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VII

RICHARD WALZER

Platonism in Islamic Philosophy

PLATONISM IN ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

It is not customary to talk about Islamic philosophy when scholars meet to discuss questions of classical scholarship. It is not generally realised how closely Islamic philosophy is linked up with Greek thought, and hence we are inclined to underrate its importance for people concerned with the continuity of the ancient legacy in different civilisations and with its adaptation to new circumstances and basically different ways of life. We have become increasingly aware how the legacy of paganism and the heritage from the ancient world were united with the newly established Christian tradition during the later centuries of the Roman Empire, and how this union of Christian and pagan elements in a new Life was transmitted to the Europe of the Middle Ages.[1] In this connection attention is being paid to the Greek civilisation of East Rome[2] and to that continuity with the ancient past which was, though to a minor degree, preserved for the Latin speaking nations of the West during the centuries which followed the advent of St. Augustine, Boethius and Gregory the Great. But there is, as far as Greek philosophy, medicine, the exact sciences and mathematics are concerned, a similar conscious continuity in Muslim civilisation and in Arabic speaking lands which, I contend, deserves to be seriously investigated not only by the professional students of Arabic but also by those who are interested in the legacy of Greece and in the various possibilities of integrating it with a basically foreign world. The influence of Greek philosophy,

1. Cf., recently, W. Jaeger, *Two rediscovered works of ancient Christian literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*, Leiden 1954.
2. Cf. Norman H. Baynes, *The Hellenistic Civilisation and East Rome*, (Oxford 1946) and *The thought-world of East Rome* (Oxford 1947), now reprinted in *Byzantine Studies and other Essays*, London 1955, pp. 1-46.

medicine etc. is much more widely spread in the medieval Islamic world than in the corresponding periods of western Christian civilisation. The number of Greek works which became known in Arabic translations before the year A.D. 1000 is immense and surpasses in a very impressive way the amount of Greek books known at that time in Latin. To recall only one well known example: Cassiodorus (about 529) recommended, in his *Institutiones*, one book by Galen for study.[1] The Arabs knew, about 900 A.D., 129 medical and philosophical works by Galen,[2] and evidence that most of them were not only known but studied is not lacking. With the notable exception of the *Politics* and some works of minor importance all Aristotle's lecture courses were known to them, often in more than one translation. Moreover a number of Greek philosophical and scientific works still read in the Eastern world before 1000 and lost during the later centuries of the gradual decline of Byzantium are nowadays preserved in Arabic translations only.[3] Hence it is no exaggeration to say that, with the exception of the Greek papyri and occasional discoveries of new inscriptions and of some medieval Latin and Syriac aud Armenian versions of lost works, the Arabic versions – which are still very incompletely known – constitute our only hope of increasing our present knowledge of Greek literature. As for the translation of works whose Greek

1. I 31, p. 78, 25 ff. Mynors. But there was some more Galen and Hippocrates known in Latin translations, cf., e.g., H. Diller, *Die Ueberlieferung der hippokratischen Schrift* Περὶ ἀέρων ὑδάτων τόπων, Leipzig 1932, p. 50.
2. *Hunain ibn Ishaq, Ueber die syrischen und arabischen Galen-Uebersetzungen*, Arabic Text and German translation by G. Bergsträsser, Leipzig 1925. G. Bergsträsser, *Neue Materialien zu Hunain ibn Ishaq's Galen-Bibliographie*, Leipzig 1932. Cf. also M. Meyerhof in Isis 8, 1926, p. 685 ff. and in *The Legacy of Islam*, Oxford 1931, pp. 316 ff., 346 ff. This work has been unduly neglected by the historians of classical scholarship and deserves their attention.
3. There are philosophical works by Galen, various commentators on Aristotle, remnants of a paraphrase of Plotinus, many mathematical and medical texts etc. etc. Cf. R. Walzer, *On the Legacy of the Classics in the Islamic World*, Festschrift Bruno Snell, München 1956, p. 189 ff.

text has survived, their value must be separately ascertained in each individual case.[1] Equally and in many respects even more important are the more or less original works by Arabic philosophers, the majority of which are neither well known nor adequately studied. They show us not only how well the Arabs understood the technical side of philosophical methods and how they continued and developed the philosophical arguments in their own right but make us realise above all what all those Greek ideas meant to a Muslim and how individual Islamic philosophers came to answer problems of their own day in terms and arguments borrowed from Greek philosophy. The classical scholar may then see his own subject in a mirror in which he is not used to seeing it, and may thus understand the continuous impact of Greek thought on other civilisations in a new light – comparing it for once neither with ancient Roman civilisation nor with patristic thought nor with modern philosophy – and I may be allowed to say that this is one of the main attractions which Islamic philosophy has in store for those who make bold to transgress the borders of the classical world and to make themselves at home in Arab lands.[2]

Plato is known to the Arabs as Aflāṭūn, since no Arabic word can begin with two consonants, and you find under this unexpected heading a survey of what the Arabs knew about him in the 4th fascicle of the second edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam, Leiden 1955, p. 234 ff. Whereas the Latin Middle Ages had to be satisfied with portions of the *Timaeus*, the Arabs knew the complete dialogue in different translations, had access to the full text of the *Republic* and the *Laws*, knew the *Phaedo*, the *Crito* and the Alcibiades-speech from the *Banquet* for example, and probably much more. The

1. Cf. my article *New Light on the Arabic translations of Aristotle* in Oriens 6, 1953, pp. 91-141.
2. Cf. the short account of Islamic Philosophy in *The History of Philosophy Eastern and Western*, London 1953, chapter 32.

