MUSLIM CONTRIBUTIONTO PHILOSOPHY

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Even the most prejudiced of the Western scholars will not gainsay the invaluable contribution of the illustrious Muslim thinkers like al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, down to Allama Mohammad Iqbal to the philosophical fund of the world. In the beginning, no doubt, the Muslim genius received initial inspiration from the Greek masters whose works they transliterated into Arabic; but the true Islamic philosophy stemmed after they comprehended the real spirit of the teachings of the Holy Quran, realizing that it was, to use a phrase from Allama Iqbal, 'anti-classical'[78]. The Muslim thinkers thence forward made some meritorious original contributions in the diverse fields of Epistemology, Psychology, Metaphysics, and Philosophy of Religion, which continue exerting marked influence to this day on modern thought in these very fields. For my today's presentation I have selected some of their contributions in the following four directions, bringing out here and there their impact on current thought in the West:

1. Theory of the Nature of Soul or Mind;
2. Mind-Body Relationship;
3. The Doctrine of Intellect;
4. The Space-Time Framework.

1. Regarding the nature of Soul or Mind, the Greek genius showed two trends: (i) like Aristotle, it conceived of Soul or Mind as an 'Entelechy' or a mere Function of the Body rather than anything independent of it; (ii) they conceived of the Soul as a compound entity after the Platonic fashion, analysable into various faculties. The Muslim mind, though ascribing various faculties to the Soul took it, in general, for a unique 'Simple Substance', existing independently of the body. the first of their lineage, al-Kindi (respected as Father of the Muslim philosophy), though better known for his transliteration work, affirmed the simple and uncompounded nature of the Soul in his *Rasa'il al-Kindi al-Falsafiyyah;*[79] al-Farabi followed him in calling the

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[78] Iqbal Dr. M., *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,* (Lahore: Sh. M. Ashraf), P. 128.
[79] Atiyeh George N., (Eng. tr.) *Al-Kindi: the Philosopher of the Arabs, Q. Rasa'il al-Kindi,* (Rawalpindi: Islamic Research Institute, 1966), P. 100.

Soul rational which was simple, incorporeal substance *(cf. al-Thamarat al-Mardiyyah);*[80] Ibn Sina urged the 'incorporeal substantiality' of the Soul (cf. *Kitab al-Shifa. Pt. V)*[81]*;* and al-Ghazali called it 'Form' (cf. Tahafut)[82], which is again simple in nature. The modern Western thinkers like Prof. H.D. Lewis[83] and his followers, who call themselves 'anti-Ryleans' and 'anti-Empiricists', have not only followed the Muslim thinkers in describing the Soul as a Simple Substance, but have also followed them in their argument that if the Soul were compounded, it would have met its end by decomposition.[84] Even the opposite view held by Prof. Bernard Williams and others, following the lead of Dr. J. b. Watson, who advocate the 'corporeal theory' of the Soul, are not without their Muslim predecessors in Abu Bakr al-Razi and the Mutakallimin. Again, Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (606/1209)[85] has ardent followers among the modern idealists and anti-empiricists both in America and in Europe who identify 'man' or 'individual' with Soul or Mind.

2. As regards the relationship between Mind and Body, the 'unitarian' approach advocated by Prof. Gilbert Ryle (d. 1976), the author of the famous 'Category Mistake'[86] in England who had very strong backing in early fifties in the whole of Europe, was itself initiated by Islam which makes no bifurcation between the spiritual and the temporal, the Invisible and the visible, the Church and the State -- a bifurcation which stemmed from the Christian approach itself in so far as it fixed its gaze on the 'Otherworldly', rejecting 'this-worldly' as profane and unworthy. This Christian dogma, perhaps, had its philosophical predeceasing in the Platonic condemnation of the 'sensory' as illusory, yielding mere 'opinion'. However, the Rylean

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[80] Sharif M.M., *A History of Muslim Philosophy,* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), Vol. I, cf. "Theory of the ten Intelligences", PP. 457 f.

[81] Ibid. cf. Ibn Sina's The Mind-Body Relationship", PP. 487f.

[82] al-Ghazali, *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (pb. Mutafa albabi al-Halbi, Cairo, n. d.), p. 80; cf. Eng. tr. by Sabih Ahmad Kamali, (Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1958) pp. 227.

[83] Lewis H.D., *Persons and Life After death* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 103; also his lectures on "Personal Identity" arranged by me at Government College and Punjab University, Lahore in 1979, which now form part of his book in press *The Elusive Self* (Macmillan).

[84] Ibid. He propounds the argument in question at page 111 and also in his subsequent writings.

[85] Ma'sumi M.S.H., (Eng. tr.) *Imam Razi's Ilm al Akhlaq,* (Islamic Research Institute, 1969), p. 113.

