BOOK REVIEW


Professor Nicholas Rescher has published a number of books on Muslim Philosophers and Arabic Logic. His book on the Development of Arabic Logic which gives a comprehensive account of the logical studies of the Arabic-speaking peoples is a valuable piece of work on Arabic Logic.

Professor Rescher's new book entitled "Studies in Arabic Philosophy" is a collection of his ten essays several of which have appeared in various learned journals and the rest have seen the light of the day for the first time.

About half of these studies is devoted to Logic and some papers concern the concentric structure of the Universe, the Platonic Solids, Causation and the "Impact of Arabic Philosophy on the West," as is illustrated by their following titles:

I. Al-Kindi's Epistle on the Concentric Structure of the Universe,
II. Al-Kindi's Treatise of the Platonic Solids.
III. Yahyâ ibn 'Adi's Treatise "On the Four Scientific Questions Regarding the Art of Logic."
IV. Avicenna on the Logic of Questions.
V. Ibn al-Šalâh on Aristotle on Causation.
VI. The Concept of Existence in Arabic Logic and Philosophy.
VII. The Theory of Temporal Modalities in Arabic Logic and Philosophy.
VIII. Ibn al-'Assl's Discourse on Logic.
IX. Nicholas of Cusa on the Qur'ân.
X. The Impact of Arabic Philosophy on the West.

The First Paper deals with a short physical treatise of al-Kindi which emphasizes geometric machinery used by the author for presenting the argument—a fact that does not concur with the system of Aristotle and Ptolemy. Al-Kindi, perhaps, rightly considers the study of geometry indispensable for the scientific understanding of the World! He tries to meet his difficulties with the axioms of mathematics. The actual title of the treatise runs as "Risâlah Fi anna al-anâsîr wa'l-jîrm al-aqṣâ Kuriyyat al-Shakl"; "An Epistle (showing) that the (Four) Elements and the Outermost Body are Spherical in Form". In the Introduction of the paper, Professor Rescher has thrown light on the life and achievements of al-Kindi. He appreciates al-Kindi's Contribution to Muslim Philosophy and studies of Sciences and says (P. 3.12 s-q), "the fact is that al-Kindi made a profound study of Greek learning, and made a great contribution to its establishment in the orbit of Islam, to some extent by his patronage of the work of others, but primarily through his own large and influential productivity."

Professor Rescher, however, declares "al-Kindi as primarily a scientist or 'natural' Philosopher, rather than a 'pure' one (i.e. Philosopher)." That in those days other branches of science formed the ingredients of philosophy is, indeed, not far from truth. We cannot, therefore, minimise the contributions of Muslim Philosophers. Nevertheless, Professor Rescher has determined the Concept of the Scientific Method of al-Kindi very carefully which deserves our consideration.
The English rendering of the tractate is, no doubt, excellent. One minor mistake in the text has, however, escaped the notice of both the Editor and the Translator. In Figure 3 the line G W seems to be redundant, as it finds no place in the example illustrated. The whole argument, in fact, centres round the line A B which has been changed by the Translator into GW. Perhaps, this change has been necessitated by the expression of the text (Abū Rida: Rasā'il al-Kindī, Part II, p. 52, L. 14, Dār al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1953/1372): ونصل أج ب which is obviously wrong and can only be justified if و is read as د. Needless to say that و and د are written almost alike and are susceptible to confusion.

The Second Article, "Al-Kindī's Treatise on the Platonic Solids", shows the influence of Plato on al-Kindī. Nevertheless, al-Kindī shows his originality in so far as he gives an account of some discussions which have not been even hinted at in the Timaeus of Plato. After giving a critical introduction, Professor Rescher has given the English rendering of al-Kindī's Treatise entitled "al-Sabab al-la&alahii nasabat al-Qudamā' al-Ashkāl al-Khamṣah ila' l-Ustuqsāt", "On the Reason Why the Ancients Attributed the Five Figures to the Elements". Though the translation of the treatise is very clear and simple in diction, it has been detected that in certain places the English rendering has not kept pace with the Arabic text. Again, though the term ابعاد plural of بعد literally means 'distance', it is usually considered in philosophical treatises as equivalent to "dimensions" and the expression الإبعاد الثلاثة which is mentioned by al-Kindī as الإباعد الثلاثية is understood as "the three dimensions." But Professor Rescher has rendered this expression into "distances" (See page 27, l. 3) "and the whole is greater than the component distances See also p. 36/13 where he uses 'dimensions'. Again, the translation of the following lines (See Ar. Text, Abū Rida: Rasā'il al-Kindī, Vol. II, p. 56-57 Sq):