Arabic bibliographers list the titles of all the dialogues to be found in the Greek Corpus of Plato's works and since the exploration of the eastern libraries, in spite of the progress made within the last thirty years, is still in its early stages, it is quite possible that translations of the original works will turn up in due course. In addition, summaries of the *Timaeus*, the *Republic*, the *Laws* have been traced and published. The Arabs also knew hellenistic, Galenian and Neoplatonic interpretations of Plato and made wide use of them for purposes of their own.[1] They were, for obvious reasons, very well acquainted with the Neoplatonists, and it may well be said that all the Arabic philosophers were Platonists qua metaphysicians, though by no means all in the same way. It is a not uncommon error to minimise these very considerable differences and thus to misunderstand the individual outlook of different Islamic philosophers.

I am going to illustrate this general statement by describing the way in which some leading Islamic philosophers dealt with traditional problems of ancient Platonism: to wit, the cardinal virtues, the ideal state, divination and prophecy, and the philosophical prayer. It so happens that in all these cases we shall have to consider both the material gain for classical scholarship and the meaning of the Greek tradition for the Muslim philosophers concerned: the Arab Al-Kindi (died after A. D. 870), the Turk Al-Fārābī (died A.D. 950) and the Persian Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980-1037). The selection made is quite arbitrary but it is of course impossible to exhaust the subject even in one highly concentrated paper. Moreover conditions in this field are still rather fluid: new evidence keeps

1. Cf. J. Lippert, *Studien auf dem Gebiete der griechisch-arabischen Uebersetzungslitteratur*, Braunschweig 1894. P. Kraus and R. Walzer, *Galeni Compendium Timaei Platonis* (Plato Arabus I), London 1951. F. Rosenthal and R. Walzer, *Alfarabius De Platonis philosophia* (Plato Arabus II), London 1943. F. Gabrieli, *Alfarabius Compendium Legum Platonis* (Plato Arabus III), London 1952. E. I. J. Rosenthal, *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic*, with an English translation, Cambridge 1956.

turning up, and the first thorough interpretation of the evidence now available is often still to be done and can by no means be considered as settled. This makes work in this field very attractive but at the same time very difficult, since the public which takes an interest in Arabic philosophy is relatively small, very little discussion develops and constructive criticism is often sadly missed.

I

As you will agree, our evidence of the teaching of ethics in the late Greek philosophical schools is not particularly abundant, and every addition to our scanty information can only be welcome. The Arabic text of the last four books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, hitherto unknown, has just been discovered by sheer good luck in a Moroccan manuscript, copied by a pupil of the great Averroes himself, and is at present being prepared for publication in England;[1] it is accompanied by a paraphrase of the work by Nicolaus of Damascus, the first commentator on Aristotle after Andronicus of Rhodes, of whose way of interpreting Aristotle we have other evidence exclusively preserved by Arabic authors.[2]

I mention this here only in order to demonstrate that the worker in this field can never be sure what kind of unexpected discovery will confront him next. From other Arabic texts, known for a long time but never studied with a view to their Greek sources, we learn that the *Nicomachean Ethics* were not the main text book of Greek ethics, as we should expect from the Western European tradition, and once we have become aware of this, we recall that the Greek commentaries on that

1. Cf. A. J. Arberry, *The Nicomachean Ethics in Arabic*, Bulletin of the London School of Oriental and African Studies 17, 1955, p. 1 ff.
2. Cf., for the time being, J. Freudenthal, *Die durch Averroes erhaltenen Fragmente Alexanders zur Metaphysik des Aristoteles*, Berlin 1885, p. 126 ff. A major study on Nicolaus of Damascus in the Syriac and Arabic traditions is being prepared by H. J. Drossart Lulofs.

work which have survived[1] cannot be compared with the learned and well informed commentaries on the logical, physical and metaphysical treatises, some of which are preserved in Arabic or Hebrew versions only.[2] Philosophical ethics in the Islamic world are mostly based on Plato, who is understood either in Posidonius' or Galen's way, or else they represent a blend of Platonic, Peripatetic and Stoic elements which is not unheard of in Greek tradition but developed in a peculiar way resembling trends of late Greek philosophy. The *Nicomachean Ethics* were studied in a commentary by Porphyry, of whose existence we know only from an Arabic 10th century bibliographical tradition;[3] some traces of this commentary can be discovered in the most influential popular Arabic treatise on ethics, by a certain Miskawaih,[4] an older contemporary of Avicenna who once in this context refers to Porphyry by name, in the beginning of the discussion of the summum bonum, but his influence goes deeper: Aristotle appears in Miskawaih's treatise, as we should expect in a philosophy which believes that Plato and Aristotle are mutually complementary and that their systems are substantially identical, as a much more decided Platonist than he actually was, and some of Aristotle's statements are modified accordingly. This view – of the essential identity of Plato's and Aristotle's thought – is, by the way, as common to all the Muslim philosophers (though they differ about it in often

1. *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca XIX. XX.*
2. Cf. *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* v, parts 4 and 5. J. Freudenthal, *op. cit.* For the recently discovered Arabic version of Themistius *De anima* cf. M. C. Lyons, *An Arabic translation of the Commentary of Themistius etc.*, Bulletin of the London School of Oriental and African Studies, 17, 1955, p. 426 ff.
3. Cf. J. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre*, Gand-Leipzig 1913, p.
4. Cf. C .Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* 1², Leiden 1943, p. 342 (Supplement 1, Leiden 1937, p. 582). An English translation of the *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* by A. J. M. Craig will be published in the near future. Cf., for the time being, D. M. Donaldson, *Studies in Muslim Ethics*, London 1953, pp. 121-133.

