

Islamic and Comparative Philosophy – An Assessment of a Special Issue of *Synthesis Philosophica*

Jana S. ROŠKER*

In the beginning of 2016, the renewed Croatian philosophical journal *Synthesis Philosophica* 62 (2) has published a special issue devoted to Islamic and comparative philosophy. The issue was edited by two well-known experts on Islamic and Arabic philosophy, Professor Nevad Kahteran from the University of Sarajevo, and Daniel Bučan, a retired scholar who teaches the Introduction to Arabic philosophy at the University of Zagreb and University of Split.

The main goal and a crucial motivation of this interesting issue was to establish a fruitful dialogue between the Islamic philosophy and various Western traditions of thought. Hence, it represents an important and valuable contribution to intercultural studies in cross-cultural and comparative philosophy, especially given the fact that despite its extremely rich and significant traditions, Islamic philosophy is still relatively unknown and unexplored in the Western academic world.

Hence, it is by no means coincidental that in Western research on Islamic philosophy, the non-reflected use of a theoretical analysis, which is a result of specific historical processes and the related, typical organizational structure of societies, may prove to be a dangerous and misleading mechanism. Concepts and categories can namely not simply be transferred from one socio-cultural context into another. Thus, in current intercultural discourses, the debate on the philosophical dimensions of Islamic texts and their role in the context of Islamic thought has been developed increasingly successfully under the aegis of rediscovering and applying specific traditional Islamic methodological approaches, concepts and categories.

The confrontation and understanding of different cultures is namely always linked to the problem of differences in language, tradition, history and socialization processes. Thus, for Western scholars, the interpretation of various aspects and elements of the Islamic culture is always linked to the geographic, historical, political and economic positions of the interpreter as well as the subject of interpretation.

* Jana S. ROŠKER, Professor, Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.
jana.rosker[at]ff.uni-lj.si



Traditional Western conceptions of Islamic culture and philosophy were constituted within the scope of Orientalism, which laid the foundations of and conditions the colonialist approach to the study of cultures, which are not the fruit of the so-called Judea-Christian tradition. The non-reflected use of a scientific analysis which is, in itself, the result of specific historical processes and the related, typical organizational structure of society including its specific ideologies, may prove to be a dangerous and misleading mechanism. In contrast to Judeo-Christian theoretical discourses, Islamic philosophy has namely been developed upon a basis of different underlying ontological, epistemological and metaphysical paradigms, and because it accordingly applied specific categorical and conceptual apparatuses, it cannot be completely understood through the lens of traditional Western methodologies.

The contributions in this volume, however, mainly proceed from the most important methodological condition, which allows the authors to achieve relevant conclusions, despite the complexity of the above-mentioned problems: this condition has been fulfilled by their consciously endeavors to preserve the characteristic structural blocks and specific categorical laws of the cultural circles discussed.

The volume opens with an informative and detailed introduction, written by both editors. It describes crucial goals, multifarious problems and deep insights underlying the creation of the volume and offers a relatively detailed description and analysis of all individual contributions, included in it.

The first two articles are devoted to the work of the most important Croatian pioneer of the so-called "Asian philosophies", Čedomir Veljačić, who passed away in 1997. Although he was mainly and expert in Indian and Buddhist philosophy, his hitherto unpublished introduction to his Ph.D. Dissertation, entitled "An Introduction to the Comparative Study of Indian and European Philosophy", which is preceded by Snježana Veljačić-Akpınar's overview of his work, represents an important aid to the understanding of problems and visions of comparative intercultural philosophy. A vital contribution to theories underlying this discourse can also be found in the next essay, entitled "How Constructive Engagement in Doing Philosophy Comparatively Is Possible". The essay was written by Bo Mou, a well-known Chinese expert in this field.

His essay is followed by Ali Paya's paper "Muslim Philosophies: A Critical Overview", which narrows the aforementioned issues to the distinct field of Islamic studies. Nader El-Bizri's contribution "Falsafa: A Labyrinth of Theory and Method", also deals with questions pertaining to the methodology of comparative theoretical approaches, focusing upon the search for a suitable method for a revival and modernization of classical *falsafa* texts through the lens of contemporary philosophic methodologies.

Osman Bakar's article "Towards a New Science of Civilization: A Synthetic Study of the Philosophical Views of al-Farabi, Ibn Khaldun, Arnold Toynbee, and Samuel Huntington" is dealing with the inherent development of philosophical views on Islamic thought through the lens of civilization science, grounding his theory upon a the concept of its epistemic status.

The main topic of the next contribution, written by Massimo Campanini is dealing with a comparison between the medieval Arabic polymath Ibn Rushd and the renewed renaissance scholar Giordano Bruno. His article entitled "Ontology of Intellect: The Happiness of Thinking in Averroës and Giordano Bruno" analyses political dimensions of their respective views on epistemology from the perspective of the highest good. The next paper, which was written by one of the editors of the collection, Daniel Bučan, also treats some crucial philosophical views of Ibn Rushd. Under the title "Active Intellect' in Avempace and Averroës: An Interpretative Issue", the author compares his work to the theory of Ibn Badža, another important Arabic philosopher from the twelfth century.

