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Interpretation in Muslim Philosophy

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Abstract

Muslim philosophers had been preoccupied with the question of interpretation since the Islamic Philosophy was first developed by its founder Al Kindi till its interpretative maturity by Ibn Rushd who represents the maturity of rationalism in Islamic Arab philosophy. Rational option was the most suitable for Arab Muslim civilization as it expresses the vitality of civilization and its ability to interact with other contemporary civilizations and trends. Islamic philosophy interpretation themes are various as they adopted the following terms:

1. Interpreting the approval of the Greek philosophy in Muslim culture.
2. Interpreting the relationship between religion and philosophy.
3. Interpreting the relationship between Mind and Mind (Plato and Aristotle)
4. Interpreting the relationship between nature and Metaphysics.

The goals of interpretation for Muslim philosophers are different as Al Kind pointed that they are oriented towards the Greek philosophy in general and towards religion and philosophy in particular while Al Farabi pointed that they are oriented towards the Greek philosophy in general and towards Plato and Aristotle. Ibn Rushd opposed Al Ghazali ,the interpretation was focused on Aristotle's texts. He presented a legal verdict in working in philosophy. My Article will illustrate and construct such opinions which I think they deserve consideration and analysis.

The Author

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Interpretation in Muslim Philosophy

Introduction

The goals of interpretation for Muslim philosophers were different as was pointed out by **Al Kindi** (801- 870AC)¹, in that they were oriented towards Greek philosophy in general and towards religion and philosophy in particular. Meanwhile, **Al Farabi** (870- 950AC)² stated that the goals of interpretation were oriented towards Greek philosophy in general and towards Plato and Aristotle in particular; and subsequently nature and Metaphysics. The difference reached its uttermost in interpreting the relationship between religion and philosophy. The same goal remained valid for **Ibn Sina**(980- 1037AC)³ who excluded the theme of conciliation between the Mind, Mind and nature and Metaphysics.

Al Ghazali(1059- 1111AC)⁴ took a different approach, as his concern focused on the philosophy presented by Muslim philosophers viewing them from the perspective of Greek philosophers. Accordingly, the orientation of interpretation for him focused on viewing the ego, and Muslim philosophers, through the id and Greek philosophy. His book 'The Incoherence of the Philosophers' (Tahāfut al-Falāsifah) is a good example.

However, this situation was not sustained over a long period as **Ibn Rushd** (1126- 1198AC)⁵ opposed Al Ghazali and restored the state of affairs to its former path. For him, the interpretation was focused on the text by Aristotle and the incapability of Prince Almohd to understand such text; his need for someone to explain it advantaged him.

¹ Abu Yusuf Yaqub b. Ishaq al-Kindi, the 242 works attributed to him by Ibn al-Nadim, according to that bibliographer's classification, logic, metaphysics, arithmetic, spherics, music, astronomy, geometry, medicine, astrology, theology, politics, meteorology, topography, prognostics, and alchemy. See Ibn al-Nadim, *Kitab al-Fihrist*, pp371-79.

² Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Tarkhan al-Farabi (Latin; Abunaser). He was the founder of Arab Neo-Platonism. His contributions in physics, metaphysics, and politics, as well as in logic. He came to be known as the 'Second Teacher' (*al-Mou'allim al-Thani*) Aristotle being the First.

³ Abu Ali al-Husain Ibn Sina (Latin Avicenna). Ibn Sina's major philosophical treatise is *Kitab al-Shifa* or book of healing, Latin's title *Sufficientia*. It is an encyclopedia of Islamic – Greek learning in the eleventh century, ranging from logic to mathematics.

⁴ Al-Ghazali is the greatest figure in the history of the Islamic reaction to New-Platonism by his book *Tahafut al-Falasifah*. He was jurist, theologian, philosopher, and mystic.

⁵ Abul-Walid Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Rushd had become the symbol of Greek philosophy in the eastern part of the Muslim world.

Thus, the preoccupation of Ibn Rushd with interpretation was a consequence of the desires of the Almohd prince, who was fond of philosophy and followed the instruction of Ibn Tufail. However, Ibn Rushd utilised his position to found interpretative philosophy, or so-called jurisprudence of interpretation. He presented a legal verdict in working in philosophy and presented a reply to Al Ghazali that he had a position with an audience, woman and society, as well as an understanding of the truth and the difficulty of realising it. The outcome of this was a book entitled '*Incoherence of the Incoherence*' (Tahāfut al-Tahāfut).