significant details), as it is to Porphyry and Simplicius and most later Neoplatonists. To come back to the main topic of this section, we find, then, many Islamic ethical treatises adhering to the Platonic trichotomy of the soul and Plato's four cardinal virtues, as is customary in late authors like Galen, Themistius or Elias' *Prolegomena of Philosophy*; Porphyry seems to have followed a similar line, according to the evidence preserved by John of Stobi.[1] But although all the Islamic writers on ethics follow Plato in the main lines, many have found individual, different ways of their own which may, in their turn, reproduce otherwise lost Greek schemes. Miskawaih, who seems to be in agreement with Al-Kindi and Avicenna, holds a special view on the virtues and their interrelations which is known to us, in the Greek tradition, from an isolated notice in Arius Didymus' Epitome of the Peripatetic Ethics only. It amounts to this: Miskawaih and those like him connect with each of the four cardinal virtues a considerable number of subordinate virtues, a scheme which may ultimately go back to discussions in the old Platonic Academy and is known as the generally accepted Stoic view of considering this subject. There is, however, much difference in detail for which there is no Greek parallel and, moreover, 'wisdom' is now identical with Neoplatonic metaphysics. The vices which correspond to the virtues are described in accordance with the Aristotelian definition of the mean (as Albinus and Porphyry had done before), and this Peripatetic doctrine is combined with the Platonic and Stoic theories just mentioned, so that we have two vices associated with each virtue, and also subordinate vices defined as faulty extremes. This theory (which is known to us from Miskawaih, Avicenna, Al-Kindi, Stobaeus) fits in well with the general trend of late Greek philosophy and was probably

1. For detailed references cf. my article *Some aspects of Miskawaih's Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* in Studi Orientalistici in onore di G. Levi della Vida, Roma 1956, vol. II, p. 603 ff.

more influential and more common in late antiquity than we could assume before taking the Arabic tradition into consideration.

Concerning the Neoplatonic commentator in Aristotle's *Ethics* whom Miskawaih uses I should like to draw attention to two very characteristic passages. Every student of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is puzzled by the fact that Aristotle tacitly disowns Plato's divine ἔρως in his discussion of human relations and mentions associations founded on ἔρως only under the heading of pleasure and gain. Miskawaih not only distinguishes between φιλία and ἀγάπη, following, I believe, some Stoic differentiation of the excessively wide Aristotelian term φιλία, but also reintroduces, as the Stoics had done before, the good ἔρως which is praiseworthy as excessive love of the good. This ἔρως can develop into a supreme grade of friendship in man, the divine friendship of θεῖοι ἄνδρες which provides unmixed and pure pleasure of the highest kind; no adverse circumstance can interfere with it. This revival of Plato's ἔρως is well known from Neoplatonic and Christian authors of late antiquity, such as Plotinus and Gregory of Nyssa, Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and had its influence in Arabic thought as well, as we realise now in that Neoplatonic exegesis of the *Nicomachean Ethics* of which they alone have preserved some traces.

The friendship between master and pupil is indicated by Aristotle as an instance of a friendship between unequal partners and compared to the relation of children to their parents and of men to the gods. The commentator used by Miskawaih has followed up this point and established these friendships as a new special class of relations, on the level of ἀπάθεια, that freedom of emotions which is the realm of contemplative virtue, superior to the realm of the 'political' four virtues which is controlled by μετριοπάθεια in the Aristotelian manner – a feature which recalls Porphyry again. "God is the cause of our higher being, of the existence of

our mind, whereas our parents are the cause of our physical being". Only the friendship between master and disciple in the transmission of philosophy from one generation to the other rises to the level of these two. I quote: "Friendship with wise men is higher in rank and more worthy of honour than friendship with one's parents, for wise men have the care of our souls and are the promoters of our real being and assist us in obtaining felicity in this life and in the life to come. Since these blessings are superior to material blessings – as the soul is superior to the body – the friendship of the disciple with the philosopher is nearer to the friendship of men with God" (We have now the singular, in the Muslim context). Thus, Miskawaih continues, the teacher is the disciple's spiritual father, he is for him like God in mortal shape. Now we have no evidence, if I am not mistaken, that the relationship between master and pupil was ever understood in terms of a spiritual kinship between father and son either in the Old Academy or in the Peripatus or the Porch, close as the personal relation may have otherwise been. But it is almost a commonplace in the later Neoplatonic school to call one's teacher 'father' or to regard one's pupil as one's 'child'. To meet this ultimately (as I am inclined to believe) Pythagorean idea in Neoplatonic surroundings is in itself not surprising. That the teacher of philosophy could be accorded divine honours, as Miskawaih's text evidently implies, was certainly unheard of in Plato's days but, again, not uncommon among the Neoplatonists who, like the Muslim philosophers, understood philosophy as a way of salvation and hence its representatives as divine guides and authorities deserving of worship as saviours. We find this and similar tenets thus added to the traditional exegesis of Aristotle, by Porphyry or some later Neoplatonist. But the expression '*spiritual* father' cannot be accounted for in this way and it is not to be found in any extant Greek philosophical text (it would literally translated be πνευματικὸς πατήρ). There are two pos-

sible explanations: the Greek text, which may have described the spiritual fatherhood without using the term πνεῦμα with its materialistic and Stoic associations could have been changed by a Christian transmitter who understood ψυχή as πνεῦμα in the Pauline sense. But one may also recall that the Arabic terms for ψυχή and πνεῦμα are almost interchangeable, so that an Arabic translator (or a Syriac intermediator) may be responsible for the wording chosen by Miskawaih. Whatever the ultimate answer may be, it is interesting to realise that the expression 'spiritual father' which we freely use nowadays and with which we are familiar, even outside the specific Christian religious sphere, is to be found in this peculiar sense for the first time in a popular philosophical work by an Arab Platonist about the year 1000 A.D.

