marketplace with other people?

5) Lastly, a fifth sense of 'spiritual practice' seems linked to the exegetical activity of *ta'wīl*. I end with some further questions about *ta'wīl* below, but for here, I would ask how this exegetical activity fits in with the other elements already mentioned in connection with rationalism as spiritual practice: Is *ta'wīl* preparatory for and / or an end-product of one or more of the above spiritual practices?

3. SYMBOLIC SPACES OF THE *TA'WĪL*: AZADPUR AND CORBIN ON TRANSFORMATION AND REASON

Closing our reflections on Azadpur's study, we turn to the *ta'wīl*, and in particular, to Corbin's sense of that activity as a transformative opening to a renewed self. As Azadpur shows in his study, Corbin has a unique phenomenological and hermeneutical approach to human subjectivity. Along these very lines, Corbin (in his study of what he calls Avicenna's "visionary recitals") describes the hermeneutical possibilities in the very act of textual exegesis in terms of a reader being transformed through an encounter with the symbolic, mythic, imaginative space of a text (Corbin 1960). Upholding this kind of "symbolic" (as opposed to allegorical) approach to Avicenna's "recitals," Corbin seems precisely to see Avicenna as moving *beyond* philosophical engagement to a spiritual self-awakening beyond intellect. In this spirit, Corbin classifies these works as Avicenna's transformational-spiritual writings, and he explains how such writings employ image, imagination and symbol to open onto an experiential reorientation that goes beyond the confines of reason. Since, for Corbin, this transformation is precisely *not* a function of intellectually moving from

symbol to idea, and since, as such, for Corbin the ultimate spiritual transformation seems linked to a state of being beyond reason, I wonder if Azadpur's own sense of Islamic-rationalism-as-spiritual-practice might have a more robust sense of intellect's role (in harmony with imagination) than can be found in Corbin's own analysis.

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CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE (2.6)

REPLIES TO CORY, EL-BIZRI, MOU AND PESSIN

MOHAMMAD AZADPUR

It is a great pleasure to reply to the insightful remarks of my colleagues, who raise a number of very important and challenging issues, and I hope I can do justice to them and at the same time clarify some of the controversial aspects of my book. As some of the remarks are shared, I have taken the liberty of addressing them where I see fit and avoided a repetition of the replies.

1. THERESE SCARPELLI CORY

Through the intervention of Cory's comments, I hope to distance myself from some of the unsavory implications of my position. After all, I have nothing against the *vetula* in her quest to become *deiform* and achieve perfect union with God.

I should then begin with the *appearance* of elitism in my rendition Islamic Peripateticism. Cory writes:

Certainly the philosopher works hard to cultivate virtue, since that is the only way to gain the immortal "acquired intellect." But what about the little old lady who is equally assiduous in cultivating virtue? Through no fault of her own, according to the Islamic Peripatetic model, she is denied perfect union with God in this life, and loses the opportunity for immortality. [See 26-27 of the current issue.]¹

There is elitism, if the philosopher is committed to the view that people are, for the most part, essentially deprived of the capacity for salvation, and that salvation is dependent on this distinction in the essence of human beings. Now it may be that due to the difficulty in the process of attaining philosophical excellence, few people do actually attain it; but that to me is not elitism *per se*. There is a further issue, which is also pointed out by Cory, that philosophical cultivation presupposes a certain amount of leisure and education, which may not be available to everyone. In other words, are

¹ The page numbers of the critics' citation references in the current issue are given in bracket parentheses.

philosophy and religion two different projects that channel salvation for two contingently different kinds of people, the elite and the commoner, respectively? Is that not a milder but no less problematic form of elitism?