In addition there were further attempts at interpretation made by **Ibn Bajjah** (?-1138AC)⁶, **Ibn Tufail** (?-1185AC)⁷ and **Ibn Sabin** (1217-1268AC)⁸, most of which were based on openness with regards to foreign cultures and trends i.e. openness towards the other.

Thus this research will illustrate and construct an approach by focusing on those opinions that require consideration and analysis according to the following themes:

1. Interpretation of the approval of the Greek philosophy in Muslim culture.
2. Interpretation of the relationship between religion and philosophy.
3. Interpretation of the relationship between Mind and Mind (Plato and Aristotle).
4. Interpretation of the relationship between nature and Metaphysics.

1. Interpretation of approving Greek philosophy in Muslim Culture:

Greek Philosophy began in 585_{BC}, the year in which **Thales** predicted a solar eclipse which lasted till 529_{AC} when the Roman Emperor Gestan closed all philosophical schools. These philosophers discussed multiple and contrasting themes; including existence and related themes: human beings, their multiple and various details, animals, plants and solids. All their opinions in this regard remain pertinent and form the basis for much argument amongst philosophers and theorists. The Arabs communicated with the Greeks,

⁶ Abu Bakr Muhammad b al-Sayigh, better known as Ibn Bajjah(the Avempace of Latin source). His famous book is Tadbir al –Mutawahid (The Conduct of the Solitary).

⁷ Abu Bakr B.Tufayl wrote a numerous works on medicine , astronomy, and philosophy. His philosophical work survive is Hayy b. Yaqsan.

⁸ Abu Mohammed Abd el-Hakh Ibn Sabin. He was known for his replies to questions sent to him by Frederick II, ruler of Sicily.

as well as with other nations, through means such as trade or religious missions and through the establishment of those cities neighbouring Persia and the Roman Empires. As a result of this contact, cultural schools were established within the Arab context which included:

- The Antakya School in Aleppo.
- The school of Edessa and Nusaybin in Iraq.
- The Baghdad School.
- The Harran School in Iraq.
- The Alexandria School.

The Arabs were introduced to Greek philosophy at these cultural schools, as Greek was the main teaching language. The views taught concentrated on man, the universe and God and disregarded the translation of Greek texts. Concentration on translation came at a later date when Islam appeared and encouraged the openness of other cultures. Translation specifically began in the Abbasid Caliphate during the reign of **Al Ma'mun** (786 – 833AC) when he established the **House of Wisdom** in Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate. The orientation in translation was more towards translation of philosophical texts than literature. The most famous translators of philosophy books including:

- Hunayn ibn Ishaq (810- 873AC): He was appointed by Caliph Al Mamun as a head of Wisdom House after Yahya ibn Masweh the first head of Wisdom House. He was talented in Persian, Greek, Arabic and Syriac. His translations for Plato included; Politics, and Timaeus. His translations for Aristotle included; Categories and Physics.
- Ishaq Ibn Hunayn ; He helped his father to administrate Wisdom House. He translated Plato's Sophistica and for Aristotle , the Universe, the Corruption and Psyche and some of the Letters Book.
- John Ibn Batriq (? – 815AC): He translated Plato's Timaeus, Natural history, Book of animals and parts of book of Physics by Aristotle.
- Qusta ibn Luqa (820- 900AC): Translated Alexandere d'Aphrodisses' explanation of physics and Alexandere's explanation of Aristotle's book of Universe and Corruption.

- Abdul Massiah ibn Abdullah Al Naamah Al Hamsi(886-939AC): He translated the following; Sophistica written by Aristotle, The explanation of Yehai al Nahwy for Physics, Athulogia Aristotle which is an explanation of the fourth, fifth and sixth Enneads written by Plotinus not Aristotle.
- Thabit ibn Qurra (826-900AC): He translated the explanation of Physics written by Aristotle.⁹

However, this translation was oriented towards philosophy not literature. From a personal perspective the author suggests there was a greater need for philosophy than for literature. Thus philosophy represented a gap in thought that they sought to bridge. **Al Kindi**, for example, translated the Greek philosophical texts and corrected associated bad translations presenting many summaries, but he did not translate any literary texts.

Therefore, it was the case that Muslim philosophers adopted Greek philosophy, which was admired and supported; they also tried to adapt it according to the teachings of Islam. However the following question becomes apparent:

Could Islamic civilization absorb Greek civilization?

