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An Insight to Islamic Philosophy and the Islamisation of Philosophy

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Philosophy in the Islamic intellectual tradition is referred to both as *falsafah* and *ḥikmah*. The former term is the Arabisation of the Greek term *philosophia* meaning “love of wisdom” and the latter is the term taken from the Qur’ān to signify a Divine gift of

abundant good, and wisdom derived from *al-kitāb* (the Book) and the prophets. Yet Muslims treat philosophy with suspicion and caution even when the Qur'ānic term *hikmah* (wisdom) refers to it.

What are the reasons for this fear of a science ('ilm) or discipline which exalts the use of the intellect (*al-'aql*) or intelligence as exhorted in the Qur'ān? The primary reason put forward for this phenomenon is that Greek philosophy had influenced Islamic philosophy and that there were Greek ideas and teachings which Muslim philosophers injected into their own thoughts while still maintaining their Islamic perspective. The past Muslim scholars both from the disciplines of *kalam* and *tasawwuf* appreciated and accommodated – in varying degrees – the philosophical thoughts of their Greek predecessors such as Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle into their own works.

These Greek philosophers were the early rationalists and empiricists who thought deeply and observed nature closely to seek answers for the fundamental questions which relate to the nature of reality, such questions on human nature and the underlying reality of the universe.

The Islamic philosophers applied these universal questions to their own worldview as Muslims, inspired by what the Qur'ān revealed to them. If the Greek philosophers discovered their answers from the intellect (Greek: *nous*) and nature (Greek: *physis*). The Muslim philosophers contemplated using the '*aql* and the Qur'ān (*wahy*).

In Islam, the two books of revelation are the cosmos and the Qur'ān namely, the creational Qur'ān (*al-Qur'ān al-takwīnī*) and the written Qur'ān (*al-Qur'ān al-tadwīnī*) or more commonly referred to as *āyāt Allāh* (signs of God).

In both cases, from the Islamic perspective, it is the '*aql* (faculty of knowing) that contemplates on both books of revelation which are sources of knowledge ('ilm) and wisdom made available to human beings by the Supreme Being or the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

Within the framework of *tawhīd*, the central doctrine of Islam, the subject, who is the human self is to discover or find (*wajada*) the object, God, or Absolute Reality (*al-Haqq*), which leads to unified knowledge or wisdom. This is the main preoccupation of philosophy which is being or existence (*wujūd*) and at the same time consciousness or awareness (*wajd*).

Hence, when the question was posed what the project of Islamisation of philosophy entails, my response was that although philosophy and particularly Greek philosophy is a universal intellectual endeavour and hence ought to be applicable to all of humankind certain of its views and theories need to be particularized within the new framework that was revealed by the Qur'ān not known to the Greeks before.

Islamic philosophy is Islamic in essence since it is rooted in the two main sources of Islam, the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. However, as explained earlier, there were doctrines which originated from Greek philosophy, and they became part of the Islamic philosophical system in areas including metaphysics, ethics, and politics.

What then is Islamisation of Greek philosophy in relation to Islamic philosophy, and what is its essential task? Its essential task, I posit, is to identify, analyse, evaluate, and explicate the concepts and terms which originated from Greek philosophy as applied and adapted to the doctrines and formulated by the Islamic philosophers into their own philosophical system.

A good example to illustrate in metaphysics is Aristotle's concept of existence and the distinction between essence (*māhiyyah*) and existence (*wujūd*) as expounded by Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sina to establish his own doctrines but placing them within an Islamic theological worldview.

In this process, the concepts and terms used in Islamic philosophy would become clearer since they have been defined and contextualised into the new worldview from which they were taken.

With the accomplishment of this Islamisation task, I believe the benefits would be manifold and significant. They are: One, students of Islamic revealed knowledge particularly, philosophy would be familiar with both philosophical traditions and their knowledge of philosophy enriched. Two, with clarity and understanding they would be more receptive to the discipline of Islamic philosophy since they would no longer consider doctrines which have Greek influences to be heresy (*kufr*) or innovation (*bid'ah*). Three, this teaching methodology would produce students with critical thinking skills and inculcate qualities of trust and compassion in them. Four, this academic exercise will contribute to the promotion of intellectual and philosophical discourse which would bridge the Western and Islamic intellectual traditions. Five, examining the two different philosophical traditions prevent misunderstanding and misinterpreting. Six, it fosters mutual understanding and contribute to the promotion of peaceful coexistence in society and across civilisations.

These goals certainly reflect the IIUM Philosophy of Knowledge and are in line with its mission and vision.***

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