Let me begin by saying that Islamic Peripatetics, as I understand them, by virtue of subscribing to the idea of religion as revealed to the philosopher-prophet-king, are not committed to a separation between religion and philosophy, in that way. The religious law and practices provide the starting point of a training that culminates in the perfection of the intellect, which is itself a spiritual faculty and of central importance for revealed religions. Without the preparation provided by the law and practices prescribed by religion, philosophical training proper cannot begin. Now in the Avicennan version of this view of religion, I maintain, the cultivation of imagination can itself culminate in a conjunction with the Active Intellect. This is possible, as I explain in more detail in my reply to Pessin, in virtue of the training of our feelings of pleasure and astonishment through the experience of the great work of art.

So the *vetula*, in this alternative view, will have to begin with submission to law and commitment to the practices prescribed by the revealed religion. Then she can engage in either the aesthetic training provided by the scriptural art *or* proceed with philosophical training. Either way, she has to dedicate herself to the project of self-transformation, and her success is the measure of her commitment to that process. I should also add that the philosophers and the poets-in-training are restless souls vying for the intensification of the intimacy that is available in varying degrees to the "faithful" in the various stages of initiation.

Cory also takes issue with my claim that Thomas Aquinas' interiorization of the Active Intellect is a source of the divide between religion and philosophy or faith and reason, a separation that characterizes much of subsequent philosophy. She asks: "I wonder, then, if Azadpur's objection is really directed, not at immanentized psychologies, but at *abstractionist* theories of cognition. In other words, perhaps the objection ought to run something like this: If intelligibles are cognized only by abstracting them from extramental sensible objects (rather than by receiving them directly from a separate Agent Intellect), then the human intellect seems to be restricted to this-worldly, empirical objects." [24] I am not sure that the abstractionist view can be problematized in this way, and Cory herself offers attractive responses to such a critique of abstractionism any way. In my view, the problem stems from the characterization of the spiritual as extra-intellectual and once you combine that with abstractionism, then all intelligibles are restricted to the material world and cognitive access to the spiritual realm is ruled out. I would add that this is probably not a charitable construal of Thomas's view, but one could probably find versions of it in the work later (especially modern) philosophers who appropriate the faith and reason divide to which Thomas did contribute. Finally, the internalization of the Active Intellect obscures the incentive for moral and epistemic progress that I discuss in my reply to El-Bizri's critique of the Peripatetic notion of the Active Intellect.

2. NADER EL-BIZRI

I remember reading El-Bizri's book, *The Phenomenological Quest: Between Avicenna and Heidegger*, with fondness as I was putting the final touches on my book. It certainly illuminated aspects of my project, but it was too late for me to respond to it in a very substantial way. So I was looking forward to El-Bizri's comments so as to discuss more extensively some of the issues regarding our engagements of similar figures and topics.

I believe that El-Bizri's critical remarks can be summed up by saying that I did not quite succeed in showing the modern relevance of Islamic Peripateticism. He says:

Having said that, one ought to indeed reflect on the phenomenon of the spiritual incapacitation of philosophy (108); albeit, this can be done by accentuating the primacy of ethics over ontology, over cosmology and epistemology, without retaining nostalgic poetizing imagery or reactionary relativistic commitments to Peripatetic or Neo-Platonist pictures that are no longer sustainable in our epoch. [33]

El-Bizri's lingering doubts about the relevance of the Peripatetic moves for modern thought are especially poignant as I repeatedly claim and argue that such moves are indeed relevant, if not necessary (in a prescriptive sense). So, perhaps I need to say some more about this.

El-Bizri finds something unique and positive in the way modernity is as an epoch and the vantage point shared by modern philosophers. For him, there is something at work in modernity (what El-Bizri calls "the age of modern techno-science," [29, 33, 34]) perhaps in the advances that science has made and technology has appropriated, that is fresh, novel, and revelatory. And the profound thinkers of the modern epoch, and surely Heidegger is among them, have done much to curtail pre-modernity's metaphysical (and poetic) excesses and have gone a long way toward establishing a demystified view of human beings and their world (while maintaining as much of the earlier tradition's relevant insights). For El-Bizri, the claim that ethics is "a prolegomenon to philosophical thinking" [31] is the only valuable contribution of my work to the study of Islamic Peripateticism.