This represents a point of dispute amongst theorists. For instance Badawy has argued that the Islamic spirit did not derive from the original Greek spirit rather it was the Greek spirit that was derived from the oriental spirit. This is the secret to the success of reviving Platonism in the Muslim world¹⁰. Some believe that it was this spirit that was found in Dialectical Theology as claimed by Badawy, Nicholson, De Boer, Goldziher, and Ernest Renan; but we oppose such Dialectical Theology as it does not represent philosophical thought.

Another team excluded scholastic theology and Sufism from philosophy; whilst an additional one argued that true Islamic philosophy had been found in scholastic theology and jurisprudence, as both first originated from Islam. Thus the argument raised by this team depended on the origins of scholastic theology and jurisprudence. Originality does not necessarily require the evaluation of thought as philosophy because philosophical thought does not have clear properties or a specific approach.

⁹ For more details see; Delisle J and Woodsworth J(1995), Translators through History, John Benjamins Publishing Company Unesco Publishing, Chapter .4, Baghdad center of Arabic translation, p.112-115.

10. Badawy; Abdul Rahman. (1980) The Greek Heritage in Islamic Civilization; Publications Agency, Introduction, ppf (later on).

There is also a further opinion that Arab Muslim culture has refuted: the contrast between natural and historical. This considered that all beings share a single nature and that interpretation and analysis as such was neither natural nor historical. Rather it goes beyond, making them the basis of their unity¹¹. However this warrants greater explanation. If the theorists from this perspective had determined the essence or nature of this source which they named unnatural and unhistorical; the matter would have been clearer. Therefore, their perspective lacks absolute clarity and decisive argument. As a result of such clear disagreements between contemporary theorists, it more useful to render the views of the philosophers themselves regarding Greek philosophy for our purposes.

At first, **Al Kindi** in his interpretation of the approval of Greek philosophies called for disregard of the early disciplines and the failure to address these was deemed unacceptable. Therefore he pointed out that the reason for returning to the early disciplines was that truth could not be fulfilled by a single person; but rather everyone could fulfil a portion of it. Therefore, taking all philosophers as one package was much better than depending on one in isolation (if one could collect as few opinions as possible from such philosophers, then a tremendous amount could be collected)¹².

Accordingly, we have to express our thanks to our ancestors who fulfilled truth as they helped us through their introductions and paved the way for the understanding of later generations. Without their efforts we would not have acquired such breadth of knowledge. In addition Al Kindi does not distinguish between peoples and nations seeking truth, 'we should not be ashamed of appreciating truth and verifying the way it came through even if it came from people who are farther from us or contrasted to us. Truth seeker should pay no attention but to truth itself. He must not depreciate truth; humiliate its supporter or bringer. None depreciated truth but everyone is honoured by

11. Al Marzouki, Abo Ya'reb. (2001) The unity of Religious and Philosophical Thought; Modern Thought House, Beirut, Lebanon, p. 122-3.

12. Al Kindi,(1984) Al Kindi book to Al Mutasim Bellah in the first philosophy, investigation made by Ahmed Fouad Al Ahwani, Resurrection Arab books house, Cairo, p. 80

truth.’¹³ Thus Al Kindi's stand is a reaction to the jurists and scholars of his time who forbade the studying of earlier works.

With regard to **Farabi**, one of the well-known Mashayeen (peripatetic) in Islamic philosophy, he realised that he lived and experienced a different civilization than that experienced by the Greeks. He also realised that there was a certain level of balance or consistency between the Greek and Arab Muslim experiences. This does not necessarily mean that they can be merged and bypassed by a theoretical system that seeks to collect and transcends them at the same time¹⁴. He trusted Greek philosophy to a great extent; especially Plato and Aristotle. His book ‘*Kitab al-jam baina rayai al-hakimain aflatun al-ilahi wa aristotalis*’ (*The Book of Harmony Between the Ideas of the Two Sages, Plato the Divine and Aristotle*) presented their views as being in agreement with Arab philosophers. A greater level of detail will thus be provided in this regard within this research.

In addition to the issues described above, the problem of accepting Greek philosophy in Arab culture is presently known in terms of the debate on originality versus modernism. Originality means accepting Greek philosophy or rational science, which faced an element of rejection in line with what was currently encountered by fundamentalism. As for the approval standpoint, it is modernism that considers truth as the first reference.

