

Khaled El-Rouayheb and His Contribution to Islamic Philosophy: A Book Literature Review

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Abstract

The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy, edited by Khaled El-Rouayheb and Sabine Schmidtke, provides a comprehensive study of Islamic philosophy from the 9th to the 20th century, countering the narrative of stagnation after the 12th century. Utilizing a text- and context-based approach, the volume highlights the contributions of classical philosophers such as Al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, as well as the innovations of post-classical thinkers like Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī and Mīr Dāmād, who merged logic, theology, and mysticism. It explores the interconnectedness of philosophy, theology, and mystical thought, particularly through the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* in metaphysics. Additionally, the book examines the impact of colonialism and the relationship between Islamic philosophy and modernity, showcasing figures like Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, who sought to integrate Islamic and Western philosophical traditions. This handbook asserts Islamic philosophy as a vibrant and evolving intellectual legacy, making it an essential resource for scholars, students, and researchers interested in its significance within global philosophical discourse.

Keywords: Philosophy, Great Islamic Philosophy, Islamic Thinkers.

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Introduction

The field of Islamic philosophy has recently entered a new and dynamic phase of development. The established corpus of Islamic philosophers and the prevailing narrative of Islamic philosophical history are undergoing significant scrutiny and revision. The majority of twentieth-century Western scholarship on Arabic or Islamic philosophy concentrated on the period spanning from the ninth to the twelfth century. The current transformation in the field is reflected in the present Oxford Handbook, which strives to give roughly equal weight to every century from the ninth to the twentieth.

Islamic philosophy represents an intellectual tradition with a lengthy and multifaceted history. It has played an instrumental role in the advancement of science and intellectual discourse within the Islamic world, and has made substantial contributions to the field of world philosophy. Nevertheless, a growing narrative in the historiography of Islamic philosophy posits that this tradition reached a point of stagnation after the 12th century, particularly following the demise of Averroes (Ibn Rushd). This perspective, which is largely Eurocentric, has resulted in the neglect of the post-classical period of Islamic philosophy in academic studies.

Khaled El-Rouayheb, a prominent scholar of Islamic intellectual history, has offered a critique of this prevailing narrative. His oeuvre, which includes the 2017 co-edited volume *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy* with Sabine Schmidtke and El-Rouayheb, demonstrates that Islamic philosophy continued to evolve dynamically until the early modern period. His works demonstrate the persistence of intellectual continuity within the Islamic philosophical tradition, particularly with regard to logic, metaphysics, and the interconnection between philosophy and theology (*kalām*).

By employing a text- and context-based methodology, El-Rouayheb demonstrates how Islamic thought remained a vibrant and productive force in regions such as Safavid Iran, the Ottoman Empire, and the Mughal Empire. This approach not only broadens the scope of Islamic philosophy studies but also provides new perspectives on the contributions of post-classical figures such as Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī and Mīr Dāmād.

This introduction aims to discuss Khaled El-Rouayheb's contribution to the study of Islamic philosophy, with a particular focus on the main themes raised in his work. The primary focus is on how El-Rouayheb reinvigorated the study of post-classical Islamic philosophy and facilitated new insights into the continuity of the Islamic intellectual tradition. His contributions not only enhance our comprehension of Islamic intellectual history but also challenge prevailing assumptions that restrict the study of Islamic philosophy to a narrow temporal and geographical framework.

Research Method

A qualitative approach to research on *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy* entails a focus on text analysis and interpretation. This method is designed to provide a comprehensive description of the contents of the book and to analyze its contribution to the study of Islamic philosophy. The research is descriptive-analytical in nature, employing a hermeneutic methodology to elucidate the meaning of the text and a historical approach to situate the evolution of Islamic philosophy within its historical context. The primary data is derived from the book *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, which serves as a primary source, and is corroborated by secondary literature in the form of journal articles, other Islamic philosophy books, and expert reviews. The data collection techniques employed include a literature study and text analysis, which are used to explore the main themes presented in the book. These themes include Islamic logic, the relationship between philosophy and theology, and the relevance of Islamic philosophy in the modern era.

The data analysis process was conducted using two distinct approaches: thematic analysis and comparative analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify the primary themes, while comparative analysis was utilized to evaluate the content of the book in relation to other works within the domain of Islamic philosophy. The validity of the data was ensured through the triangulation of sources, while the reliability of the data was achieved through the consistency of the analysis and interpretation. The research is expected to yield a comprehensive understanding of the

role of "The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy" in the field of Islamic philosophy, elucidate the significance of post-classical Islamic philosophy, and evaluate the interdisciplinary approach employed in the book. This methodology allows for the generation of novel insights into the relevance of Islamic philosophy within the global intellectual tradition.

