

Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy (Suny Series in Islam)



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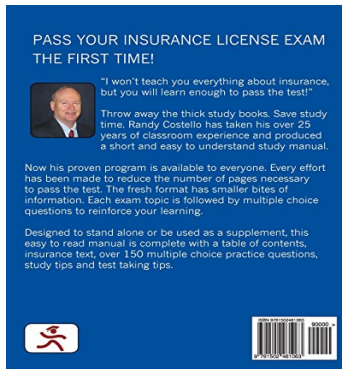
Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy (Suny Series in Islam)

Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present offers a comprehensive overview of Islamic philosophy from the ninth century to the present day. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr attests, within this tradition, philosophizing is done in a world in which prophecy is the central reality of life a reality related not only to the realms of action and ethics but also to the realm of knowledge. Comparisons with Jewish and Christian philosophies highlight the relation between reason and revelation, that is, philosophy and religion. Nasr presents Islamic philosophy in relation to the Islamic tradition as a whole, but always treats this philosophy as philosophy, not simply as intellectual history. I



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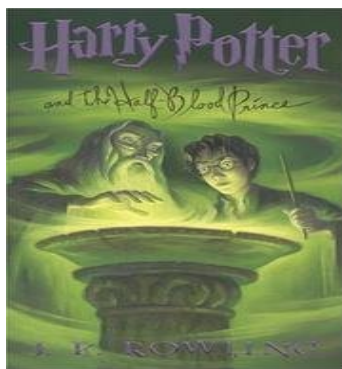
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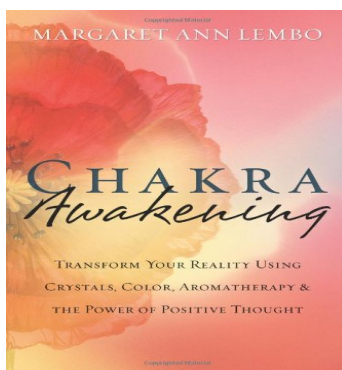
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Review 1:

The book is very well written in a literary sense, but the author over uses technical terms. The book lacking a glossary does not help either. There are several things missing as well. Things the author overlooked or forgot to discuss eg. Atomism, Islamic golden age, etc.

Review 2:

Nasr is a prolific author and prestigious witness to the contemporary relevance of Islamic philosophy in its traditional form, especially as fashioned within the Shia tradition. Nasr is also a masterful propagandist, attempting to reinvigorate the traditional point of view, not only in Islamic studies, but also in religious studies generally. This volume pays tribute to the change in religious studies orientation over the last 20 years, showing how into Islamic studies, the traditional point of view, which was definitely marginal and suspect 30 years ago, has now moved more towards the center of normative religious studies. In many ways Nasr and his colleagues have been the patient architects of this movement.

Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present attempts to open up what the West considers Islamic philosophy. It moves beyond the usual capstone of Islamic influence on the west being the Averroes' Aristotelian translations which made their way into Latin through Spain and set the theological stage for the High Middle Ages and the Summa of Thomas Aquinas. As Nasr well demonstrates Averroes' rationalism was not the end of Islamic philosophy but actually a sidestream that did not centrally impact the consideration of Kalam, nor the spread and elaboration of Ibn Sina's epistemology as it impacted the central motive of Islamic thought which is to elaborate the presence of revelation and prophecy through the Qu'ran and the community of prayer. Nasr manages a good survey of the scope of Islamic philosophy available in English translation today, and he presents a rationale for his continued encouragement of the traditional viewpoint as valid today as ever.

Review 3:

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a reviver of the Islamic intellectual tradition and expositor of those traditional doctrines associated with the Sophia Perennis, or al-Hikmah al-Khalidah as it is known in Islamic intellectual discourse, has provided for those pursuing the illumination of the Spirit through the way of the Intellect with a seemingly constant flow of treatises touching on nearly every aspect of what is known as the Din al-Islam. This particular work seems to be Nasr's final word on the subject of Islamic philosophy; conclusions arrived at after many decades of study, teaching and contemplation. The chief aim of the work can be seen in the following quote from the second chapter:

"This philosophy [Islamic philosophy] remains of the greatest pertinence to the contemporary world because of the harmony it has achieved between logic and spiritual vision and also because of the profound metaphysical and cosmological doctrines it contains within the pages of its long and extended historical unfolding. Furthermore, because of the present encounter of Islam with an alien philosophy and science--this time from the West--Islamic philosophy must be called upon once again to play the role it fulfilled in early Islamic history, namely, to provide the necessary intellectual instruments and the requisite intellectual background with the aid of which Muslims can face alien philosophies and sciences from a position of discernment and intellectual rigor. Otherwise the encounter with the West can only result in calamity for the future of Islamic intellectual life and threaten even more than what happened in the colonial period the continuation of the life of falsafah itself. Only in remaining true to its own genius, to its own

roots, and to the role it has always played in Islamic history in a land dominated by the reality of prophecy can falsafah (and hikmah) fulfill its vital function of providing the Muslims themselves with the necessary intellectual background to confront the modern and now postmodern West and to remind the world at large about the long-forgotten but urgently needed truths that Islamic philosophy has been able to preserve within its treasury over the centuries and that it is able to present in a contemporary language to the world today." (pg. 47)

Nasr's genius lies in his birds-eye perspective and his illuminating commentary on the history, development and spiritual underpinnings of Islamic philosophy. Unlike modern scholars and historians of Islamic philosophy, and their Muslim imitators, or Muslim scholars who wish to compare this or that Islamic philosopher with some modern philosopher or another--a boring preoccupation on the part of certain Muslims educated in Islamic philosophy who seek approval from the dominant philosophical currents of Western modernity--Nasr constantly reminds us that philosophy, when pursued within the framework of the Islamic tradition, or within the "land of prophecy", is not an inquiry into the phenomenal world with phenomenal ends in view, nor the endless, labyrinthine analysis of those possessed with an obsessive mental passion, but an inquiry into the very nature of things in view of reinstating the intelligence back to its original sanctity.

When Nasr maintains that Islamic philosophy "remains of the greatest pertinence to the contemporary world because of the harmony it has achieved between logic and spiritual vision", he is referring, in my mind, to the culmination of the Islamic philosophical project in the grand synthesis found in the Eastern lands of Islam. While there exist several "schools" which deal superbly with systematic metaphysics and the sciences of realizing the end--one of the most popular and direct being Advaita Vedanta--they don't enter too deeply into the domain of discursive philosophy and natural science. In the West--which serves as the model for the rest of the world now--these two traditions of inquiry became more and more separated from each other until discursive philosophy eclipsed metaphysics altogether; sending the West into its current spiritual, philosophical and civilizational bankruptcy. However, the synthesis established by later Islamic philosophy between peripatetic (mashsha'i) philosophy and the metaphysical/theosophical (al-hikmah al-ilahiyyah) discourse of the Sufi sages harmonized discursive philosophy with what Suhrawardi called "Divine Philosophy". Islamic philosophy, if properly taken account of, offers the West many important insights which, if considered seriously, could help in placing a derailed Western philosophical tradition back on its tracks.

Nasr's outline of the history and influences which flavored different schools of Islamic philosophy is very intriguing, such as the Hermetico-Pythagorean influences which came in through Isma'ili philosophy. Nasr also gives ample room to a Nasir al-Din Tusi, Hamid al-Din Kirmani and Nasir-i Khusraw, enormous philosophers almost totally neglected by Western studies of Islamic philosophy, as well as reclaiming 'Umar Khayyūm from the imagination of the Orientalist. The great merit of this work is the introduction of many Muslim philosophers who never make it into those histories of Islamic philosophy (sometimes clumsily referred to as Arab philosophy) written by Western scholars, who believe that "Arab" philosophy died after the death of Ibn Rushd. Some of these later Muslim philosophers, like Fath Allah Shirazi, Shams al-Din Kafri, Ghiyath al-Din Mansur Dashtaki, and Jalal al-Din Dawani are introduced with the hope that scholars in the West will turn away from the endless analysis of Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd and begin to study their works as well; especially since in many cases they offer a greater balance between philosophy, that is, man seeking to know the Real, and the call of Revelation - the Real disclosing Itself to man.

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