

AN ANTHOLOGY OF PHILOSOPHY IN PERSIA, VOL 3:

# PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND BEYOND



EDITED BY S. H. NASR & M. AMINRAZAVI

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*An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*

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Previously published volumes:

*An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Volume 1: From Zoroaster to 'Umar Khayyām*

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*An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*

VOLUME 3

*Philosophical Theology in the Middle Ages and Beyond  
from Mu'tazilī and Ash'arī to Shī'ī Texts*

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR *and* MEHDI AMINRAZAVI

*with the assistance of*

M. R. JOZI

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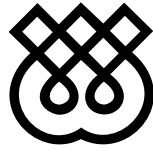
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## The Institute of Ismaili Studies

The Institute of Ismaili Studies was established in 1977 with the object of promoting scholarship and learning on Islam, in the historical as well as contemporary contexts, and a better understanding of its relationship with other societies and faiths.

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1. Occasional papers or essays addressing broad themes of the relationship between religion and society, with special reference to Islam.
2. Monographs exploring specific aspects of Islamic faith and culture, or the contributions of individual Muslim thinkers or writers.
3. Editions or translations of significant primary or secondary texts.
4. Translations of poetic or literary texts which illustrate the rich heritage of spiritual, devotional and symbolic expressions in Muslim history.
5. Works on Ismaili history and thought, and the relationship of the Ismailis to other traditions, communities and schools of thought in Islam.
6. Proceedings of conferences and seminars sponsored by the Institute.
7. Bibliographical works and catalogues which document manuscripts, printed texts and other source materials.

This book falls into category two listed above.

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جز حق حکمی که حکم را شاید نیست    حکمی که ز حکم حق افزون آید نیست  
هر چیز که هست آنچنان می باید    و آن چیز که آنچنان نمی باید نیست

There is no judge worthy to give judgment save the Truth,  
There is no judgment beyond the judgment of the Truth.

Whatever exists is as it should be,  
And that which should not be exists not.

Naşir al-Din ٲūsī





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- Ghazzālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad. *al-Iqtisād fi'l-i'tiqād*, tr. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Abū Zayd as *al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates and their Properties*. Lahore, 1970.
- Ghazzālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad. *Kitāb al-'ilm*, Book 1 of the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, tr. Nabih Amin Faris as *The Book of Knowledge*. Lahore, 1962.
- Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn. *Kitāb al-naḥs wa'l-rūḥ wa sharḥ quwāhumā*, ed. and tr. M. Şāghir Ḥasan Ma'şūmī as *Imām Rāzī's 'Ilm al-Akhlāq*. Islamabad, 1969.
- Shahrastānī, Abū'l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad. *Kitāb Nihāyat al-iqdām fi 'ilm al-kalām*, ed. and tr. Alfred Guillaume as *The Summa Philosophiae of al-Shahrastānī*. London, 1934.
- Taftāzānī, Sa'd al-Dīn. *Fī uṣūl al-Islām*, tr. Earl Edgar Elder as *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*. New York, 1950.



## Note on Transliteration

### Arabic characters

ء	’
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	‘
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w
ي	y
ة	ah; at (construct state)

### long vowels

ا	ā
و	ū
ي	ī

### short vowels

ـَ	a
ـِ	u
ـُ	i

### diphthongs

ـَو	aw
ـَي	ai (ay)
ـِي	ayy (final form ī)
ـُو	uww (final form ū)

### Persian letters added to the Arabic alphabet

پ	p
چ	ch
ژ	zh
گ	g





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## List of Contributors\*

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR received his early education in Iran and completed his studies at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University from which he received his doctorate. Nasr is the author of over five hundred articles and fifty books. He has taught at a number of universities, both in the Middle East, especially Tehran University, and in the United States; and he has lectured widely on Islamic philosophy and science and Sufism. Nasr is currently the University Professor of Islamic Studies at The George Washington University.

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\*Contributors mentioned here are those who have translated new material for this volume and M. R. Jozi who variously assisted in its production. The list of others whose translations have already appeared elsewhere and of which we have made use appears in the List of Reprinted Works.