Al Ghazali did not personally examine Greek philosophy; but depended on Ibn Sina in this regard to find information. Accordingly, most of his information was incorrect because he did not receive it from its original sources; and because he misrepresented the Greek text so as to accuse his theorists of non-belief, and accordingly to accuse those Muslim philosophers who followed this Greek philosopher of non-belief. Therefore Al Ghazali rejected the philosophy related to Plato and Aristotle and also omitted the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Al Jabril Mohamed Abid. (1977) An introduction to Fasul al Makal in determination of the connection between jurisprudence and wisdom, Beirut, p. 38.

writings of other Greek philosophers. He accused Muslim philosophers of non-belief because Greek philosophers were found guilty of this. This will be further illustrated in greater detail when the consistency between religion and philosophy is discussed.

Ibn Rushd was well informed about Greek philosophy and therefore he represented modernism i.e. rationality in Arab thought. Conversely Al Ghazali represented the fundamentalist trend, and thus Ibn Rushd called for the rendering to Greek philosophy and the need to depend on it especially when rational argument was considered superlative¹⁵. Ibn Rushd considered that earlier philosophers preceded us in searching for reason and so we must take them into account to discover whether they share our faith or not, “by sharing I mean those who lived before Islam whose books must be read and we must consider all their views and accept the correct ones and to warn about the incorrect ones.”¹⁶ In addition, Ibn Rushd spoke about creatures and the requirements of proofing “to consider their views in this regard and what they had proved in their texts so that we can accept what coincides with truth and express our thanks to them and to warn about what does not coincide with truth and give them some excuse.”¹⁷ He also stated that the studying of earlier books was legally permissible because he considered their sense as that associated with jurisprudence; the matter of which means the consistency between both the goal of philosophy and the goal of religion.

2. Interpreting the Relationship between Religion and Philosophy

Al Kindi interpreted the relationship between religion and philosophy as that which depended on his own definition of philosophy, “human artifacts are supreme and philosophy occupies the most honourable amongst them. Accordingly he defined philosophy as: the science of knowing things in their real sense according to man's

¹⁵ More details see; Stewart, Olivia(1993), Ibn Rushd, Chapter, Reasoning, The American University in Cairo Press ,p.92.

¹⁶ Ibn Rushd, Abu Al Walid, Fasul al Makal, a previous reference, p 91.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 93.

capability because the objective of the philosopher is to reach truth in his science and to work according to this truth”¹⁸.

The most honourable philosophy is the earliest one, by which I mean the first truth science is the origin of any truth. Therefore, the philosopher should be aware of all matters relevant to this honourable science. Accordingly, philosophy and religion are similar because philosophy aims to discover truth; whilst religion aims to determine the reality of everything. Therefore, there is no contradiction between philosophy and religion. For Al Kindi philosophical knowledge depended on the mind and this differed from prophetic and Sufi knowledge because the source of prophetic knowledge was revelation; whereas the only tool supporting Sufi knowledge was intuition.

With regards to **Al Farabi** his adaptation between philosophy and religion was based on the belief that Greek philosophy represented the sovereignty of reason. Accordingly, Muslims must be aware of the rational arguments about God, man and the world. Al Farabi defined philosophy as ‘the knowledge of creatures as they exist’¹⁹; and the utmost objective of philosophy ‘is to understand about Lord the Creator and that he was the creator of everything and therefore does not contradict with religion’. Rapport and harmony prevail in life through the rapport and harmony which is associated between religion and philosophy because what is determined by religion is similar to what is proved by philosophy; just as utopia, resembles the cosmism and its correlation. Thus, there is no contradiction between religion and philosophy as “philosophy expresses truth directly through arguments and proofs while religion expresses it with resemblance and ideals.”²⁰

In his book "*The Letters*" Al Farabi stated:

“when it is proved that religion is a version equivalent to the message of philosophy, then philosophers would not reject religion while men of

¹⁸ Al Kindi, Al Kindi's book to Al Mu'taism bellah in the first Philosophy, a previous reference, p.77.

¹⁹ Al Farabi, Abo Nasr.(1986) *Kitab al-jam baina rayai al-hakimain aflatun al-ilahi wa aristutalis (The Book of Harmony Between the Ideas of the Two Sages, Plato the Divine and Aristotle*; an investigation made by Albert Nasry Nader, Al Mashreq House, Beirut, Lebanon, p. 80.