This scope is followed by Snežana Vejačić- Akpınar's second contribution entitled "Al-Ghazali, Skepticism and Islam", in which the author critically introduces some crucial methods and motivations for Al-Ghazali's search for certain and indubitable knowledge in Islam. Al-Ghazali's thought is also in the center of the interest of the next paper, which is entitled "Thinkable and Unthinkable" and was also written by Danile Bučan.

In his contribution "A Discourse on the Soul in Later Islamic Philosophy", Mehdi Aminrazavi traces back and brilliantly analyses the discourses regarding the concept of the soul in the work of several important Islamic philosophers. Sara Sviri's article "Seeing with Three Eyes: Ibn al-ʿArabī's *barzakh* and the Contemporary World Situation", on the contrary, is focused on the analysis of the work of one great master of Islamic, especially Sufist mysticism, focusing upon his concept of the so-called "third principle" (*barzakh*).

The next contribution was written by Željko Paša under the title "The Concept of God's Unity in the Kitāb *farā'id al-fawā'id fī uṣūl ad-dīn wa-l-ʿaqā'id* by ʿAbdīšū bar Briḥā". In this paper, the author deals with the problem of the Oneness of God on the one, and with the comparison of this paradigm with the Christian concept of the Trinity of God. Intercultural philosophical comparisons and dialogues are also the main topic of the next two articles, namely "Culture In the Global World and Opportunities for Dialogue, and Philosophy as a Tool of Achieving the Worlthy Life", both written by Alexander N. Chumakov.

The last—but certainly not least important—essay in this scope was contributed by the first editor of the present volume, Nevad Kahteran and has a crucial and pivotal importance for the collection. It is entitled “Recognizing a Model of Post-modern Pluralism through Looking at Islam from the Standpoint of Far Eastern Traditions: A Dialogue between Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism”. The author Chinese proceeds from the problems, connected to the fact that Non-European philosophies still represent a riddle to most Western intellectuals. The primary difficulty is their inability to answer the fundamental question of whether they should be considered philosophies at all. These issues are connected to the problem that in general, scholars trained in Western philosophy have limited access to and knowledge of the general theories and original philosophical aspects of these discourses. Many features of classical non-European thought strike most of them as obscure and unsystematic, and therefore lacking in theoretical reliability. In this context, we might ask ourselves the general question of how do European, Islamic, Arabic, Indian, Chinese, African and Latin American philosophies justify their being European, Islamic, Arabic, Indian, Chinese, African and Latin American while at the same time sharing in the universal applicability of the term philosophy.

As Ram Adhar Mall, one of the greatest pioneers in the field of intercultural philosophy exposes, any answer to this question must consider the cross-cultural elements that shape different traditions to various degrees. Hence, it is mistaken to think that intercultural philosophy is just a fashionable expression in the scope of postmodern thought. In spite of the alleged “liberal pluralism”, which is considered as a crucial basis of both, postmodern and intercultural discourses, intercultural thought is by no means a result of postmodernity. It rather exists in its own right, beyond plain historicity and contextuality. Hence, Kahteran also emphasizes that intercultural philosophical dialogues cannot proceed from any absolutistic and exclusive claims to the sole possession of philosophical truth. Therefore, the meeting of different cultures, philosophies and religious traditions—with all its global technological formations—calls for an intensive and reciprocal dialogue. According to him, recognizing the comprehension, analysis, and transmission of reality based on diversely structured socio-political contexts as a categorical and essential postulate offers the prospect of enrichment.

The present special issue of *Synthesis philosophica* represent a first step in such endeavors. In addition to the sixteen aforementioned theoretical articles, the issue concludes with Maja Veselič's report on the 4th STCS Conference that was organized in Ljubljana in December 2015 by the Department of Asian studies under the title *Comparative Perspectives: Islam, Confucianism and Buddhism*. In the last section, it also includes five book reviews written by Nevad Kahteran.

The volume is of great importance, especially for the region of Central and Southern Europe, for it clearly points to the crucial role of Islamic philosophical discourses for the common ideational heritage of humanity and also for the development of European philosophy. For centuries, Islamic philosophy, similar to other philosophies all over the world, has been the driving force for the creation of ideas and the shaping of knowledge that forms and develops human understanding, launches human curiosity, and inspires human creativity. The present collection represents a precious contribution to the rising awareness of the fact that the Western philosophical theory does not constitute the sole, universally valid epistemological discourse, something that was taken for granted by most Western theorists less than a century ago. It clearly shows that polylogues between different forms of intellectual creativity are not only possible but also sensible and valuable.