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## General Introduction

The Islamic community of the first/seventh century was already in contact with a world in which Graeco-Alexandrian thought had become known and where Christian theology had developed in its encounter with Greek thought. Muslims began to discuss certain problems of a theological nature in part in response to the theological issues discussed within the Jewish and Christian, and also to some extent Mazdean and Manichean, communities, but mostly resulting from the character of the Islamic revelation itself. Such questions as the nature of the Qur'ān as the Word of God and whether it was created or uncreated, free will and determinism, who is saved, the relationship between faith and works, the question of the legitimacy of politico-religious authority, and the relation between the oneness of God's Essence and His many Names and Attributes mentioned in the Qur'ān, were discussed widely by the early Islamic community, often in relation to political contention between different groups. It was from this background that the first important school of Sunni theology (*kalām*), which is said by traditional sources to have originated with 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, came into being. Already in the *Nahj al-balāghah* (The Path of Eloquence) – a collection of the sermons, letters and aphorisms of 'Alī assembled by Sayyid Sharīf al-Raḍī in the fourth/tenth century – many theological questions of the greatest importance are discussed, such as the meaning of Divine Unity, how Divine Unity differs from mathematical unity, the meaning of justice as it is related to the Divine Nature and Will and the meaning of the vision of God. There is the famous tradition of Dhi'lāb according to which Dhi'lāb asked the Imam if he could see God and the Imam answered, 'I have never worshipped a God whom I have not seen'. These and many other issues with which 'Alī dealt contain the roots of later *kalām* discussions, not to mention the question of the Imamate concerning himself, which divided the Sunni and Shi'i understanding of the legitimacy of politico-religious authority.

The founder of the first formal Sunni theological school possessing a philosophical dimension is said to be, however, Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā', a student of the Baṣran

patriarch of early Islamic learning and Sufism, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), who was a student of ‘Alī. But Wāṣil broke away from the teachings of his master over the question of the status of grave sins. With Ḥasan’s exclamation ‘*tazala ‘annā*, ‘he has separated himself from us’, Wāṣil withdrew, as commanded, from the master’s circle and began to teach his views to a number of disciples, the group thus becoming known as *al-Mu‘tazilah* or Mu‘tazilites. Wāṣil died in 131/748 but his school survived to become a major current of thought in Baṣra, Kūfa and later Baghdad, and even achieved dominance in the early Abbasid period before it was eclipsed and replaced in Baghdad at the end of the third/ninth century by the Ash‘arites. In Persia, however, it survived for another century or more.

The Mu‘tazilites were not exclusively Persians or Arabs; rather, this school of *kalām* was cultivated in centres where both groups lived and intermingled with each other. If they are included in a volume dedicated to philosophical thought in Persia, it is not to disclaim in any way the importance of the Arab component in this school, but to assert the presence of a Persian element as well. Moreover, most of our knowledge of the Mu‘tazilite school comes from the vast Mu‘tazilite encyclopedia of Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, who hailed from Hamadān. One needs also to mention that a school which sought to formulate an intermediary position between the Mu‘tazilites and Ash‘arites, namely the Māturīdite school of *kalām*, was founded by Abū Manṣūr Māturīdī (d. 337/944) from Khurāsān and flourished mostly in Persia and Transoxiana.

The Mu‘tazilites have often been called the rationalists of Islam, especially by Western scholars, but they were not simply rationalists in the current philosophical understanding of the term. Nevertheless, they did use reason widely in theological discussions and questions of religion and many of them tipped the scale in favour of reason in seeking to understand of the Unity of God in purely rational terms. They also defended free will against determinism and believed in the created nature of the Qur’ān. Furthermore, they developed an ‘atomism’, usually known as *kalām* atomism, which was also accepted by their opponents, the Ash‘arites.

*Kalām* atomism is of considerable philosophical interest and is to be distinguished from the atomism of both Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā’ Rāzī and the Greek atomists. According to *kalām* atomism, objects are not composed of form and matter as asserted by Aristotle and later by the Muslim Peripatetics, or of small units with dimension as held by the Greek atomists, but of dimensionless ‘atoms’ which they called *juz’ lā yatajazzā* (literally the part that cannot be divided). Moreover, for them space and time are also discontinuous, space consisting of discontinuous points and time of discontinuous moments. They claimed, furthermore, that there is no causality in the ordinary sense of the term. For the followers of this ‘atomistic’ perspective, what we conceive as causality, for example observing that A ‘causes’ B, is no more than the result of the habit of observing B following A, which we then generalize into a causal relation. For them what holds the world