[86] Ryle Gilbert, *The Concept of Mind,* (Penguin Books 1949), cf. chapter on "Category Mistake".

doctrine could not find inspiration either from Christianity or from the ancient Greek thought whence the Westerners claim their thought to have originated. It was Islam which first initiated the need for a study of the various facets of Nature, placing due reliance on the 'reports' of the senses.[87] This bears out Dr. Robert Briffault's concession that science is the most momentous contribution of Arab civilization to the modern world.[88]

Even in their 'dualistic' approach to the Mind-Body problem, the present-day anti-Ryleans we have been discussing above, owe greater inspiration to the basic position of the Muslim thinkers. Despite the fact that Islam does not appear to make a bifurcation between Mind and Body, the Muslim genius, perhaps realizing some intellectual difficulties inherent in a 'unitarian' position, was led to a rigid 'Dualism'. The Father of Muslim philosophy al-Kindi said, "the soul is separate from the body and different from it".[89] Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina followed him in this dualistic position, the latter affirming its independence of the body in his *Kitab al-Shifa.* The selfsame position was held by Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi in his famous treatise *Kitab al-Nafs wal-Ruh.* The aforesaid Muslim thinkers made this 'dualistic' position the very basis of and pre-condition for their view of 'disembodied survival'[90] What is interesting for us here is that the present-day idealists (who call themselves 'anti-empiricists') not only follow the Muslim thinkers in their 'dualistic position'; they also follow them in affirming it as the very basis and pre-condition for the possibility of 'disembodied survival'. One can refer to the positions of Prof. H.D. Lewis[91] of the University of London, Prof. Sydeny Shoemaker[92] of Cornel University, and Prof. Antony Flew[93] of the University of Reading. This shows what a marked influence is the Muslim thought exerting on the current Western philosophy, especially in the field of the philosophy of religion.

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87 *The Koran,* N.J. Dawood's Penguin Classics Eng. tr., 11: 164; X:101 XXX11:9.

88 *The Making of Humanity,* (Islamic Book Foundation 1980), p. 202.

89 Atiyeh, op. cit., pp. 100-01.

90 This was the position of all those Muslim thinkers who believed in 'disembodied survival', e.g., al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, etc.

91 Lewis, *Persons and Life after Death, p.* 133.

92 Brown C.S., (ed). *Reason and Religion,* (London, Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 259f.

93 Flew Antony, *The Presumption of Atheism,* (London: Pemberton 1975); cf. also see prof. Lewis's *Persons and Life After Death,* chapter on "Survival". N.B. Though not believing in "Immortality', Both Flew and S. Shoemaker admit that 'dualism' is a necessary pre-condition of immortality'.

3. One of the most influential doctrines of the Muslims was their theory or 'Intellect'. Though taking initial inspiration from the Greeks, the Muslim genius must be credited with important original contribution, thereby paving the way to modern science of Epistemology. Even al-Kindi, made some very momentous re-adjustments leading towards a full-fledged theory of knowledge.[94] It were, however, al-Farabi[95] and Ibn Sina[96] who must be credited with bringing home full epistemological implications of the doctrine of 'Intellect' unknown to the Greek world. In fact, the Muslim mind has shown special interest in the 'theory of knowledge' inspired by the basic teachings of the Quran in which God enjoins the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) to say: 'Lord, increase my knowledge'.[97] It took the West centuries to acquire such an interest, rather as late as John Locke (1632-1704 A.D.)[98] or, perhaps later still when Immanuel Kant, a renowned German thinker, wrote his famous *First Critique* in 1781. Al-Kindi divided 'Intellect' into Primary and Secondary kinds, former being the same as Aristotle's 'active intellect'. The Secondary Intellect he divided into three kinds: (i) the 'Intellect in Potency' which is comparable to Aristotle's 'possible intellect'; (ii) the 'Acquired Intellect', which is almost the same as Alexandar's 'intellectus habitus'; and (iii) the 'Demonstrative Intellect', which was al-Kindi's own addition and he conceived of it as something more dynamic than the 'Acquired Intellect': the latter was conceived as a 'Skill', whereas the former was the 'skill put to use'. Modern psychology follows this important distinction in what it calls 'capacity' and 'achievement'.[99]

Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina stole yet another very important lead when they used the Doctrine of Intellect for epistemological purposes, giving an invaluable initiation to modern Epistemology. Al-Farabi believed that the intellect development of man consisted in rising from the 'intellect in Potency' through 'intellect in Action' to the 'Acquired Intellect', till it reached the level of communion, ecstasy, and inspiration. At this level, reason and intuition would become one, and rational knowledge coincided with ecstasy

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[94] Sharif, op. cit., see al-Kindi's "Soul and Intellect", p. 432f.
[95] Ibid, cf. al-Farabi's "Theory of the Intellect", p. 460f.
[96] Ibid, cf. Ibn Sina's "Theory of knowledge", p. 492f.