²⁰ Al Jabri as cited in an introduction to his investigation of Fasul Al Makal's book by Ibn Rushd, p. 35.

religion would reject philosophy. Therefore, both philosophy and philosophers will be rejected instead of playing the leading role in facilitating and adopting religion. As a result, religion will not receive any support from philosophy. Rather, religion and its followers will cause huge harm to philosophy and philosophers. In front of such threat, philosophers may have to oppose the men of religion while they would not dare to reject the religion itself. They may reject the idea raised by men of religion that religion contradicts with philosophy. Also, they will attempt to eradicate such an idea through bringing to the knowledge of men of religion that the message of their religion is an equivalent representation for philosophy.”²¹

Ibn Tufail's view-point regarding the relationship between religion and philosophy was in agreement with that of Al Farabi in his book "*The Letters*" as he had considered the right philosophy as self-sufficient; and as presenting a truth similar to religion, despite the different language of both and the construction of the correspondence of religious experience to Hai and Asal i.e. the correspondence of religion to philosophy.

Ibn Rushd stated that philosophy and jurisprudence are two siblings that are fed from one source: truth. Accordingly truth is not contradicted by truth; rather both agree and certify each other as well as seek to fulfil one objective, which is virtue.²²

Finally we can conclude that Ibn Rushd's method to adapt religion with philosophy was a matter that did not undertake the same function as that made by Al Kindi in the same regard; or by Al Farabi in attempting to combine the views of both Plato and Aristotle. It would appear that he may have issued a legally applicable judgment. Philosophy is a legal duty and does not contradict religion; rather one completes the other. In general, the grace of Muslim Arab thought, as assumed by certain theorists, attempts to integrate both

²¹ Al Farabi, *The letters*, as quoted by G K Bergl in his research about Ibn Tufail and the book of Hai Ibn Yaqzan "A turning point in Arab Philosophical writing", p. 1162.

²² Ibn Rushd, *Fasul al Makal*, a previous reference, p. 50.

philosophical and religious thought. The logic of Islamic philosophy says that both are united in essence.

3. Interpretation of the relationship between Mind and Mind (Plato and Aristotle).

Abū Nasr al-Fārābi, Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Tarkhan

His attempt to combine the views of Plato and Aristotle are considered one of the most famous interpretive attempts in the history of Islamic Philosophy. He wrote a separate book where he made clear, in its introduction, that the goal of such an attempt was to “clarify the method is to clear the right path to the student as not to go stray and to judge the sayings of those two philosophers without deviating the right path to imagine the problem sounds.”²³ Accordingly he interpreted the difference between them according to the following themes:

- Life choices: Aristotle was married and had children; whilst Plato refused this choice. This meant that Aristotle enjoyed the material life whilst Plato refused such a life.
- Oral tradition versus written: Plato refused documentation and preferred memorising to documentation; whilst Aristotle adopted the scientific method in documentation.
- Essences: Plato thought that essences were closer to the soul and further away from the senses; whilst Aristotle believed that people were the essences.
- Division of things: Plato began with the whole and deconstructed this into parts; whilst Aristotle began with the parts to reconstruct the whole.
- Vision: Plato interpreted vision as something derived from sight requiring a meeting with the mind; whilst Aristotle thought that vision was the outcome of sight.
- Ethics: Aristotle thought that ethics were changeable customs and that he did not need them; whilst Plato observed that nature overcame habits.
- Knowledge: Plato thought that knowledge was memorised; whilst Aristotle thought that it was acquired.

²³ Al Farabi, *Kitab al-jam*, a previous reference, p. 105.

- Longevity of the universe: Aristotle thought that the universe was old; whilst Plato thought it was modern.
- Idealism: Plato believed in the possibility of an ideal world; whilst Aristotle rejected it.

Al Farabi's concern was concentrated on attempting to find an interpretation or construction of some of the ideas associated with both Plato and Aristotle; however, he stated that there was no difference between them. Unfortunately, most interpretations presented by Al Farabi were later rejected by Muslim philosophers and did not find any support; principally because the disagreements between Plato and Aristotle were fundamental philosophical differences. Aristotle was a factual philosopher whilst Plato was an idealistic philosopher. In addition, Al Farabi depended on the 'Enneads' by Aristotle which he attributed to him; whilst in reality it belonged to Plotinus. He completely depended on the book in order to interpret the disagreements about the ideals of Plato. It has been suggested that Aristotle in his book "Enneads" proved the spiritual images which he said were available in the Godhood domain. In fact it was Plotinus who first mentioned this and not Aristotle.