together is not horizontal causes but the Will of God. Ultimately every cause is the Divine Cause. This view, amplified further by the Ash'arites, brought about a strong response from the Islamic philosophers especially Ibn Sīnā who was in turn attacked on the issue by Ghazzālī in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), while the criticisms of Ghazzālī found their response in Ibn Rushd's *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* (The Incoherence of Incoherence). This issue was also central in the centuries long debates between Ibn Sīnā, Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī and Quṭb al-Dīn Rāzī. One cannot understand fully the course of philosophy in Persia without taking into account the views of *kalām* and the interaction between *kalām* and *falsafah*.

The Mu'tazilites also exercised some influence upon the course of early Islamic philosophy by creating a theological ambience in which the use of reason was highly extolled. They became known in the Islamic community as the followers of the five principles (*al-uṣūl al-khamsah*): unity (*tawḥīd*), justice ('*adl*), the 'promise and the threat' (*al-wa'd wa'l-wa'id*), an in-between position for a Muslim who has committed sin (*al-manzilat bayn al-manzilatayn*), and exhortation of the performance of the good and forbidding the committing of evil (*al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf wa'l-nahy 'an al-munkar*). These five principles possess important philosophical aspects. What is the meaning of unity? How is justice related to the Divine Nature and Will? If there is promise and threat, we must have free will. Then what about the question of Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence? These were all questions which, raised by the Mu'tazilites became a major challenge to philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā who also sought to address them.

Most of the works of early Mu'tazilites have been lost or survive only in fragments recorded in later writings. But what remains points to the significance of a number of the early figures of this school chief among them Abu'l-Hudhayl al-'Allāf and his student Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn al-Sayyār known as al-Nazzām. Abu'l-Hudhayl (d.c. 226/840) was a student of Wāṣil's student, 'Uthmān ibn Khālid al-Ṭawīl. A brilliant dialectician and speaker, he carried out many theological debates including some with Mazdaeans and Christians. The formulation of the five principles of the Mu'tazilites goes back to him.

Nazzām, who was a famous figure during the reign of al-Ma'mūn and who died in 231/845, was not only a theologian but also a poet and man of letters who was moreover familiar with Greek philosophy. Like Abu'l-Hudhayl, he held many controversial views especially concerning the meaning of God's Attributes and the power of His Will over evil. But Nazzām was most of all known as the figure who developed the Mu'tazilite theory of atomism as well as that of latency and manifestation (*kumūn* and *burūz*) concerning creation. Most of the famous Mu'tazilites of the third/ninth century in Baghdad such as Muḥammad ibn Shabīb and Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir (d. 210/825) were his students. The last of the famous Mu'tazilites of the third/ninth century Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915–916) from Khūzistān,

who was the teacher of Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, also traced his lineage in *kalām* to Nazzām.

As for Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, the last major figure of Mu'tazilism known to us (with the exception of those from Yemen), he came from Asadābād near Hamadān. After completing his early studies in Hamadān, he became a well-known scholar of *ḥadīth*. His attraction to Mu'tazilite teachings took him to Baṣra where he studied with some of the students of Jubbā'ī and also to Baghdad. It was upon returning to Persia, however, that 'Abd al-Jabbār composed his monumental encyclopedia of Mu'tazilite teachings entitled *Kitāb al-mughnī fi'l-abwāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-'adl* (The Book of Plenitude concerning Headings of Unity and Justice). This work of twenty volumes was written in 360/970 in Rāmhurmuz near the Persian Gulf and is the most famous work of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār but not his only work. At the end of *al-Mughnī* he mentions seven of his other writings including one entitled *Naqd al-luma'* (Critique of The Book of Flashes of Light) which is a criticism of al-Ash'arī's well-known *Kitāb al-luma'* (The Book of Flashes of Light).

'Abd al-Jabbār became a famous figure in Persia which was governed during his lifetime by the Būyids. He was even chosen to be chief judge (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) by the Būyid rulers and spent some time in Rayy, one of their major capitals. But he fell from grace after the fall of the prime minister and little is known of the last part of his life. Despite having had a number of students, his death in 415/1025 marked the end of the prominent intellectual activity of the Mu'tazilites in Persia, although Mu'tazilism continued to survive through the generation of his students.