So much about the first aspects of Platonism in Islamic philosophy to be discussed in this paper. It is, after all, though gratifying, not so surprising if we discover Platonic ethics with Neoplatonic colouring, making use at the same time of advances made in Peripatetic and Stoic thought and uniting different but by no means incompatible elements of different origin, to have been alive, and more popular than we realised, in late antiquity, and taken over by the Arabs. Miskawaih in particular became a kind of standard text in later times. This type of Platonising ethics appealed to the mind of the Muslims who felt in need of a theistic philosophy of the Platonic or Neoplatonic kind when they set out to rationalise their new religious experience, first in order to defend themselves against the Christian critics of their creed, but soon in order to reassert themselves in terms of philosophy without considering the outside world at all. Since it did not contradict any basic tenet of Islam, it was not discarded when, in the twelfth century, the original religious foundations of Islam were relaid and philosophy, especially metaphysics, physics and psychology, had to be content, more and more, to withdraw from the centre of Islamic life and to

occupy a very minor place in the now definitely established Islamic tradition.[1]

2

But Plato did not help the Arabs in theoretical and moral philosophy only. They, or certainly some of them, appreciated him as a political philosopher; they by no means, like Plotinus, wanted the philosopher to keep away from practical life altogether, nor were they attracted by Proclus' dislike of the *Republic* and the *Laws* in favour of *Parmenides* and *Timaeus* exclusively. On the contrary, the greatest representative of this trend in Islamic philosophy, Al-Fārābī,[2] chose Plato's *Republic* as his textbook of political theory, instead of Aristotle's *Politics*, the only major Aristotelian treatise – with the exception of the *Dialogues* – which was never translated into Arabic. This very fact in itself may suggest that a similar substitution of the *Republic* for Aristotle's *Politics* may have taken place already within the Greek tradition which reached Al-Fārābī and, in fact, we have no ancient Greek commentary on the *Politics* and only one MS older than Moerbeke's S. XIII translation. But, to make this clear from the very outset, reading Plato's *Republic* was not a merely academic exercise in political theory for Al-Fārābī. It was meant as a very serious attempt at proposing a radical reform of the Islamic caliphate, in the first place by introducing the idea that organised society must be governed by philosopher-kings, i.e. that the caliph, the successor of the Prophet as a

1. For the whole of this section cf. above p. 209 n. 1 and the article *Akhlaq* by Sir Hamilton Gibb and the present writer in the 2nd edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam.

2. Cf. C. Brockelmann, *op. cit.* 1 p. 232 ff. (Suppl. 1, p. 375). The work by Alfārābī on which this section is mainly based is accessible in German and French translation. Cf. F. Dieterici, *Der Musterstaat von Alfārābī*, Leiden 1900. R. P. Janssen, Youssef Karam, F. Chlala, *Al-Farabi Idées des habitants de la cité vertueuse*, Le Caire 1949. Unfortunately, both translations use the same unsatisfactorly edited Arabic text. Cf. also F. Dieterici, *Die Staatsleitung von Al-Fārābī*, Leiden 1904.

religious and political leader, must conform to the principles laid down in Plato's *Republic*; "if at a given time no philosophy at all is associated with the government, the State must inevitably perish after a certain interval". Words like these have a familiar ring for everybody who recalls Plato's *7th Letter*, Cicero's *De republica*, Eusebius' theory of the Christian emperor[1] or Julian's abortive attempt at restoring paganism with the help of Platonic philosophy. Al-Fārābī's account of Plato's political philosophy is thus interesting not only because we become aware of a continuous study of this aspect of his work even in the days when Plato's and the Neoplatonist's view of the transcendental world prevailed among philosophers; and because we obtain some new material for the history of late Greek Platonism from Arabic texts. The crisis of the caliphate in his own day made Al-Fārābī understand the Platonic dilemma more immediately than a mere scholarly reading of *Republic* and *Laws* could have done, and gives to his sober and detached way of writing a freshness which demonstrates that Greek thought had in fact found a home in Islamic lands, – as Al-Fārābī himself claims, who believed that Greek philosophy had come to an end everywhere else. – It may not be out of place to say a few words about the kind of perfect State (ἀρίστη πολιτεία), which Al-Fārābī has in mind and his conception of the perfect man who ought to be its ruler. The best organised society can be either a city-state, or an *umma*, that is a wider society based on a common religious creed, like Islam or Christianity,[2] or the whole inhabited world, ruled by a philosopher-king. Al-Fārābī, who maintains that philosophical reason is superior to the different forms of established religions and is more than a simple handmaiden of theology,

1. Cf. N. H. Baynes, *Eusebius and the Christian Empire*, Mélanges Bidez, Brussels 1933, p. 13 ff., reprinted in *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (cf. above p. 203, n. 2), p. 168 ff.
2. Cf., e.g., *Encyclopedia of Islam*, s. v. *umma*.

has indeed these three possibilities in mind, and clearly envisages, beyond the realm of Islam, a world state under a philosopher-king who is at the same time a prophet and a legislator. This obviously goes beyond the ideas of Plato, who limited his vision to a city state, but it may well have been envisaged by Stoics or Platonists in the Roman Empire; and there is some scanty evidence for that. Al-Fārābī's scheme is, however, not the less daring, because Greek thinkers had expressed similar views before. It is very different from St. Augustine's *Civitas Dei*, who does not envisage a perfect State here and now, and this may account for the fact that Al-Fārābī's various works on the perfect state were not translated into medieval Latin.

