INTRODUCTION

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Comparing Neoplatonism with Islamic thought reminds one of different perspectives of visitors to Spain. A European may take Spain to be another Western country like France or England. But those who are familiar with the Islamic Middle East and with North Africa feel a special affinity with the Arabesque and the Moorish dimensions of the Spanish tradition. In the same manner, a student of Islamic philosophy picks up different messages from Plato and Plotinus from those received by a contemporary Western philosopher who reads the same texts. For the Muslims, Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus are part of the Islamic tradition in the same manner that Abraham is regarded to be a prophet of Islam. These identifications are not mistaken. Regardless of one's perspective and orientation, there is an undeniable affinity between Neoplatonism and Islamic thought for at least the following reasons:

(1) **Similarity of Origin**: Both the Neoplatonists and the Muslims learned part of their philosophy by reading Plato. Plotinus was a close student of Plato's philosophy, and Muslims studied the Arabic translations of most of the Platonic dialogues. Both consequently asked the same Platonic questions and inquired about the same topics, e.g., the ontological status of the numbers and the nature of beauty.

(2) **Availability of Neoplatonic Texts**: Arabic paraphrases of Neoplatonic texts were studied by Muslims. In addition, Greek philosophers took refuge in the Sassanian courts of Persian kings

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prior to the rise of Islam. Neoplatonism was directly available to the Muslims.

(3) **Spatial and Temporal Proximity**:   Plotinus and other Neoplatonists lived only a few centuries before the rise of Islam, and many of them were Egyptian Greeks.

(4) **Mystical Perspectives**:   Plotinus' system, like the Pythagorean mysteries and the Platonic myths, is akin in content to mysticism, e.g., Islamic sufism, Jewish Kabbalah, and the Jungian doctrine of the individuation process. Accordingly, in many issues, technical Muslim philosophers left Aristotle and Islamic theology and embraced Neoplatonic doctrines, e.g., choosing emanationism over creation theory or the doctrine of co-eternity.

For these reasons our inquiry into the particularities of the relationship between Islamic philosophy and Neoplatonism is appropriate. For clarity we have divided the essays in this volume into three groups. The first focuses on the general contexts in which Islamic Neoplatonism developed. The second focuses upon various philosophical issues which clarify similarities and differences between Neoplatonism and Islamic thought. The last inquires into various Neoplatonic dimensions of Islamic mystical and religious doctrines.

As one might expect of the fourteen essays in this volume, five use Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) as the representative of Islamic philosophical mysticism with Neoplatonic tendencies and six focus on the various dimensions of emanation and return. Together the essays constitute a most comprehensive study of the relationship between Neoplatonism and Islamic thought, and for this reason they are a contribution both to the study of the history of philosophy and to inquiries into the common mystical themes, essential to all traditions developed from the Platonic dialogues.

Let us proceed with a summary of some of the salient features of the essays in this volume.

R. C. Taylor, "A Critical Analysis of the Structure of the *Kalām fī mahd al-khair (Liber de causis)*," discusses the structure of the Arabic version of *The Elements of Theology* of Proclus. Taylor points out the relationship between this text and the so-called "Theology of Aristotle," which in fact consisted of translations and paraphrases of parts of the *Enneads* of Plotinus. Taylor begins by discussing the influences of the Latin translation of the *Discourse* in the Latin West up to the thirteenth century. He attributes the notion

of the creation of all things by God to an Aristotelian account of monotheistic doctrine found in the latter. Thereafter he turns his attention to previous scholarship on this work by authors such as Aquinas, Badawi, and Anawati. Unlike Aquinas and Anawati, Taylor divides "the discourse" into seven sets of propositions on "General Principles, True Being, The Intelligence, Epistemology, Infinity, The First Cause, and Substances." He points to both *The Elements of Theology* and the *Enneads* of Plotinus as sources of the *Discourse*. Finally he holds the thesis that the *Discourse* is a single unitary philosophical work, in which the author is free to modify his sources in accordance with his own thought in the tradition of *Plotiniana Arabica*, and concludes (1) that while the *Discourse* lacked emphasis on the rigors of philosophical arguments, it should be considered to be a source of Neoplatonic inspiration, and (2) its importance lies in both the Islamic and the Latin tradition. In his footnotes Taylor points to ample references for those who wish to continue their research in the Arabic sources of Neoplatonism.

