

## **Islamic Philosophy A-Z**

*Peter S. Groff with Oliver Leaman*  
*Edinburgh, United Kingdom: Edinburgh University*  
*Press, 2007. 237 pages.*

Understanding Islamic philosophy, an indispensable formative link in the chain of medieval thought, is crucial to grasping the intertwined development of philosophical ideas both within and without the Islamic sphere during the period under discussion. Peter Groff and Oliver Leaman's text belongs to the discipline of the philosophical and theological analysis of Islam. It is an attempt to shed some light on the essential, mainly Islamic contribution to the philosophical thought of the Middle Ages. This work intends to offer "the vital insights and resources of the Islamic philosophical tradition" (p. xi) as a main influence upon medieval philosophic thought in different religions (Judaism and Christianity) and cultures (India). Furthermore, he rightfully refers to Islamic philosophy as a transmitter of the classical Greek legacy.

This concise work contains brief entries (alphabetically ordered), key terms, bold marked cross-references to related terms for easy access, and major figures in the rich heritage of Greek, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim philosophy. Each brief entry is written in a very comprehensible style and covers the main relevant ideas related to the theme being discussed. Since religion has always played a decisive role in the development of Islamic thought and was never separated from the state, it is also present in varying degrees in nearly all of the entries. Consequently, this work provides information on the development of Islamic belief. The bibliographical references for further reading at the end of each entry are very helpful, though mostly laconic. Key concepts or terms are given in a simplified Arabic transcription that differs from the standard one.

This work includes diverse accounts of various central aspects and key figures of Islamic philosophy (Ibn Rushd, pp. 87-92; al-Farabi, pp. 38-40; Ibn Taymiyya, pp. 98-01; and Ibn Tufayl, pp. 101-02), theological schools (the Hanbalites, pp. 64-66), Islamic ideological currents (the Batinites, pp. 19-21, and the Brethren of Purity, pp. 24-25), theological and philosophical concepts (active intellect, pp. 4-6; the afterlife, pp. 11-12; and free will and predestination, pp. 41-44), general streams and elements in philosophy (epistemology, pp. 33-34; ethics, pp. 36-38; humanism, pp. 66-67; and logic, pp. 130-32), general issues (belief and faith, pp. 21-22, and *adab*, pp. 6-7),

and modern Islamic thinkers (Muhammad Abduh, pp. 3-4, and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, pp. 10-11).

Although the study focuses on Islamic philosophy and theology, it nevertheless includes various Jewish and Christian philosophers whose works either contributed to the Islamic intellectual tradition or were significantly influenced by it. Hence one can find such Jewish philosophers as Moses Maimonides (appears in the book as Ibn Maymun, pp. 83-86), Gersonides (Levi ben Gerson, pp. 127-30), Judah Halevi (pp. 62-64), Ibn Gabirol (pp. 73-74), and Saadia Gaon (pp. 184-86). To a far lesser extent, Groff and Leaman discuss Christian philosophers, for example, the Monophysite Jacobite Christian Ibn Adi Yahya (pp. 67-68). Such Greek philosophers as Aristotle (pp. 14-16), Plato (pp. 164-65), and Socrates (p. 197) are also reviewed.

The lack of an index, however, is a major shortcoming. In addition, there is also no clear indication of what specific criteria led to the inclusion or exclusion of a specific entry. For instance, both Sayyid Qutb and Abu al-A`la al-Mawdudi are mentioned, among others, in the entry "Islamism" (pp.112-14). But it is unclear why such political philosophers as al-Mawdudi or Qutb's extremist philosophical concept did not have entries of their own, whereas other less influential figures do appear in the book as independent entries. Therefore, the title *A-Z* misleads the reader, who would expect a more comprehensive and detailed work. Since the purpose of this study was to provide a survey, a different title would have been more accurate.

This book is recommended for non-specialists in Islam, as it is written for readers who wish to become familiar with the fundamentals of medieval philosophy. Groff and Leaman themselves rightfully classify this work as "a small introductory reference volume" (p. x) aimed at "the student or newcomer, rather than the specialist" (p. xi). The significance of this study lies in its brief and compact provision of basic information and, as such, it has fulfilled its goal. It sheds light on the guiding principles and primary aspects of Islamic philosophy especially, and on medieval philosophy in general. Thus it suffices as the first step to approaching Islamic philosophy and its roots. Based upon the premises outlined above, I find this book, all in all, a welcome compact contribution to the non-specialist interested public.

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