The head of the perfect state must not only be an accomplished philosopher and a prophet and thus be divinely inspired – I shall have to say a word about prophecy presently. He must also be able to translate what he knows into effective speech and thus work on the imagination of his non-philosophical subjects – as Plato himself had explained in *Phaedrus* and *Clitopho*, according to Al-Fārābī.[1] He must, further, have the power to lead people to felicity by teaching them to perform those actions through which felicity is obtained: in other words he should be lawgiver and educator as well. Whereas philosophical truth is the same everywhere, in every city and in every nation, the symbols (created by philosopher prophets) through which this truth is conveyed to the non-philosophical crowd are different, according to different religions and different languages spoken by different nations. And, accordingly, laws and customs vary from land to land, although they are related to one and the same truth. Finally the ruler must be of good physique and be able to shoulder the task of war, when war is forced upon him. ('Musterstaat' chapter 27, towards the end.)

1. Cf. for this topic and for this section of the paper in general Plato Arabus II (referred to above, p. 206, n. 1).

The prospective ruler of the perfect state must be born with twelve excellent physical, moral and intellectual qualities which Al-Fārābī, as he reports himself, took from the first section of the 6th book of Plato's *Republic* and arranged in a more systematic way. He is quite aware that it may happen very rarely that such a man should be born and, in addition, should, on reaching maturity, acquire all the faculties just mentioned. Such a man alone would qualify as ruler of the perfect state. He would qualify as well if he were lacking in prophetic, divinatory power, a faculty located in the imagination which is inferior to the intellect – a statement not surprising in view of the introductory chapter of *Plato Republic* IX, *Tim.* 71 and *Laws* XII 966 D, but which would probably be contradicted by late Neoplatonists of the Athenian school. Both philosopher-prophet and philosopher can act as heads of the perfect society. Inferior in rank is a ruler who was born with the essential twelve qualities referred to before but proved unable to reach the grade of perfection required and thus unable to give laws and establish rules of good conduct in his own right. He will, instead, although he is qualified as a philosopher as well, have to rely on the forms of life established by the rulers of higher rank, but his superior intellectual qualities will enable him to know and remember intimately what they have laid down as law and custom and to conform to this tradition in all his deeds without exception (one feels reminded of the *Politicus*). Whenever there is no precedent recorded he will be in a position to find out new law, in the spirit of the first ruler. He will also be a politician in the narrower sense of the term, being able to deal with situations unthought of by his predecessors and to select ways and means in the service of the well-being of the community. He will, in his turn, have oratorical faculties of convincing people of the validity of the Law and the necessity of his own innovations, and will have the same military qualities as the perfect ruler. The same good government

could also be achieved by the union of a philosopher and a politician (Plato in Sicily!) and, should this prove to be impracticable, by a team of persons each of whom would display one of the qualities required (nocturnal council of the *Laws*). But it would be disastrous if there should be a government without philosophy altogether. ('Musterstaat' cap. 28.)

But no Platonist could consider politics in isolation, without referring the universe, the individual man and society to the same principle, and it goes without saying that Al-Fārābī conforms to that rule. The same order which prevails in the universe, where centuries of unquestioned tradition have given to the postulate of the rule of the divine mind the appearance of self-evidence, must apply to man, the μικρὸς κόσμος, who should organise himself on the same pattern, and to society which should be ruled and organised by the perfect man living in conformity with the divine order which guarantees the eternal existence of the whole world. ('Musterstaat' cap. 26-27 passim).

Al-Fārābī's account of the different possibilities of philosophical government which Plato had envisaged in different works of his own may well go back to an attempt by Hellenistic or later Greek philosophers to give a coherent account of Plato's political theory. We cannot lay hands on the very work he used, but his treatise *On Plato's philosophy*[1] which depends on a Greek pattern and the paraphrase of the *Republic* used by Averroes[2] and certainly known to Al-Fārābī also show the kind of books which existed in late Greek philosophy whose authors, like their Aristotelian opposite numbers, made their authorities more coherent and more systematic than they actually were and had aspired to be.

Al-Fārābī's statement is couched in very abstract terms so that it may be applied to any existing society; all specific Islamic terms are, almost completely, studiously avoided. But he wrote for Arabic, Muslim readers, for whom the

1. Cf. above p. 215 n. 1. 2. Cf. above p. 206 n. 1

application of the views expressed must have been obvious, although there was some risk involved in putting it down in writing. We shall not be far off the mark if we understand him in the following terms: Muhammad himself would then be the philosopher-prophet, and the Qur'ān the work in which he transmitted philosophical truth to non-philosophers. It would take the place of poetry in Plato's *Republic* or of the Gospels in Christianity, and would certainly not have an appeal as universal as philosophy. The Divine Law of the Muslims tied traditionally to the Prophet's authority would take the place of Plato's *Laws* which, obviously, were valid for Greeks only. The socalled orthodox four caliphs, the immediate successors of Muhammad, idealised in the later Islamic tradition, would correspond to the philosopher rulers who have no prophetic powers associated with their intellectual supremacy as Neoplatonic metaphysicians. The other possibilities surveyed by Al-Fārābī are probably meant as practical proposals and are by no means as unrealistic as they may appear at first sight. His views had some influence in various quarters and were by no means forgotten.[1]

