

Philosophy Handouts-Lecture#5

Islamic Philosophy

Semitic Culture/Philosophy

Islamic philosophy is deeply rooted in the Semitic cultural traditions, which also encompass Judaism and Christianity. These Abrahamic religions originated in the Arabian Peninsula around 5000 years ago. One of the fundamental beliefs in these traditions is that the universe is finite, and that God actively intervenes in human affairs. According to these religious beliefs, their followers are the chosen ones of God.

The historical development of monotheistic faiths is marked by significant figures such as Prophet Moses (Musa AS), Prophet David (Daud AS), and Prophet Solomon (Suleman AS). David, who lived around 970 BC, was granted kingship, and his successor Solomon ruled around 832 BC. The title "Son of God" and "Messiah" were attributed to David, as mentioned in Genesis 6:02 and Psalm 29:1. Jewish suffering over the centuries gave rise to prophecies regarding redemption and the arrival of a Messiah who would restore the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ, whose Hebrew title "Messiah" translates to "Christ" in Greek, played a crucial role in this belief system. His teachings were spread by his students, Peter and Paul, leading to the establishment of the Roman Church and the doctrine of the Trinity.

Elements of Islamic Philosophy

Islamic philosophy is deeply intertwined with theology (kalam) and Sufism (mysticism). Key domains include metaphysics, cosmology, ethics, epistemology, and teleology. Islamic thinkers like Al-Farabi, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Al-Ghazali, and Averroes (Ibn Rushd) made significant contributions to philosophical discourse, harmonizing reason with revelation.

Metaphysics in Islamic Philosophy

God in Islamic Thought

The argument from design is a significant theme in Islamic metaphysics. The complexity and order of the universe imply an intelligent Creator, known in Islam as Allah. This notion aligns with the Quranic assertion that everything in the cosmos bears testimony to God's existence and unity.

The Design Argument

A famous analogy used in contemporary philosophy describes a person finding a watch in the desert and reasoning that such a complex object must have a creator. Similarly, the universe, with its intricate laws and precise design, must have an intelligent designer—God.

God as the First Cause and the Unmoved Mover

Building on Aristotelian thought, Islamic philosophers like Avicenna and Al-Ghazali argue that God is the First Cause—the necessary being whose existence explains the existence of all contingent beings. This aligns with the concept of God as the Unmoved Mover, who initiates all motion but remains unchanged.

Reflective and Non-reflective Beliefs

Justin Barrett, a cognitive scientist, categorizes belief formation into:

1. **Non-reflective beliefs** – Intuitive and experience-based.
2. **Reflective beliefs** – Conscious, rational deliberations.

Islamic epistemology integrates both, using heart-based appeals (faith) and rational arguments (reason) to affirm God's existence.

Allah as the Creator

The Arabic term “Allah” consists of “Al” (the) and “Lah” (worthy of worship). This linguistic structure underscores God’s transcendence and uniqueness. The Quran asserts that human beings instinctively turn to God in times of crisis, reinforcing the innate awareness of a higher power (fiṭratAllāh).

Cosmology in Islamic Philosophy

Islamic cosmology describes the universe as a creation of God’s command. The Quran provides insights into the origin and expansion of the universe:

Creation of the Universe

- The Quran states: *“Be! And it is”* (Al-Baqarah 2:117) and *“We parted the heavens and the earth”* (21:30), implying a singular origin and subsequent expansion.
- Early interpretations by scholars like Ibn Kathir suggest that the universe was initially a single entity, later divided into multiple heavens and earths.
- Maurice Bucaille interprets the Quranic term “seven heavens” as indicative of multiple celestial bodies in the universe.

Expansion of the Universe

- The Quran states: *“We built the heavens with power, and verily, We are expanding it”* (51:47), aligning with modern cosmological theories about the universe’s continuous expansion.

Sun, Moon, and Celestial Bodies

- The Quran describes the sun as a source of light and the moon as a derived light (12:04).
- Celestial bodies move in precise orbits (21:33, 41:37).

Teleology in Islamic Philosophy (Purpose of Creation)

The purpose of existence, as per Islamic thought, is to worship and recognize God. The Quran emphasizes:

- *“He created for you all that is in the earth”* (2:29).
- *“Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest”* (13:28).
- *“Man, you strive hard to get closer to your Lord, and so you will finally meet Him”* (84:6).

Anthropology in Islamic Philosophy

Creation of Humans

- The Quran narrates that humans were created from clay and a “quintessence of fluid” (15:26, 32:7-8).
- Adam, the first human, was molded from the earth and given a divine soul.

Composition of Human Beings

Humans consist of three essential components:

1. **Body** – Comparable to hardware, carrying out the soul's desires.
2. **Soul** – The self, capable of reason and emotion.
3. **Spirit (Ruh)** – Known only to God, sustaining life (17:84).

The Function of the Soul

The soul undergoes different states:

- **Nafs Ammarah** – The commanding self, inclining towards desires (12:53).
- **Nafs Lawwamah** – The self-reproaching soul, experiencing guilt (75:2).
- **Nafs Mutmainnah** – The tranquil soul, content with God (89:27-28).

Predestination and Free Will

Islamic philosophy balances divine decree (Qadr) with human agency. The Quran acknowledges trials in life (2:155) while emphasizing that individuals are accountable for their choices.

In conclusion, Islamic philosophy integrates metaphysics, cosmology, theology, and ethics, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding existence, the nature of God, and human purpose. Its contributions continue to shape theological and philosophical discourse in both religious and secular contexts.