In "The Relevance of Avicennian Neoplatonism," Joseph Owens examines the degree of Aristotelianism in the Avicennian metaphysics. He points out that Avicenna, like other medieval Muslim thinkers, took the Aristotelian first efficient cause as the one God from whom all entities were generated. While the Aristotelian substances were totally distinct from each other, the Muslim Avicenna sought a unity of being in the Necessary Existent which, unlike the Neoplatonic One, was not beyond all existents and beings. In spite of its differences from Plotinus, there is a kinship in Avicenna to the Neoplatonic mentality that seeks a unique source for all being. Owens points out that Avicenna's threefold division of nature in itself, as existent in the real world and as existent in human thought, influenced Latin scholasticism, as was also observed by Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Duns Scotus. Aquinas, of course, rejected attributing to nature in itself any being whatsoever. The essence-existence distinction as developed in Avicenna made an important impression on all later Latin Western philosophy up to the seventeenth century. And it survived, in fact, beyond this date to the modern era. The presence of mind and its innate ideas, what is epistemologically primitive for Descartes, is inherited from the basic Avicennian distinction. Avicenna's insights resulted in a philosophical view, which allowed isolation of the basic object of

philosophical thought from the really existent sensible universe. Owens closes by inquiring into the significance of the development of the Neoplatonic conception of being for Avicenna's notion of a finite thing's proper being, in contradistinction to the existence received from a cause. The importance of this idea lies not only in its significance for the history of western philosophy, but also in how it accounts for the modern philosophical mentality.

P. Morewedge, in "The Neoplatonic Structure of Some Islamic Mystical Doctrines," begins with four suppositions about the nature of Islamic mysticism in relationship to the following themes: the unity of being, the mediator figure, the way of salvation, and the language of symbolic allegory. Next, Morewedge focuses upon three dimensions of ontology in Plotinus and in Ibn Sīnā, which he finds to be representative of the systems in question.

In comparing the "One" of Plotinus with the "Necessary Existent" of Ibn Sīnā, Morewedge notes that while they are similar in their dependence relation on the world, there is a fundamental syntactical difference between the two systems. Specifically, the One of Plotinus, like the Form of the Good of Plato, is beyond being, whereas the Necessary Existent of Ibn Sīnā can be constructed from his notions of being and modality. Similarities and differences between the two systems emerge in the manner in which they use process languages to reject the substance-event language of the categories.

Finally, on the topic of norms in metaphysics both in the relationship between existents and the Good, as well as in the notion of the mediator figure, Plotinus and Ibn Sīnā agree. There are minor differences, such as the significance of practical life and the relationship between politics and philosophy. On the latter issue Islamic philosophy follows Plato's insight instead of Neoplatonic asceticism.

Morewedge concludes by noting that even though there are strong structural resemblances between the two systems, there was in fact no school of Islamic Neoplatonism. Islamic mysticism, however, contains development of Neoplatonic themes. Just as Neoplatonism cannot be deduced from Platonism but is a continuation of topics found in the writings of Plato, Islamic mysticism is also a further development of themes found in Islamic philosophy.

In "Quiddity and Universality in Avicenna," M. E. Marmura argues that for Avicenna, essence, nature, or quiddity (*al-māhiyya*) is different from a universal in itself and is related to a universal only in an accidental manner. Marmura points out that for Avicenna, a universal may be predicable of the Many outside the mind, or of a set of non-actualized contingents, or of that which, in fact, is exactly one instance, e.g., the sun. The universal, which exists in the mind, consists of quiddity and the accident universality. But in itself, quiddity does not include universality, existence, or unity-plurality features. For Avicenna, this doctrine has philosophical implications in two fields: (1) the logical problem when either universality or particularity is included in the definition of a quiddity which forms a component of a Porphyrian predicable, and (2) the metaphysical problem of the one and many in the Avicennian ontological context.