The *Kitāb al-mughnī* is a veritable summation of Mu'tazilite teachings of the earlier centuries while as a theologian Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār himself sought to go back to the earliest position of Wāṣil in which '*aql* and '*naql*, or reason (in this context) and revealed knowledge were kept in balance against the later tendency of some Mu'tazilites who raised the status of '*aql* over that of '*naql*. 'Abd al-Jabbār and his followers sought to reassert the early belief of Wāṣil according to whom the Qur'ān, authenticated *ḥadīth*, rational argument ('*aql*) and consensus (*ijmā'*) were all to be considered as sources for theological truth. But by then the main arena of Sunni theological thought was dominated by the Ash'arites and Mu'tazilism retired from main centres of learning in the central lands of Islam to the Yemen where it continued to enjoy a new phase of life for many centuries.

Sunni rational theology and philosophical theology are also treated in this volume for a period that is nearly the same as the era of classical Ismaili philosophy. The theological thought of a philosophical nature which this volume treats extends from the second/eighth to the ninth/fifteenth century when Sunni *kalām* gradually lost its great propagators among the Persians whose theological concerns turned to an even greater degree to Twelve-Imam Shi'i thought. In the second part of this volume our concern is, however, only with Sunni *kalām* whose greatest Persian expositors lived

in the period from the fifth/eleventh to ninth/fourteenth centuries. Shi'i *kalām*, as far as it concerns philosophy, is treated in the last section of this volume.

It might be asked why a volume should be devoted to *kalām*, usually translated as Islamic 'scholastic theology', in a work devoted to philosophy in Persia. The answer is that while early Ash'arite *kalām* was totally opposed to *falsafah* and has therefore not been included in this work, the earlier Mu'tazilite school of *kalām* provided an extensive reign for the exercise of reason and therefore both interacted widely with philosophy and helped to provide an ambience in which philosophy could be more easily cultivated. As for later Ash'arite *kalām*, usually referred to as *kalām al-muta'akhhirin*, that is, the *kalām* of the later generations (or the *via nova*), although it remained opposed to *falsafah*, it adopted to an ever greater degree philosophical arguments and dealt with philosophical issues while also interacting with philosophy and influencing its arguments in many domains. Such major theologians as Ghazzālī and Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, while being adamant opponents of those technically called philosophers, that is, the *falāsifah* such as Ibn Sīnā, were themselves philosophers in the wider sense of the term. Many of them were in reality philosophical opponents of philosophy and their thought as well as that of certain other figures of later *kalām* who were Persians must certainly be represented in a work devoted to philosophy in its widest sense in Persia. As for systematic Twelve-Imam Shi'i *kalām*, its life is hardly separable from that of philosophy.

There is no doubt that Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935–936), the founder of the Ash'arite school of *kalām*, which opposed Mu'tazilism, was an Arab as were some of the major figures of the school established by him, such as Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) along with many other later Ash'arites. Curiously enough, however, the later school of Ash'arite *kalām* (or the *via nova*) associated with Imām al-Ḥaramayn Juwaynī and his student Ghazzālī, the most famous of all Muslim theologians, had its home in Khurāsān. It was from the Persian province of Khurāsān that the intellectual defence of Sunni Islam was to be provided in the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries when much of the heartland of the Islamic world was under Shi'i control. For some three centuries, from the fifth/eleventh to the eighth/fourteenth, the greatest figures of later Ash'arite or philosophical *kalām* hailed from Persia and were associated with the centres of Khurāsān and later Shirāz. To this day the advanced texts of *kalām* taught in major Sunni centres of learning such as al-Azhar in Cairo consist mostly of the works of Persian theologians such as Ghazzālī, Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī and Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī.

It must be emphasized that both Mu'tazilite *kalām* and later Ash'arite philosophical *kalām* discuss many issues of philosophical interest while also reacting constantly with the mainstream schools of philosophy. Can one study Ibn Sīnā or even Mullā Ṣadrā seriously without consideration of their reaction to the views of the *mutakallimūn*? Can one study later Islamic ethics without full awareness of the teachings of Ghazzālī? Can one possibly understand how Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī



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