Before I pass to the third and last section of this paper I should add a word about Al-Fārābī's explanation of prophecy – which though subordinate to reason is none the less an indispensable quality of the τέλειος ἄνθρωπος. It would be like carrying coals to Newcastle if I should recall to you the appreciation and acknowledgment of mantic powers by Plato, Aristotle in his earlier works, Stoics and Neoplatonists. Al-Fārābī located them in the imaginative faculty, and its explanation is linked with the analysis of the soul by Alexander of Aphrodisias who brought Aristotle's treatment of the subject in different treatises into some kind of coherent system: he did this by establishing a hierarchic order of the body and the different faculties, each of them being at the same time the matter for a higher faculty and the form for a lower fa-

1. Sir Thomas W. Arnold, *The Caliphate*, Oxford 1924, p. 121 ff.

culty. The highest faculty is the rational which provides structural unity to man and all his various faculties: it is, when it reaches perfection, in contact with the Active Mind, the νοῦς ποιητικός which is in most Arabic philosophical works no longer identical with the First Cause, with God (as it is for Alexander), but has become a separate transcendental entity, comparable to the World Intellect of Plotinus. It mediates between the higher world and the world below the moon. Through it divination can even reach the First Cause and become aware of it in visual and other symbols. The detailed explanation of divination by Al-Fārābī is highly interesting and reproduces, again, a Greek theory for which, as a whole, we have no other evidence. It is based on φαντασία, which is analysed in a much more differentiated manner than Aristotle had done, by utilising the progress made in the Stoic school, and on an elaborate view of μίμησις, coupled with the Neoplatonic theory of emanation.[1]

It is obvious that the problem of divination and prophecy assumed a new actuality when the adherents of the three Hebraic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, set about understanding their non-Hellenic religious experience in terms of philosophy. This applies to Islam with particular force since the very fact of Muhammad's prophecy is next to the uniqueness of God the main basis of its creed. For Al-Fārābī divine inspiration[2] comes about through philosophy and divination at once, but divination, located in the inferior faculty of imagination, is only auxiliary to philosophy. Al-Kindi and Avicenna give (though in different ways) to divination a higher place than to reason and their views remind us of what we know of Stoic thought and of the Athenian school of Neoplatonism. But the traditionalist and mystic Muslim critics of philosophy who eventually won

1. Cf. my paper on *Al-Fārābī's theory of prophecy and divination* in Journal of Hellenic Studies 77, 1957, p. 143 ff.
2. Cf. *Encyclopedia of Islam* s.v. *wahy*.

the day claimed that no rational explanation of prophecy could ever be adequate, that it is a stage beyond intellect and that it had unlocked the door to a domain of reality to which Greek philosophy (a few Neoplatonists excepted) had not provided the key.[1]

3

The Muslim philosophers were, like their immediate Greek predecessors, – to mention this third aspect of Platonism in conclusion – very well aware of the religious element in Plato's thought. In the case of Avicenna it pervades his entire philosophy, so that one can say he interprets the whole of Islam in terms of the Platonic religion of the mind which takes, however, its firm roots in the established forms of Muslim worship and of Muslim law and custom altogether; similarly his Hellenic Neoplatonic counterparts had appreciated and accepted Greek tradition though they looked at it with the philosopher's eye. Philosophy is, for Avicenna, more than a knowledge of truth accumulated in many centuries and by different generations, not only a system of natural theology, a way to understand the world and God in rational terms. Philosophy is for him a religious way of life, or rather the religious way of life, the only religious way of life, and hence Islam must be made to conform to it without risking its basic tenets. I shall try to illustrate this by referring to his short treatise *On prayer* (which can be read in an English version).[2] Avicenna deals in this treatise with two kinds of prayer: a) the ritual daily prayer, five times a day as regulated by the Qur'ān and the Divine Law, which is incumbent on philosophers and non-philosophers alike and which he considers as an outward symbol of the higher kind of prayer.

1. Cf. e.g., W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali*, London 1953, p. 63 ff.

2. A. J. Arberry, *Avicenna On Theology*, London 1951, p. 50 ff. French translation by A. F. Mehren, *Traités Mystiques . . . d'Avicenne*, 3me fascicule, Leiden 1894, p. 16 ff.

(We know from his autobiography that he was very strict in observing these forms.) b) the private conversation of man with God which constitutes the last section of the communal prayer and whose importance had increased in the Islamic mystical tradition which had developed independently without contact with philosophy.[1] He gives to this part of the rite a completely new meaning by making it the specific prayer of the philosopher and identifying it with philosophical contemplation, as the final result of intense and protracted philosophical studies. To quote a few sentences: "prayer is the foundation stone of religion – worship is knowledge, that is to be aware of the existence of One Whose being is necessary and absolute – the real nature of prayer is therefore to *know* Almighty God in his Uniqueness, as a being wholly necessary". This prayer is silent, far beyond the world of the senses, it is an inner vision, with the eye of the mind: "Reason's ambition and striving all through life is to purify the sensual impressions and to become aware of the world of intelligible truth. Reasoning is the speech of the angels who have no speech or utterance, reasoning belongs to them especially, which is perception without sensing and communication without words. Man's relation to the Kingdom of Heaven, to the world of the mind, is established by reasoning: speech follows after it. If a man possesses no knowledge of reasoning he is incapable of expressing truth".