From the logical perspective, universality and particularity are mutually exclusive and thus cannot be included in the definition of a quiddity such as "animality." To so include them would make animality apply only to certain individuals or to no specific individual. Avicenna's solution lies in treating quiddity as a *meaning* irrespective of various perspectives relating to its ontological dimensions, e.g., names of a particular animal in the non-mental realm or accidentality signifying a universal feature. Quiddity in itself is neither a universal nor a particular; its universality or particularity is an addition that takes place in the mind. From the metaphysical perspective, quiddity in itself is neither one nor many. When it is realized in the actual world, it exists particularized in the concrete and becomes one, since oneness is a necessary concomitant.

Marmura probes deeper into various senses of the Avicennian doctrine by distinguishing between quiddity as (1) an abstraction from particular circumstances or external reality or other general features such as universality, and (2) as an existent entity in the mental domain. The latter becomes evident in Avicenna's rejection of Platonic realism. But neither quiddity nor universality in itself should be confused with its existence in the mind. The question of its mental existence is extraneous to its being what it is. The former is its mental genus which can be contrasted with its logical genus. Marmura concludes his penetrating essay by making explicit some of the ambiguities implied in the Avicennian distinctions between the logical genus and the mental genus.

In "Self-Knowing in Plato, Plotinus, and Avicenna," L. Westra examines systematically the possibility of and the need for "self-knowledge" in the systems of the three philosophers in question. In the context of Platonic epistemology Westra points to the difficulty of the possibility of knowledge of the self. Since only ideas are knowable, we should examine first the relationship between the self and the realm of ideas. For Plato the self is obviously the soul. Since souls are corruptible, no soul can be an idea. The demiurge, as the universal soul is the agent of motion, while ideas are all static. The best proximation of self-knowledge occurs when the concept of the self transcends the particular person's soul but relates to the soul, as soul-qua-soul.

In the case of Plotinus, Westra points out that the self-soul is understood in the context of the process of self-realization. Consequently, self-knowledge is a kind of a therapy which is understood in terms of a drive for oneness. A dimension of this ascent is a "contact" type of knowledge, but the nature of self-knowledge in Plotinus is a mystical refinement of the ordinary sense of "self-knowledge."

Finally, Westra turns her attention to Avicenna, for whom self-knowledge once again is associated with the ethics of self-realization. The problematic issue raised deals with the nature of the union between the soul and the Necessary Existent, since no substantial depiction of the self can achieve an essential union with another substantial entity. Westra concludes by presenting a comparative analysis of the theories in question and by making explicit the difficulties embedded in all theories of self-knowledge expressed in the context of self-realization.

N. Heer, in "Al-Rāzī and al-Ṭūsī on Ibn Sīnā's Theory of Emanation," focuses on Ibn Sīnā's theory and al-Ṭūsī's defense of Ibn Sīnā's position. The controversy singles out problematic issues in Neoplatonic emanationism, such as multiple effects emanating from the simple first, the possibility of being an agent, and the metaphysical implications of the analogy of a sphere. The essay makes clear the sophisticated development of the prototype of Plotinian emanation theory in medieval Islam; the controversy stimulated the development of various senses of modalities and self-knowledge.

T. A. Druart, in "Al-Fārābī, Emanation, and Metaphysics," clarifies the significance of the theory of emanation in al-Fārābī's system. Druart begins by showing that for al-Fārābī, *Metaphysics* dealt with a universal science which included theology. She brings out the various complexities of al-Fārābī's views on Aristotle's philosophy, concluding that al-Fārābī needed to go beyond Aristotle's system to develop his own theory, especially with respect to the creation-vs.-emanation controversy. Sometimes al-Fārābī selectively modifies the Aristotelian theory, e.g., by making proximity with the active intellect the touchstone of man's ultimate happiness. Druart undertakes a detailed analysis of the place of al-Fārābī's emanationism in various texts by showing how in his commentaries on Aristotle's metaphysics, emanationism takes a less prominent place than in texts where al-Fārābī focuses on specific philosophical problems independent of Aristotle's own views.