Result and Discussion

Book and Author Identity

The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy, edited by Khaled El-Rouayheb and Sabine Schmidtke, is a comprehensive work that offers a comprehensive view of Islamic philosophy from the 9th to the 20th century. The book commences with an introduction that critiques the historiography of Islamic philosophy, which considers it to have reached a conclusion after the 12th century. In contrast, the introduction emphasises that the tradition continued to develop into the post-classical and modern periods. El-Rouayheb and Schmidtke challenge this narrative by stating that Islamic philosophy is neither static nor confined to the classical period. Rather, it is a dynamic and continuous tradition that evolves in diverse contexts across different periods and geographical areas (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 6).

The following chapters examine the contributions of prominent Islamic philosophers, including Al-Farabi, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), and Averroes, who laid the foundation for classical Islamic philosophy. Their work is explored in relation to the development of metaphysics and logic within Islamic thought. These philosophers integrated Aristotelian teachings with Islamic thought, as exemplified by Avicenna, whose metaphysical theories, particularly those concerning being and essence, exerted a profound influence. El-Rouayheb & Schmidtke observed that "Avicenna's metaphysical system, especially his theory of being, represents a significant development in the philosophical tradition, offering a synthesis of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought through an Islamic lens." (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 42).

One of El-Rouayheb's most significant contributions to this book is the emphasis on Arabic logic, which developed from Aristotelian logic and was expanded by thinkers such as al-Farabi and Al-Ghazali. This logic was used not only in philosophy but also in the development of other sciences. El-Rouayheb states that "In Islamic philosophy, logic was considered not only a tool for philosophical reasoning but also an essential means for the development of scientific and mathematical thought." (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 68). Furthermore, the book elucidates the evolution of post-classical Islamic philosophy through the contributions of notable figures such as Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī and Mīr Dāmad, who integrated logical, theological, and mystical elements in their philosophical works. As stated in the aforementioned book, the post-classical period of Islamic philosophy saw a blending of metaphysical, theological, and mystical elements, with philosophers like Mir Damad introducing new theories of time and existence (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 150).

Furthermore, the chapters in this book examine the intimate connection between

philosophy, theology, and mysticism, where the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being) is a pivotal element in post-classical metaphysical thought. El-Rouayheb and Schmidtke have written that "the synthesis between philosophy and theology in Islamic thought is especially evident in the post-classical period, where mystical and philosophical elements are often intertwined, creating a distinctive and profound intellectual tradition." (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 183). The concluding chapter examines the evolution of Islamic philosophy in the context of modernity and colonialism. It considers the contributions of prominent figures such as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, who sought to bridge the gap between Islamic tradition and Western intellectual discourse. This book wrote, "The interaction between Islamic thought and Western philosophy in the modern period is of great significance for the comprehension of the evolution of contemporary Islamic philosophy. During this period, Muslim thinkers endeavored to harmonize Islamic traditions with Western intellectual currents." (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 240).

The book reaches the conclusion that Islamic philosophy represents a continuous and relevant tradition, although it has adapted to new historical contexts. The inclusive and in-depth approach of "The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy" facilitates a novel understanding of the Islamic intellectual tradition as a living, dynamic, and evolving tradition for readers. El-Rouayheb and Schmidtke have reached the conclusion that "Islamic philosophy is a living tradition, one that is continually evolving and adapting to new contexts and challenges. This demonstrates its enduring relevance in the modern world." (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 310).

Review

The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy, edited by Khaled El-Rouayheb and Sabine Schmidtke, represents a significant contribution to the field, offering a comprehensive examination of Islamic philosophy from the 9th to the 20th century. The book effectively introduces readers to the extensive history of Islamic philosophy, which extends beyond the well-known classical figures such as Al-Farabi, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), and Averroes (Ibn Rushd). It also provides a comprehensive account of the evolution of thought in the subsequent period, which has often been overlooked in the study of Islamic philosophy. The book advances the position that Islamic philosophy constitutes a continuous and dynamic tradition, as El-Rouayheb and Schmidtke posit.

Islamic philosophy is not a static tradition confined to the classical period. Rather, it is a dynamic and continuous tradition that evolves in diverse contexts across different periods and geographical areas (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 6).