A main task of *Reason Unbound* has been to offer a more general (than a mere ethical) anti-dote to modernism – the thesis that modernity involves a radical (and progressive) departure from the past and requires a new philosophy. Now short of reciting the arguments of the book all over again, I say that my dismantling of modernism begins with a serious consideration of the primacy of ethics. Such a starting point goes a long way in taking down a fundamental dualism definitive of modernism: the divide between mind and world. Ethical training involves the cultivation of a kind of sensitivity to the moral requirements embodied in particular circumstances, and once we are able to follow through this starting point, the notion of a purely causal world that is denuded of values and concepts begins to lose its grip

on us. The purely causal world is the modernist's demystified world and its vanishing grip is a main outcome of the ethical preparation. There are at least two further related points that I make in my book: 1) The ethically initiated erosion of the mind-world dualism entails that the mind reaches all the way down, but not at the expense of exposing us to a supernatural Platonism² or a mere "congruence of subjectivities."³ Instead, the concepts, that is, the abilities to cognize intelligibles, are drawn in passively in our experience of the world and actively in our judgments about it. Knowledge, that is, our judgments getting things right, is preserved, while affirming our involvement in making "things" show themselves. 2) Freedom from the grip of problematic theses that preserve the mind-world dualism is not a merely intellectual matter. I believe this is a point that chafes El-Bizri's modernist sensibility and compels him to call my work preparatory. [35] Of course, one is not going to whisk oneself away from the bewildering web of reflective and pre-reflective perplexities (including modernism) by simply reading a book; that is not how philosophy as a way of life works. My book, as an instrument in the repertoire of the transformative approach to philosophy, is designed to effect a disturbance (especially in one who is in the grip of the modernist sensibility); as such, *Reason Unbound* is indeed preparatory and may result in the *practice* of the philosophical cultivation necessary for genuine liberation and authenticity.

In the end, I would like to address El-Bizri's critique of the relevance of the Islamic Peripatetic notion of a separate Active Intelligence. He finds it a mythical remnant of a bygone age:

One can still evoke the significance of virtue-ethics and stress its primacy in preceding intellectual inquiry (104) or scientific research. This aim does not anymore require the continuation hitherto of conversations about an Active Intellect within our contemporary intellectual settings. It is not also a well-founded critique to level against Heidegger that he was reductive in his approach by doing away with the notion of a separate intelligence, and by following the footsteps of his predecessors that went down the route of Thomism (pp. 105-107). Heidegger's thought unfurled against the background of his preoccupation with the question of the meaning, truth, and place of being in a scientific age that is marked by the unfolding of the essence of modern technology. [33]

In my book, I devote a considerable effort to discussing the Peripatetic notion of a transcendent Active Intellect. The Active Intellect is the actualized intellect, that is, the intellect that has become all things and has the intelligibles within. The Peripatetic opponents of a transcendent Active Intellect assign its function to the human intellect.

² In *Mind and World*, John McDowell refers to this position as "rampant Platonism" as the view that the mind apprehends a super-human meaning (1994, 77). This is the more general account of the same Platonism that he criticizes earlier (in the context of a metaethical discussion) as the consoling myth of rules as rails (1981, 149). This is not an outright rejection of Platonism, as McDowell also labels his own position as a kind of Platonism (1981, 156. See also 1994, 92).

³ This is Stanley Cavell's phrase as quoted by McDowell (1981, 149). I mean to emphasize the criticism offered by McDowell of Cavell's view as still in the grip of the mind-world dualism.