P. E. Walker, in "The Universal Soul and the Particular Soul in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism," clarifies the relationship between the two souls in question. Walker focuses on Kirmānī's views as they differed from the doctrines of Sijistānī, Nasafī, and A. H. Rāzī. One major issue deals with the problem of the perfection or the impurity of the soul in its original state. Another deals with the relationship between time and the soul. The relationship between the universal and the particular soul is clarified in various perspectives, including the issue of the "part-whole" possibility, of being an impression or a trace of one another, and of the possible dualistic implications of the distinctions between them. The controversy took the philosophers to the normative dimensions of primal matter, to the place of man in the universe, and to the generation of worlds out of one another. Walker concludes by pointing out the complexity of the positions of the four Ismāʿīlī thinkers on this topic and the spirit of free controversy which was permitted in the Ismāʿīlī religious tradition.

M. A. Alibhai, in "The Transformation of Spiritual Substance into Bodily Substance in Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism," focuses on Sijistānī's theory of emanation of bodily substance from non-bodily substance. Matter, the utterly indeterminable entity, becomes corporeal when it receives form. Since form and pure indeterminability are both non-corporeal, one asks how the union of these results in corporeality. Materialistic opponents of Neoplatonism

criticized the Islamic followers of emanationism on this point; the Ismāʿīlī writers in turn attempted to provide a satisfactory answer to their objections. Sijīstānī changes the argument from a combination of matter and form to one of change and transformation. The two realms of spirituality and materiality have substantiality in common, while their variation relates to fineness and coarseness of the substance in question. In his analyses and evaluations of these controversies Alibhai points to various facets of the controversy, including the minor issue of the geometry of combinations of solids and the departure of Sijīstānī from Plotinus on the categories. Alibhai's essay brings into sharp focus Ismāʿīlī developments of Neoplatonism in Islam and the controversy among the Muslim physicists who objected to the main themes of Islamic Neoplatonism.

In "The Circle of Spiritual Ascent According to Al-Qūnawī," Chittick makes a special contribution to this volume in the following specific ways. First, he describes extensively the system of a member of the school of Ibn ʿArabī, one of the most important Islamic traditions akin to Neoplatonism. Second, Chittick's essay makes available, for the first time, translations from Al-Qūnawī's texts, which illustrate to the reader the spirit of Islamic mystical emanationism. Finally, Chittick compares carefully Islamic with Neoplatonic Greek concepts to show that the affinity is due not to borrowing but to having similar types of mystical experience. Chittick focuses on several aspects of Islamic Neoplatonism; among these are a special mystical vocabulary, such as "unveiling" and "mystical perception," the concept of the unity of being, the circle of ascent for the perfect man, the Divine Names, and the correspondence between man the microcosm and the Divine Reality.

In "The Return to 'The One' in the Philosophy of Najm al-Dīn Al-Kubrā," David Martin begins by tracing the religious sources of the Islamic doctrine of the return to the One, before focusing on Najm al-Dīn's own system with emphasis on the following notions: "Union with the Great Name," as the Name of that Essence which constitutes the medium for the union with the mystic; the degrees of proximity to God in the context of the stages of self-realization, the union of the human and the Divine Will which continues through the annihilation of the human will, the attainment of Unity through the Absorption into the One as a response to the epiphany of the Divine attributes, and finally various senses of union. Martin's account

brings the reader to the central theme of a totally sufic vision of the ascent, in which the Neoplatonic insight into the ascent to the One is extensively elaborated in psychological and normative dimensions.

In "Revelation and 'Natural' Knowledge of God," V. G. Potter concentrates on the possibility of revelation without the possibility of "natural" knowledge of God. While focusing both on the epistemological and the ontological components of this topic in the context of monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, he limits the perimeters of his investigation to Plotinus, Iqbal, Aquinas, and Pierce. Potter presents the new insight that the Neoplatonic and other Greek notions of knowledge are present in "knowing" in the model of "seeing" or "taking a look at." Such a view of knowledge cannot give us a natural knowledge of God. If we reject this "visual" model of knowledge, then the transcendence and immanence of God imply one another, and some sort of "natural" knowledge of God is a necessary condition for the possibility of Revelation.

The essays included in this text bear out that in the Islamic tradition Neoplatonic themes were elaborated beyond the expression of the particular prototype in the Greek tradition. In addition, the greatest cluster of Neoplatonic themes is found in religious mystical writings, which in fact transform purely orthodox doctrines such as creation into doctrines such as emanationism, which allow for a better framework for the expression of Neoplatonic themes and the emergence of the mystical themes of the ascent and mystical union.

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