It does not need many words to demonstrate that this is another case of an important and profound Greek idea, fully naturalised in the Islamic world and fully understood by the Muslim philosopher who made it his own. We need only to recall Plato's *Laws*,[2] or the fact that Aristotle wrote a treatise *On prayer*, a sentence from whose closing section, the only one we have, we owe to that very Plotinian Neopla-

1. Cf. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, s. v. *salat*.
2. Cf., e.g., E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley 1951, p. 219 ff., 222.

tonist Simplicius.[1] It must have been concerned with the philosopher's prayer and have been akin to the well known statement in the *Eudemian Ethics* that the contemplative life is the true worship of God, that the perfect life is τὸν θεὸν θεραπεύειν καὶ θεωρεῖν, (VIII 3, 1249b20), by becoming similar to God as far as human beings are able to do so – a formula, by the way, which is again quite familiar to the Islamic philosophers. I may refer also to an equally famous saying of Seneca to whom we owe so many impressive formulations of widely accepted philosophical views (*Ep.* 95. 47): "deum colit qui novit . . . primus est doerum cultus deos credere. deinde reddere eis maiestatem suam, reddere bonitatem sine qua nulla maiestas est. scire illos esse qui praesident mundo . . . satis illos coluit quisquis imitatus est."[2] Galen could also be quoted in this context.[3] More similar still to what we find in Avicenna are statements on prayer and worship of the Divinity to be found in Porphyry's *Letter to his wife Marcella*.[4] Only the philosopher knows how to pray (μόνος εἰδὼς εὔξασθαι). "(16) You will honour God in the best way if you make your mind (τὴν σαυτῆς διάνοιαν) similar to God: ἡ δ' ὁμοίωσις ἔσται διὰ μόνης ἀρετῆς· μόνη γὰρ ἀρετὴ τὴν ψυχὴν ἄνω ἕλκει καὶ πρὸς τὸ συγγενές. The wise man's soul adapts itself to God, always sees God with the mind's eye, it always is with God: ψυχὴ δὲ σοφοῦ ἁρμόζεται πρὸς τὸν θεόν, ἀεὶ θεὸν ὁρᾷ, σύνεστιν ἀεὶ θεῷ. Not the speech of the wise man is appreciated and acknowledged by God but what he does: οὐχ ἡ γλῶττα τοῦ σοφοῦ τίμιον παρὰ θεῷ ἀλλὰ τὰ ἔργα. A wise man gives honour to God even when he is silent: σοφὸς γὰρ ἀνὴρ καὶ σιγῶν θεὸν τιμᾷ, while he is silent he voices truth: μετὰ σιγῆς φθεγγόμενος τὴν ἀλήθειαν. On the other hand, an

1. W. D. Ross, *Aristoteles Fragmenta Selecta*, Oxford 1955, p. 57. Plato, *Rep.* 509 B. W. Jaeger, *Aristotle*, Oxford 1948, pp. 160, 240.
2. Cf. W. Theiler, *Die Vorbereitung des Neuplatonismus*, Berlin 1930, p. 107 ff., 135.
3. Cf. R Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians*, Oxford 1949, p. 23 f.
4. Cf. W. Theiler, *op. cit.* p. 140 ff.

ignorant man even if he prays and sacrifices defiles God: ἄνθρωπος δὲ ἀμαθὴς καὶ εὐχόμενος καὶ θύων μιαίνει τὸ θεῖον. Only the wise man is a real priest (ἱερεύς), the wise man alone is θεοφιλής (? he loves God and is loved by him). Your mind in you (ὁ ἐν σοὶ νοῦς) should be the temple of God. God enjoys nothing else but a pure mind". But the philosopher, Porphyry emphasizes, will also worship God in the traditional ritual forms though they are of minor importance.

The very close similarities between Porphyry and Avicenna are so obvious that there is no need to describe them in detail. There is, however, no reason why Avicenna should depend for his conception of philosophical prayer on that particular essay by Porphyry which is fortunately available for us. These ideas are quite widespread among Neoplatonists and could have reached him in many ways.

Avicenna understood Islam in Neoplatonic terms though he did not for this reason even contemplate ceasing to be a Muslim. Hence he could – and you may remember what was reported about Al-Fārābī – claim that the silent prayer of the philosopher had been established by the prophet himself. "This is the type of prayer which was incumbent upon our Lord and Founder of our Faith . . . on the night when he was separated from his body and divested of all worldly desire, so that there remained with him no trace of animal passion or the pull of natural wants. He enjoyed converse with God in his soul and intellect, saying: 'O Lord, I have discovered a strange joy this night: grant me the means to perpetuate it and provide for me a way that will always bring me into it'. It was then that God commanded the Prophet to pray, saying: 'O Muhammad, the man at prayer is in secret converse with His Lord' or, in other words, one part of the ritual prayer has been established with a view to philosophy. "Those who practice only the outer part of prayer experience but a defective portion of that joy; but those who pray in the spirit know that joy in full and abun-

dant measure, and the fuller that measure is, the ampler is their reward".

This attitude of the Neoplatonists and Avicenna has not died with the collapse of the Neoplatonic universe in modern times and continues to live amongst us, since it is deeply rooted in human nature. I need only remind you of the closing section of J. Burckhardt's lecture on 'Glück und Unglück in der Weltgeschichte'.[1]

I can not claim to have exhausted my subject, and this has also by no means been my intention. I thought it more appropriate to illustrate a few examples more fully, and to make out, if possible, a case for classical scholars to take an increased interest in the history of Greek thought in the Islamic world and in the attitude of Islam to the Greek legacy which is so different from the fate of ancient civilisation in the Latin world.