But then it is difficult to explain how the same intellect can be actual and potential simultaneously. I recognize that the dispute about the transcendence of the Active Intellect is almost as old as Aristotelianism itself, and my aim is not to get bogged down in the dialectical exchanges between the proponents and the opponents of this notion. Instead, I argue that the proponents of a transcendent Active Intellect succeed better in reconciling faith and reason, philosophy and revealed religion. And of course, one problematic feature of modernism is its feebleness in negotiating a satisfactory resolution of these dualisms, and one of the factors contributing to this infirmity is the apparent unpalatability of a transcendent Active Intellect. For my Peripatetics, religious expressions are symbolic manifestations of what philosophical thought aims to uncover intellectually, and a transcendent Active Intellect, for these philosophers, is not a consolation from getting things right. It brings to view the *difficulty* of a transparent awareness, which is the elusive reward (*vis-à-vis* a conjunction with the Active Intellect) of the humble and virtuous knowledge seekers. Moreover, the invocation of the transcendent Active Intellect and the aspiration to conjoin with it are incentives for further ethical and epistemic progress. Latin anti-Averroists found in this view a challenge to the authority of the church and sought to discredit it. Subsequently, even when the church's condemnation lost its grip on educational institutions, mainstream philosophy was not able to shake off the spiritually inert role assigned to it in medieval universities.

3. BO MOU

Mou gets to the point right away by putting forth a familiar account of philosophical inquiry and contends that it is more general than the ones I put forth in my book. He has in mind my appropriation of the competing views of the philosophical inquiry that Pierre Hadot, in his now famous *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pits against one another. For Hadot, mainstream historians of philosophy, when they come to ancient philosophy, take it to be in the business of producing philosophical discourse. This he takes to be at odds with the project that the ancients themselves undertook and called philosophy. For them philosophy was primarily the practice of spiritual exercises aimed at the transformation of the self and the acquisition of wisdom.⁴ Now a central claim made in my book is that Hadot's reading of ancient philosophy is the conception of philosophy Muslims inherit from the Greeks. Mou, however, maintains that "[m]any think that the critique (taking nothing absolutely immune from criticism and without blindly claiming anything) and justification (understood in a broad way) constitute two closely-related (prescriptive) defining features of philosophical inquiries". [37] Given this broader conception of philosophical inquiry, Mou comments that "[a]ctually, both the production of the abstract rational theory account and the practice of spiritual exercises can go in distinct directions: either in the critical/justification direction or in the faith-based divinely direction." [37]

⁴ Hadot 1995, 269.

This is an interesting distinction, but I would like to suggest that it is itself an item in the modernist's repertoire. To be more precise, this distinction can be seen as a reformulation of the modernist contrast between faith and reason or religion and philosophy. In this light, I do have something to say about that account. Islamic Peripatetics did not see a fundamental difference between the purpose of religious practice and that of philosophy. For them, both aimed at the attainment of truth (*ḥaqīqa*). In fact, they maintained that philosophy itself ought to belong to the core of religion's transformative technologies, and religious symbolism and practices ought to contribute to the initiation of the person into the philosophical way of life. Indeed, in this picture, religion is not in the business of articulating systems of dogma, which one believes blindly (has faith in). Rather, "faith," as Karen Armstrong has pointed out, is rather to "give yourself" or "commit yourself" to (or "engage") the way of life symbolized by the belief. In her essay, "Faith and Modernity," she writes that "the Latin word *credo* (translated now as "I believe") seems to have derived from the phrase *cor dare*: to give one's heart. The Middle English word *beleven* meant to love. When Christians proclaimed: *credo in unum Deum*, they were not so much affirming their belief in the existence of a single deity as committing their lives to God."⁵ I would add that in this approach, God is the real as such, and a commitment to God means the embracing of the way of truth, i.e., the practice of getting reality right. It is by the engagement in the purifying spiritual practices that we become like that which we seek to know, and it is only thus that we can know it. The dogmatic approach to faith, on the other hand, is on par with the approach to philosophy that aims at the mere production of rational discourse, they both miss the alchemical dimension of philosophy and religion, that is, the transformation of the self to the point of achieving intimacy with the divine.