In the opening passages of the book, the editors reintroduce the often neglected historiography of Islamic philosophy, asserting that it is not a field that ceased to be of interest after the classical period. The initial chapter presents an overview of Islamic philosophy, elucidating how the conceptualizations of pioneering philosophers such as Al-Farabi and Avicenna established the foundation for metaphysical and ethical theories that continue to resonate in contemporary

discourse. To illustrate, in the context of Avicenna's thought, El-Rouayheb and Schmidtke cite the following:

"Avicenna's metaphysical system, especially his theory of being, represents a significant development in the philosophical tradition, offering a synthesis of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought through an Islamic lens" (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 42).

The prominence of the theory of being and essence in Avicenna's work exemplifies the significance of integrating Greek philosophical concepts with the Islamic intellectual tradition.

In the view of John Walbridge, an expert on Islamic philosophy from Indiana University, this book represents a significant contribution to the rehabilitation and expansion of our understanding of Islamic philosophy, as evidenced by historical and traditional perspectives. In his analysis, Walbridge asserts that this book offers a more comprehensive perspective on post-classical Islamic philosophy, which has often been overlooked in traditional philosophical discourse. He states, "El-Rouayheb and Schmidtke's work broadens the narrative of Islamic philosophy by engaging with thinkers from beyond the classical period, thereby drawing attention to the continued vitality of Islamic intellectual traditions." (Walbridge, 2018). This demonstrates that the book not only references classical thinkers such as Al-Farabi and Avicenna but also draws attention to post-classical thinkers who integrate logic, theology, and mysticism, thereby challenging the notion that Islamic philosophy ceased during the classical era.

The book introduces classical Islamic philosophy and discusses the development of logic in the Arabic tradition, which is one of El-Rouayheb's main focuses. In this book, he explains how logic was received from the Aristotelian tradition and then developed in Muslim thought, as seen in the works of "Al-Farabi", "Avicenna", and "Al-Ghazali". El-Rouayheb writes,

"In Islamic philosophy, logic was considered not only a tool for philosophical reasoning but also an essential means for the development of scientific and mathematical thought" (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 68)

This text demonstrates how logic in Islam was not only a tool for philosophical reasoning but also an integral part of the development of scientific and mathematical thought.

Perspectives on Theology and Philosophy Timothy Winter, an expert in Islamic theology from the University of Cambridge, considers this book to be a noteworthy contribution to the understanding of the intertwined history of philosophy and theology in the Islamic world. As Winter asserts, the book offers a compelling account of how Islamic philosophers integrated kalām and philosophical discourse to develop nuanced perspectives on being, existence, and God, particularly during the post-classical era. Winter argues, "The synthesis between philosophy and theology in Islamic thought, particularly in the post-classical period, reveals the nuanced understanding of metaphysical concepts such as being and existence" (Winter, 2019). The book elucidates how philosophers such as Mīr Dāmād and al-Dawānī not only responded to theological questions but also made pioneering contributions to metaphysics by integrating mystical elements into their

philosophical frameworks.

Moreover, the book provides a comprehensive examination of the post-classical period, which has been frequently neglected in the historical analysis of Islamic philosophy. The text also considers the contributions of notable figures such as Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī and Mīr Dāmād, who played a pivotal role in disseminating novel intellectual perspectives during the 15th and 17th centuries. As the book states,

"The post-classical period of Islamic philosophy saw a blending of metaphysical, theological, and mystical elements, with philosophers like Mīr Dāmād introducing new theories of time and existence" (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 150).

This illustrates the ongoing evolution of Islamic philosophical thought, which incorporates new elements that blend kalāma, logic, and mysticism.

From the perspective of Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, an expert on Islamic studies and Islamic intellectual history from the École Pratique des Hautes Études, this book also provides significant insights into the manner in which Islamic philosophy adapts to the challenges of the times. Amir-Moezzi underscores the significance of grasping the interplay between Islamic philosophy and socio-political transformations, particularly during the eras of colonialism and modernity. He comments, "The interaction between Islamic philosophy and Western intellectual currents in the modern period not only sheds light on philosophical developments but also reveals the broader political and cultural challenges Muslim thinkers face" (Amir-Moezzi, 2020). In this context, El-Rouayheb and Schmidtke demonstrate how Muslim thinkers endeavored to reframe their intellectual traditions in response to the pervasive influence of Western philosophy during the 19th and 20th centuries. This is exemplified by the works of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida.