Al Farabi went on to say that such sayings had three possibilities which may either contradict one another; some may belong to Aristotle whilst others may not, or they may have some meanings and interpretations that are either inwardly consistent or outwardly inconsistent. Al Farabi denied any contradiction and rejected the suggestion that some of the ideas belonged to Aristotle, whilst others did not. Therefore this led to different interpretations leading to meaning that the possibility that their exploration will raise doubts and confusion.²⁴

4. Interpretation of the relationship between nature and Metaphysics.

4.1- Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī

4.1.1: His interpretation of the 'Trusting the Mind' theme differed from the interpretation given by Aristotle who provided an absolute trust in the Mind. However, he agreed with Aristotle with regards to the consideration of the philosophy of theology

²⁴ Details of Al Farabi opinions, see a previous reference, pp. 91-109.

being greater than the philosophy of physics and mathematics. In research associated with the Mind he presented the views of Greece and divided intelligence into: Active intelligence; Material intelligence, Actual intelligence and Acquire intelligence. This division was first made by Aristotle with the exception of the beneficiary of Mind or absolute or introverted Mind made by Al Kindi. Muslim philosophers later followed him as he defined Mind “as a simple essence that is aware of things and their reality.”²⁵

4.1.2: In his interpretation of the aspects of philosophy to students he did not bypass Plato and Aristotle. He emphasised determining pronunciation; studying mathematics; studying the philosophy of Aristotle; telling the truth; expressing thanks to previous theorists; adopting methodology and believing that philosophy is scientific and work.

4.1.3: His interpretation of the definition of the Soul was that of ‘a whole natural living germ. It is said that the Soul is a primary completion of the natural living viable body. Also, it is said to have a self-movable rational essence with composite number.’²⁶ These definitions are those which were provided by Aristotle and Pythagoras. Aristotle defined the Soul as a primary perfection of an automated natural body; whereas, the notion of a composite number was provided by the definition given by Pythagoras.

4.2. Ibn Sina, Aba Ali ibn Al Hassan

Ibn Sina's interpretation attempts are crystallised as follows:

4.2.1: He based his interpretation of soul eternity and its existence before the body on Plato's idea of an ‘Ideal World’. This is apparent at the very beginning of his real Alayn poem:

‘It came onto you from the highest stand,

²⁵ Al Kindi, (1966),The message of borders and drawings; an investigation made by Al Amir Al A'ssam, Al Manahel House, Lebanon , p. 62.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 62.

A life which is valuable and strengthened
It is veiled from the eyes of beholders,
It is the one which goes unveiled without yashmak,
It arrived unwillingly to you,
It may hate your desertion and may be agonized.'²⁷

Plato divided the universe into two worlds: The earthly and the ideal world. The latter represented the truth; whilst the former was transient and changeable. In addition, Plato considered that the soul had been living in the ideal world before its incarnation in the body. The body was represented as the jail or the grave of the soul. Plato thought that death was simply a process in which the soul returned back to the original place from which it had come. In this poem written by Ibn Sina, he considered that the soul was living in another world before its incarnation into the body. Therefore he stated that it had come down to the individual from the highest place. Its fall was not willingly and therefore death was joy for the self because it would return back to its original place.

4.2.2: Ibn Sina in his interpretation of Mind theory, agreed with Al Kindi and Al Farabi. This point has been previously made clear during the discussion related to Al Kindi and Al Farabi.

4.2.3: Ibn Sina discussed the question of the whole and the part for both Plato and Aristotle. He tried to interpret their ideas as he adopted the approach of Al Farabi in reconciling between Plato and Aristotle. Therefore his attempt was reconciliatory.

4.2.4: Ibn Sina made a bold attempt at interpretation which included:

- An interpretation of Al Ma'ad in which he presented two characters: Ibn Sina, the Muslim man who believed in physical and spiritual return; and Ibn Sina, the

²⁷ Muheb Al Den Al Khateeb. (1910), Ibn Sina, The Orientals logic and the double poem in logic,

philosopher who only believed in spiritual return. The significance of Ibn Sina in philosophical thought lay in his role as a philosopher, not as a Muslim.

- The interpretation of destiny as presented in a dissertation in which he discussed the question of fate and destiny in which there were three characters: Ibn Sina's friend, Ibn Sina the sheikh (old) and Hai Ibn Yaqzan. He was fatalist rather than being a man of free will.
- He interpreted some quranic verses using symbols in his dissertation entitled '*Proofing the Prophecies*'. In this way he has agreed with Al Farabi as he thought that jurisprudence did not contradict with philosophy; but rather it was a theoretical science which had been framed in terms suitable to laymen.