Having said this, I would like to respond to another of Mou's questions. He asks, "given that Islamic Peripatetic tradition includes the prophecy discourse as its crucial portion, how can one look at the due relationship between the critique/justification character of philosophical activities and the imagination power of prophecy? Should such imagination be regulated by adequate critique/justification or eventually be based on religious faith in God (in the Islamic sense of the term)?" [38] Yes, prophecy and philosophy are different sides of the same coin, and the test of prophecy is in its philosophical coherence. Of course, we should understand by "philosophy" the practices of self-transformation for the sake of wisdom and by "prophecy" more than the foreshadowing of future events. In my book, I spend a lot of time working out the notion of prophecy as developed by Islamic Peripatetics. The lowest form of prophecy is the anticipation of future events, and at its apex, it is the direct grasp of the intelligibles. I should add that in the Peripatetic prophetic philosophy, the venues of divine mercy are not limited and wisdom and its relevant practices are available throughout history and across geographical boundaries.⁶ There are some Islamic traditions that claim a more direct path, but the Peripatetic paths to truth are as

⁵ Armstrong 2004, 73.

⁶ See my brief treatment of Hegel's philosophical chauvinism in Azadpur 2011, 73-4.

multifarious as that allowed by the limits of human ingenuity and inspiration in the quest for the Good.

A third point raised by Mou concerns the non-Peripatetic forms of Islamic philosophy. He asks whether they all forms of Islamic philosophy by the conception of philosophy as a way of life. [39-40] I answer in the affirmative. Alternative forms of Islamic philosophy, like those more heavily Platonist, Plotinian, skeptical, etc., also operate within the framework of philosophy as a practice of spiritual exercises for the sake of virtue and wisdom. This is in agreement with what Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes, rather eloquently and concisely, as a way of characterizing all species of Islamic philosophy: “This conception of philosophy as dealing with the discovering of the truth concerning the nature of things and combining mental knowledge with the purification and perfection of one's being has lasted to this day wherever the tradition of Islamic philosophy has continued and is in fact embodied in the very being of the most eminent representatives of the Islamic philosophical tradition.”⁷ Different schools of philosophy in the Islamic tradition realize this conception differently. In my book, for instance, I draw upon Abū Hāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī's position to highlight a form of “Islamic philosophy” that stems from ancient skepticism and is critical of the Peripatetic approach.

4. SARAH PESSIN

I sympathize with Pessin's anxieties in trying to represent a philosophical tradition that is relegated to the margins of mainstream philosophy and holds a key to dissolving some of its most perplexing problems. My sympathy is multiplied by the historical connections and shared commitments of Medieval Islamic and Jewish thinkers. My excursion into Thomas' explicit disavowals of the views of Islamic thinkers stems from my attempt to diagnose *a source* of the misreadings that affects not only the Western reception of Islamic philosophy (and medieval Jewish philosophy, for that matter) but also the contours of the ensuing philosophical enterprise. I do not want to put the entire weight of such misreadings on Thomas; his critique of Avicenna's theory of the Active Intellect is not the only source; another salient wellspring of the aberrations in the subsequent tradition of Western philosophy is the rise of ethical voluntarism in late thirteenth century, and here Thomas' own views are themselves challenged and marginalized.⁸ These are just two of the more explicit sources of opposition to the tradition of Islamic Peripateticism. I do not deny that there are other more subtle (and perhaps more pernicious) ones, and I'd be happy to learn more from Pessin.

Pessin asks “why invoke Heidegger in this project at all?” [43] I understand her concerns about Heidegger. In a context, where “introducing” the Islamic Peripatetics is the order of the day, why should they be related to a philosopher whose atrocious conduct is well-documented and nothing short of appalling? Having said that, I

⁷ Nasr 1996, 24–25.