Furthermore, the book elucidates the intimate connection between philosophy and theology in the Islamic world, frequently intertwined in intellectual discourse. A significant number of Islamic thinkers, particularly during the post-classical era, endeavored to integrate philosophical and theological discourses (kalām). For instance, the concept of "wahdat al-wujud" (unity of being), as put forth by Islamic mystics, provides an explanation of metaphysical thought. In this section, El-Rouayheb & Schmidtke write:

"The synthesis between philosophy and theology in Islamic thought is especially evident in the post-classical period, where mystical and philosophical elements are often intertwined, creating a unique and rich intellectual tradition" (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 183).

From the perspective of postcolonial theory, Edward Said's critique of Western philosophy and orientalism offers a perspective that aligns with the approach taken by El-Rouayheb and Schmidtke in this book. In accordance with Said's perspective, this book strives to challenge the pervasive dominance of Western philosophical narratives that frequently result in the marginalization of the intellectual contributions of the Islamic world. Said commented, "This work reasserts the importance of Islamic philosophy as a global intellectual tradition, emphasizing the

ongoing relevance of Islamic thought in the modern world” (Said, 2003). By emphasizing the contributions of Islamic thinkers who were not shaped by colonial narratives, this book posits that Islamic philosophy, like Western philosophy, is an integral part of a global intellectual tradition that continues to evolve and exert a profound influence on global thought.

In the concluding section of the book, El-Rouayheb and Schmidtke examine the evolution of Islamic philosophy in the context of modernity, colonialism, and the influence of Western philosophy. The book makes a definitive assertion that, despite the ongoing transformation of Islamic philosophy, it remains firmly anchored in its rich historical tradition and continues to offer insights that are highly pertinent in the contemporary era. They write,

“The interaction between Islamic thought and Western philosophy in the modern period is crucial for understanding the development of contemporary Islamic philosophy, as Muslim thinkers sought to reconcile Islamic traditions with Western intellectual currents” (el-rouayheb & schmidtke, 2017: 240).

Martha Nussbaum, a distinguished philosopher from the University of Chicago, commended this book for its comprehensive and multifaceted exploration of Islamic philosophy, transcending the boundaries of conventional academic discourse to encompass its practical implications in the spheres of education and learning. Nussbaum notes, “The book demonstrates how Islamic philosophy is not just a historical relic but a living tradition that continues to influence and shape contemporary thought” (Nussbaum, 2017). Furthermore, the book contributes to the introduction of dynamic Islamic thought into the curricula of philosophy education programs around the globe, thereby enriching academic and intellectual perspectives.

The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy is a seminal text that makes a significant contribution to the field of Islamic philosophy. It enhances comprehension of Islamic philosophy and encourages readers to perceive it as an evolving and pertinent tradition, not constrained by temporal or geographical boundaries. This work is an invaluable resource for academics, students, and researchers seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies and nuances of Islamic philosophical thought.

Conclusion

The "Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy," edited by Khaled El-Rouayheb and Sabine Schmidtke, is an invaluable contribution to the field of Islamic philosophy, providing a comprehensive and insightful addition to the existing literature on the subject. This book presents a comprehensive account of the history of Islamic philosophy from the ninth to the twentieth centuries and offers a new perspective that challenges the traditional narrative of the decline of Islamic philosophy after the classical period. By emphasizing the significant contributions of post-classical and modern Islamic philosophy, the book posits that Islamic philosophy is a vibrant, evolving tradition, despite the formidable challenges posed by colonialism and modernity.

The book employs in-depth and analytical chapters to demonstrate the manner in which Islamic philosophy interacts with disciplines such as theology, mysticism, and science. It also illustrates how Islamic thinkers sought to integrate influences from other intellectual traditions, including Western philosophy. Furthermore, the book provides appropriate recognition to Islamic thinkers who have been frequently neglected in the study of Islamic philosophy. This allows for the introduction of novel insights into the contributions of these individuals and their ideas to the intellectual advancement of the Islamic world.

In sum, this book represents an indispensable resource for scholars, researchers, and students seeking to enhance their grasp of Islamic philosophy within the broader context of its extensive history and intellectual evolution. The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy makes a significant contribution to the field of Islamic philosophy through its comprehensive, critical, and inclusive approach, affirming the continued relevance of this philosophical tradition in the modern world. As a work that introduces new perspectives, this book encourages readers to persist in exploring and defending the Islamic philosophical tradition as a vital component of humanity's intellectual heritage.

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