Ibn Sina attempted to prove these prophecies through decoding the codes of prophets and interpreting their sayings. He acknowledged that jurisprudence had an interior side and the men of thought were the only persons allowed to interpret it. For example he interpreted the verse, 'And the angels will be on its sides, and eight angels will, that Day, bear the Throne of your Lord above them.' He also interpreted 'the eight by the eight orbits and the carriage by natural carriage not human carriage such as our saying that water is carried by earth and fire is carried by air.'²⁸

He also attempted in all his interpretive efforts to establish an oriental philosophy from which he went on to define wisdom as 'wisdom is completing the human soul with matter imagination and believing the theoretical and practical facts as much as human beings can.'²⁹ This was the oriental philosophy that was considered the weak point from which Al Ghazali attacked philosophers.

4.3. Al Ghazali; Abo Hamed Ibn Mohammad Ibn Ahmed

With regards to Al Ghazali the interpretation took another direction. He did not follow the path that philosophers before him had taken from Greek philosophy. He suggested

²⁸Ibn Sina.(1968) A message in proving prophecies, investigation Mitchell Marmora, Dar Al Nahar Beirut, p. 49-61.

²⁹Ibn Sina, (1980) Eyes of Wisdom, investigation Abdul Rahman Badawy ,Publications Agency, Kuwait, p. 16.

that Plato and Aristotle must be criticised because they were people not prophets. However, he did not bypass the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. In his discussion, he presents the world as whole, attacking philosophers and judging them as heterodoxies, which was an idea first made by Aristotle. He made this clear in his famous book '*Tahafut al-Falasifa*' (The Incoherence of the Philosophers); whereby he interpreted the texts of Aristotle in order to criticise Muslim philosophers, and to accuse them of unbelief. In the introduction to his book 'Incoherence of Philosophers' he explained that the cause of writing this book resulted from a disagreement between philosophers. He mentioned that explaining such disagreements would take a long time but that he would be satisfied with explaining the contradiction between the opinion of the absolute philosopher and the first teacher, Aristotle, as he is considered the philosopher who arranged sciences and replied to all his ancestor philosophers and apologised for deviating his master Plato. He said "Plato is a friend and the truth as well. However, Truth is more truthful than him."³⁰ Aristotle's approach meant that there was neither confirmation nor agreement between philosophers; but rather that they judged through guesswork and supposition. They also used narrow reasoned people to assert and categorise their opinions on the divine using mathematical and logic sciences.

Al Ghazali also criticised the philosophy of those who translated the philosophy of Aristotle as they depended on misrepresentation and alterations. Those translators included Ibn Sina and Al Farabi as he considered both as translators who dealt with the text of Aristotle. Accordingly, when Al Ghazali replied to philosophers, he replied to Aristotle claiming that he represented all philosophers. However this is actually untrue. Moreover, he did not use the literature of Aristotle, but made use of the translations available to him and interpreted what he liked. Therefore, his method of depending on the original text of Aristotle was not fruitful as there were certain questions regarding it. Thus he would depend on Al Farabi and Ibn Sina to learn more about the philosophy of Aristotle. Al Ghazali aimed to eradicate trust from philosophy and called for all theologies to consolidate with him in order to attack philosophers and philosophy. He

³⁰ Al Ghazali, Abo Hamed, (1980), *Tahafut al-Falasifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), an investigation carried out by Soliman Donia, House of Knowledge, Cairo, p. 76.

considered it a battle. This approach is a somewhat vulgar one, as he said, "Let us conquer them as through disasters malice goes away."³¹

In addition, his interpretive thought depended on hypothecation and the building of results according to such a hypothesis. His hypothesis was the definition of positivism: "It is the science in which the known is exposed openly in such a way that makes no doubt about it and drives away any possibility of mistake and illusion. There is no sufficient space in one's reason to assess this" or his requirements of clarity, excellence and exposition. Thus he began with examining the thought through this hypothesis. His journey of suspicion took two paths: cognitive suspicion (family, teachers, sensory knowledge, mental knowledge and the conclusion that Sufi knowledge was right); and suspicion at the level of scholars (theologians, intrinsicists and philosophers). Finally he concluded that Sufi knowledge was right.

As for the theory of Mind, he accepted the views of Al Kindi, Al Farabi and Ibn Sina (they followed the Aristotelians in their view of the id). However, Al Ghazali did not criticise them within this theory; although the ultimate outcome revealed that Al Ghazali was more Sufi than philosopher.

Al Ghazali warned about taking from the whole philosophical sciences at once. He refuted mathematics because the correlation of the mathematical argument would lead people to believe in what the philosopher said about the divine. He also disputed the primacy of logic as it was a clear-cut science with its arguments and those who trusted it would believe what the philosophers said about disbelief. As for physics, it was based on causality, thus believing it would mean denying the miracles of the prophets.