[97] *The Koran,* XX:114 (last portion)
[98] Locke John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, (N.Y.* Dover publications, 1959).
[99] Kimble G.A., *Principles of General Psychology (N.Y.* Ronald Press, 1963), pp. 88-9.

and inspiration.[100] In whole of this development the First Intellect plays an indispensable role. Thus, for Farabi, all knowledge, however mundane and empirical, must have an 'a priori' and 'intuitive' element, thus forestalling Kant and the later epistemologists. Moreover, Farabi's concept of 'Acquired Intellect' is original and alien to Aristotle's, for "it is almost identified with the separate intelligences, and serves as the link between human knowledge and revelation"[101] (cf. *al-Thamarat al-Mardiyyan* and *al-Madinat al-Fadilah).* In Ibn Sina we find a fully developed theory of knowledge, which clearly anticipates some more recent theories of knowledge propounded by epistemologists like A.D. Woozley in his treatise *theory of knowledge*[102] which is considered as a land-mark in the field of Epistemology. Ibn Sina talks of the various grades of knowledge or knowing processes, and the various grades of abstraction corresponding to them. For him, the progress of knowledge depends on the degree of abstraction, [103] a fact which Kant and his followers learnt centuries later to emphasize. Under the inspiration of the Holy Quran, Ibn Sina held that perception was an important and indispensable stage on the way to acquisition of knowledge. His mechanistic theory forestalled modern schools of Epistemology.

4. The Muslim mind showed keen interest in the problem of Space and Time also. It may, in one definite sense, at least, be regarded as pioneer of the Space-Time Relativity theory. This theory, one of the most prized achievements of the modern Science, found its elementary exposition, at any rate, in the writings of al-Ghazali (d. 1111) who paved a way to the modern version of theory. Al-Ghazali, through a semantic analysis of the words 'Was' and 'Will be' in modern fashion, first established relative nature of both Space and Time in respect of object,[104] a fact acknowledged by Dr. De Boer.[105] He not only believed that Space and Time were relative to the object, but also (to quote from him) "There is no distinction between temporal extension --which is described, in terms of its relations as 'before' and 'after' -- and spatial extension -- which is described, in terms of its relations, as

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[100] Sharif, op. cit., cf. "Farabi", pp. 461-62.
[101] Ibid, p. 462.
[102] Woozley A.D., *Theory of Knowledge,* (London: Huchison University Library, 1964,).
[103] Sharif, op. cit., cf. *"Ibn Sina", pp.* 493f.
[104] al-Ghazali, op. cit., p. 15; *Sabih Ahmad kamali's Eng.* tr., pp. 37-8.
[105] De Boer, op. cit., p. 160.

'above' and 'below"'.[106] This shows that they were conceived as relative to each other in the manner of modern version of the theory. Some centuries later, a Sufi poet and scholar Fakhr ud-Din Ibrahim al-Hamadani al-Iraqi (b. 686/1287) in his book *Lam'at* and Jalal ud-Din Dawani (830/1427-908/1502) in his book *Zoura* added that there were different levels of Space and Time relative to the nature of the object or being.[107] Thus, these Muslim scholars established a 'multi- relativity' of Space and Time centuries before the modern theory had its inception. What is interesting in this connection is that over five centuries after al-Ghazali, Sir Isaac Newton, the renowned European mathematician, was still advocating the concept of absolute Space and Time and, consequently, the West was adhering to the Newtonian view of the 'fixed' Universe (a notion derived from Aristotle), enclosed by illimitable void. 1t was not until the present century that Albert Einstein (b. 1879), the renowned European physicist, made the West appreciate the relative nature of Space and Time. In this way, al-Ghazali forestalled one of the prizest geniuses of modern physics, I mean Dr. Einstein, who has been credited with the discovery which, it is asserted, has revolutionized the whole view of the nature of the Universe. Morever, modern science has succeeded in probing into one dimension of relativity only; it has got only a limited view of relativity and has yet to probe into that 'multi-relativity' which the Muslim thinkers envisaged centuries ago. This partial view of science has led into some serious difficulties and, as a consequence thereof, modern version differs from the Muslim theory in the following respects:

1. It gives primacy to 'space, relegating Time to one of its dimensions, i.e., its fourth dimension, as opposed to Muslim thinkers who have primacy to Time; and this modern approach is mainly responsible for the present-day materialism both in science and philosophy;
2. It has yet to discover some other, more important, dimensions of Space-Time relativity which, when discovered, may further revolutionize the world-view of Science. It may lead modern physics to undiscovered spiritual aspects of reality which, at present, fall beside its scope owing to its own limitations. In fairness to modern genius, however, it may be said that thinkers like Woozley have admitted the possibilities of various levels or

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[106] al-Ghazali, op. cit., p. 15; Eng. tr., pp. 38-9.
[107] Iqbal, op. cit., p. 75.

grades of being;[108] though they certainly have their Muslim predecessors in the field, as shown in the course of discussion.

In the above few pages I have tried to present before you, the learned assembly of the Muslim scholars, who have traveled from far and wide to my country and to the venue of this present Conference, my humblest broodings on some of the aspects on which our Muslim scholars have made invaluable and meritorious contributions to the world fund of philosophy, especially those whose views have exerted marked impact on some very recent schools of thought in the West.

[108] Woozley, op. cit.