1. *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* (Bern 1941), p. 393:

«Könnten wir völlig auf unsere Individualität verzichten und die Geschichte der kommenden Zeit etwa mit ebensoviel Ruhe und Unruhe betrachten, wie wir das Schauspiel der Natur, z. B. eines Seesturmes vom festen Lande aus mitansehen, so würden wir vielleicht eines der grössten Kapitel aus der Geschichte des Geistes bewusst miterleben.

In einer Zeit:

da der täuschende Friede jener dreissig Jahre, in welchen wir aufwuchsen,

längst gründlich dahin ist und eine Reihe neuer Kriege im Anzug zu sein scheint,

da die grössten Kulturvölker in ihren politischen Formen schwanken oder in Uebergängen begriffen sind,

da mit der Verbreitung der Bildung und des Verkehrs auch die des Leidensbewusstseins und der Ungeduld sichtlich und rasch zunimmt,

da die sozialen Einrichtungen durchgängig durch Bewegungen der Erde beunruhigt werden – so vieler anderer angehäufter und unerledigter Krisen nicht zu gedenken –

würde es ein wunderbares Schauspiel, freilich aber nicht für zeitgenössische irdische Wesen sein, dem Geist der Menschheit erkennend nachzugehen, der über all diesen Erscheinungen schwebend und doch mit allen verflochten, sich eine neue Wohnung baut. Wer hiervon eine Ahnung hätte, würde des Glückes und Unglückes völlig vergessen und in lauter Sehnsucht nach dieser Erkenntnis dahinleben».

RÉSUMÉ DE LA DISCUSSION

M. Guthrie commence en constatant que les discussions précédentes ont montré à l'évidence la solidarité étroite entre les recherches sur le platonisme et les recherches sur la pensée de l'antiquité chrétienne. Mais, en outre, il ne faut pas négliger une troisième tradition, la tradition islamique, qui puise aux sources anciennes au même titre que la tradition chrétienne. L'Islam a contribué pour une large part à assurer la continuité de la pensée antique au Moyen-Age. Les relations entre la culture islamique et la culture du christianisme oriental ont toujours été très intenses. M. Walzer confirme tout de suite que la série des problèmes communs à l'Islam et au Christianisme est très importante et mérite toute notre attention. Passant aux détails, M. Gigon relève trois questions qui ont un certain intérêt.

1. L'Islam semble volontiers donner à la philosophie une importance quasi religieuse; le philosophe est considéré comme le guide spirituel, dans le sens le plus absolu du terme. Cette nuance n'est pas absente de la philosophie ancienne. Nous observons tout un courant, tantôt fort, tantôt faible, qui, en décrivant le but, la méthode et les effets de la philosophie, se sert de la terminologie religieuse. Ce courant remonte jusqu'aux présocratiques, à Platon, à Epicure. Il atteint sa plus grande dimension chez un néoplatonicien comme Proclus. Est-il possible de déterminer avec plus d'exactitude les relations éventuelles entre cette attitude quasi-religieuse des derniers néoplatoniciens et le portrait de la philosophie dans l'Islam? 2. Il est bien entendu que le conflit entre l'autorité et la raison a été particulièrement aigu chez les philosophes chrétiens et musulmans. Pourtant le conflit en tant que tel remonte à la philosophie antique. C'est le conflit entre l'enseignement par les preuves logiques et l'enseignement par l'exemple vivant. Il vaudrait la peine de l'étudier une fois dans toute son ampleur. 3. Ce qui frappe dans la tradition de l'aristotélisme, c'est l'abondance de termes techniques couramment employés dans la

doxographie pour résumer la doctrine d'Aristote, mais qui ne se rencontrent nulle part dans les traités d'Aristote que nous possédons. Il s'agit surtout des termes: *quinta essentia* en physique, *metriopatheia* en morale. La doctrine est parfaitement présente chez Aristote, mais pas le terme. D'où viennent-ils? Des livres perdus ou des résumés de l'école? La tradition islamique peut-elle aider à éclaircir ce problème?

En effet, confirme M. Walzer, la philosophie et le philosophe gagnent dans l'Islam une autorité très grande: le philosophe est le père spirituel de son disciple. Pourtant l'état de nos connaissances et le caractère des textes ne permettent pas encore d'établir une continuité sûre entre la situation spirituelle dans l'Antiquité et celle qui existe dans l'Islam. M. Marrou se demande à ce propos s'il y a un intermédiaire chrétien entre les textes musulmans et la tradition purement païenne. Le fleuve néoplatonicien a pu se grossir d'affluents chrétiens en cours de route et les Musulmans ont pu recevoir ainsi un mélange d'éléments très différents. Il sera donc peut-être extrêmement difficile de déceler dans la tradition musulmane, ce qui est encore authentiquement platonicien.

Sans entrer dans les détails, M. Theiler ne voudrait pas être aussi sceptique que M. Marrou. Certaines idées fondamentales porphyriennes ont très bien pu passer dans l'Islam; c'est même probable.

Enfin M. Courcelle observe qu'il est peut-être un peu injuste de comparer, sans autre, les maigres connaissances médicales d'un Cassiodore avec les 29 traités de Galien qui ont été identifiés dans les bibliothèques musulmanes. N'oublions pas tout ce qui reste encore à découvrir dans nos bibliothèques occidentales. D'autre part, il est hautement souhaitable que les recherches dans la tradition musulmane soient poussées plus avant et que les résultats des recherches puissent être mis à la disposition des savants de façon pratique.

En terminant la discussion, tous les participants expriment leur gratitude la plus chaleureuse et la plus profonde à M. le Baron Hardt qui, une fois de plus, a offert une hospitalité si généreuse et si charmante aux études classiques.