4.4. Ibn Tufail; Abo Bakr Mohammad Ibn Abdul Malak Ibn Mohammad

4.4.1: Ibn Tufail's interpretation in the book of Hai Ibn Yaqzan was based on the possibility of only depending on Mind, reaching an acquaintance with God and reaching the absolute knowledge. He represented orientalism in his philosophical island. This was

³¹Ibid p. 83.

the philosophy first proposed by Ibn Sina, but Ibn Sina wanted to merge religion with philosophy and establish a religious philosophy or a philosophical religion; whilst Ibn Tufail asked to separate both.

In his interpretation, Ibn Tufail refused the cognitive approach which was based on listening to the teacher during his lectures; and the discussions undertaken in the learning settings: reading of text, undertaking of research and following up on developments in science. All these areas were time consuming as man could depend on his own mind to reach his goals. This suggests that Ibn Tufail agreed with Aristotle on the limitless powers of human mind.³²

4.4.2: Ibn Tufail discussed the Aristotelian question: Is the world old or modern? His answer was compromising as he mentioned that all beings alive on the earth were mortal; but that the motion of the heavens was immortal.

4.4.3: Ibn Tufail interpreted from Asal to Hai and learned about how a philosopher could interpret things; as the latter neglected many things in his religion therefore the former could make use of him in order to interpret them.

4.5.Ibn Rushd; Abo Al Walid Mohammed Ibn Ahmed

Ibn Rushd laid down the principles of interpretation which are summarised in the following manner:

- If a religious text is understood superficially or interpreted correctly, it will not contradict with reason.
- Religious text explains itself.
- Ibn Rushd differentiates between what should be interpreted and what is prohibited from interpretation.

³² See the details of the Hai Ibn Yaqzan story, Ahmed Amin, (1966), Hai Ibn Yaqzan to Ibn Sina, Ibn Tufail and Al Sahroudi, House of Knowledge, Cairo, p. 52-122.

As for the requirements of interpretation:

- To respect the aspects of the Arabic style.
- To respect the internal unity of the religious text.
- To take into consideration the mental level of the people to whom the interpretation is given³³.

According to the terms of Ibn Rushd "We decide that every outcome proved by argument and contradict superficially with jurisprudence should be construed according to the Arabic interpretation. This is an issue that no Muslim would doubt and no believer would suspect."³⁴ He also classified religious discourse as that which could be interpreted; whilst that of the other could not be. For example the following quranic verses 'but none knows its hidden meanings save Allah,"³⁵ and "And they ask you (O Muhammad SAW) concerning the Ruh (the Spirit); Say: "The Ruh (the Spirit): its knowledge is with my Lord. And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little."³⁶ These verses cannot be interpreted and declared to the public. The right interpretation is a moral responsibility entrusted to man to bear while other creatures were afraid of it. This is mentioned in the verse "Truly, We did offer Al Amanah (the trust or moral responsibility or honesty and all the duties which Allah has ordained) to the heavens and the earth, and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it (i.e. afraid of Allah's Torment). But man bore it. Verily, he was unjust (to himself) and ignorant (of its results).'³⁷ Thus the interpretation determines when, how and to whom.

People divide jurisprudence into three categories: the people who cannot interpret, the addressees (the great majority of people) and the people of construction and interpretation. The latter are those deemed controversial. Further, he categorised the people of interpretation/construction into the positivist evidentialist people of interpretation who were the people of industry, i.e. the makers of wisdom.

³³ Mahmoud Khudrah.(1999) The time of Ibn Rushd and the legitimacy of interpretation, Thought world, Vol. 27, Issue 4, April, p. 203.

³⁴ Ibn Rushd, Fasul Al Makal, a previous reference ,p. 98 and other details p. 97-100.

³⁵ Holy Quran, Surat Al-Imran (The family of Imran) chapter 7.

³⁶ Holy Quran, Surat Al-Isra (The Journey by Night), 85.

³⁷ Holy Quran, Surat Al-Ahzab (The Confederates), 122.

Ibn Rushd argued that it was from interpretations that Islamic schools came into existence. They began to accuse each other of disbelief, such as Mu'tazili who interpreted religion and made such interpretations public. In addition, Ash'ari schools one of which declared its disbelief in the existence of God the Creator, Praise to Him, through the methods they adopted in their books. Thus, they are the real unbelievers and deviants³⁸.

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38 Ibn Rushd, Fasul Al Makal, a previous reference, p. 118-122.

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