⁸ See Kent 1995, especially 40-6.

should now emphasize that I engage Heidegger for three main reasons. First, I draw extensively on Henry Corbin's reading of Islamic Peripatetics, and Corbin's position is rooted in early Heidegger. Second, Early Heidegger is immersed in scholastic Aristotelianism and draws heavily from it in his phenomenology. His aim is to avoid the institutionalization of Aristotle-interpretation, and that comes at the cost of obscuring the Aristotelian origins of his view. Thirdly, Heidegger-interpretation is the site of a fascinating exchange between John McDowell and Hubert Dreyfus, where McDowell brings to light Dreyfus' commitment to a problematic view of the relation between mind and world. I especially wanted to seize that opportunity to point to some of the problematic aspects of the contemporary theories of mind, especially since I found those aspects insidiously at work in missing the point of the approach to philosophy as a practice of spiritual exercises. Having said that, I took every opportunity to point out the unsavory figure of Heidegger and the relation of his philosophy to his appalling choices.

Having responded to Pessin's initial worry, I want to turn to the core of her concerns about the various senses of "spiritual practice" in my work. She asks first "whether the initial training or the resulting *phronesis* is more properly illustrative of the 'spiritual practice' that he has in mind when he emphasizes that Islamic rationalism is itself deeply tied up with spiritual practice." [44] For me, spiritual practices are only instrumental. So the initial ethical training is obviously "spiritual practice" in the sense that I mean it. It aims at *phronesis* or practical wisdom. Now, *phronesis*, to put it in a nutshell, is the ability to recognize the good in a particular situation and to be able to respond to its requirements swiftly. As such, it is itself the beginning of the process that culminates in the acquired intellect, i.e., the intellect which grasps the secondary intelligibles (including but clearly going beyond the moral intelligibles – e.g., the good) immediately. So the practice of *phronesis* is at the service of a higher good, and a spiritual practice.

Pessin, then, wonders that if "the source of the ethical training is itself a divinely revealed Islamic Law, does that not put a kind of Divine Command Theory at the foundation – and does such a foundation not risk overshadowing the fluidity of Aristotelian *phronesis* with a more rigid mode of 'following God's law'?" [44] This is also a very important question. Islamic Peripatetics attribute the legislative act of the prophet-philosopher to his perfected imagination, and such an imagination enables him to provide a set of laws that are easy to understand and persuasive so that the initiate can begin the process of self-overcoming. The practices get intensified at the level of supererogatory ascetic exercises and result in the transparent awareness of the good that marks the stage of *phronesis*. The process goes even further as the theoretical intellect is cultivated. Therefore, the Divine Law, for the Islamic Peripatetics, is only the lowest rung of the practices that culminate in wisdom. Nevertheless, it is an essential part of the process of sapiential development.

In response to Pessin's questions about my contributions to the understanding of poetic interpretation (*ta'wīl*), [45-6] I should begin by emphasizing that, with Avicenna, Islamic Peripateticism comes to acquire a further engagement of the faculty of imagination in the advanced stages of the philosophical development, i.e.,

beyond practical wisdom. The earlier engagement concerns the divine law. In the later forms of this engagement, the person may take on the symbolic aspect of sacred text and cultivate his feelings of pleasure and awe by interpreting (*ta'wīl*) the relevant presentations of the Good in the text (work of art). As I argue in my book, in his *Poetics*, Avicenna contrasts this aesthetic refinement with the refinement of the theoretical intellect by the philosopher, and maintains that the former can also bring the person to the brinks of divine inspiration.⁹ This is the start of the obsession with the imaginal in the subsequent Islamic philosophers. Also this is where I place Corbin's concern with the symbolic rather than the allegorical approach to Avicenna's own efforts at poetic production. As Corbin rightly points out, drawing on a distinction indigenous to Romantic poetics, Avicenna's poetic treatises are not allegories, that is they are not publicly available representations of a point that is otherwise accessible more precisely and directly to the elite philosopher in his intellectual quest. Rather, the symbols are hierophanies, and their exegesis (*ta'wīl*) refines his inner life and enables him to become *deiform* (i.e., attain *theosis* or *ta'alluh*).¹⁰

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⁹ Azadpur 2011, 75-9.

¹⁰ Corbin 1960, 28-34.