اعتي السما التي هو الأرض واحدة، اذهما نهايات الكل و نهايات الذي بالكل

as: "..... I mean the sky which is of one (type) with the earth since both are extremities (i.e., the one inner and the other, outer) of the universe. The extremities which are (extremities) of the universe are the most extreme of extremities; they are the most distant of the component distances in respect of place. (Thus) they are both (viz. earth and sky) united in their power and their nature" (See pp. 27, 61) seems to be difficult to understand and can be expressed, perhaps, in a better way in the following lines:

".....I mean the Sky which is one with the earth, since both are extremities (i.e., the one inner and the other outer) of the universe and the extremities of the universe are the most distant of the component dimensions in respect of place, both (i.e. the earth and the sky—the two extremities) being one in potency and encompassing (the universe)—reading و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و و and as read by the Editor; obviously being difficult from the grammatical point of view).

The Third Chapter discusses Yaḥya Ibn ʿAdī's treatise "On the Four Scientific Questions Regarding the Art of Logic." Logic has been considered by the Muslims as a
means to avoid committing errors in thought, perhaps following their First Teacher, Aristotle, who is considered as the inventor of this Science. Professor Rescher has given a short account of the life of Yahya and has critically analysed the subject of Yahya’s treatise. He specially prints out that the treatise prolongs its digression on the “pathology of error” in reasoning—a fact that indicates the intimate link between Logic and medicine which is easily discernible in the system that prevailed from the time of Galen to the fag-end of the medieval period. The “Four Scientific Questions about Logic” concern (i) its existence, (ii) its general nature; (iii) its specific character; and (iv) its use.

As the text of the treatise is not in our hand, it is not possible to say anything about the translation, except that it reads very intelligible and precise.

The Fourth Chapter deals with “Avicenna on the Logic of Questions”. As Professor Rescher states, Avicenna has taken up the task of providing an analysis and a systematic classification of questions in several of his treatises on ‘Logic’. Avicenna’s classification of questions has been illustrated by Professor Rescher in Table I (See p. 49) under the Sub-headings of (i) “Basic Questions (muṭalib ummat)” and (ii) Subsidiary Questions (muṭalib juṭ’iya).” The Arabic expressions used in the sub-headings within brackets would correctly read respectively as follows:

(i) “…………(Maṭālib Ummahāt)” and
(ii) “…………(Maṭālib Juṭ’iya)”.

The Fifth Chapter deals with “Ibn al-Salāh on Aristotle on Causation.” Ibn al-Salāh's writings have, for the first time, been studied by Professor Rescher who has thrown light on the life and works of this great physician of the 12th century very briefly. He has analyzed the subject-matter of the tract under review (which is not complete) by saying that it is the passage of Posterior Analytics, Book II (99a17-22) where Aristotle expounds the reciprocal relation of cause: ‘subject of causation, and effect.’

The editor, however, does not use points for جن and leaves it looking like the objective masculine, singular pronoun in the Arabic text.

The Sixth Chapter is entitled as “The Concept of Existence in Arabic Logic and Philosophy”. In this essay Professor Rescher has evaluated the theories of the Muṭażilites, al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Averroes and al-Qazwini al-Kāthibi on the concept of existence. He has also drawn attention of the modern world to the fact that some of the distinctions and ideas on the concept of existence drawn and adduced by philosophers and logicians in recent years were, in fact, anticipated in discussions by “Arabic Philosophers” of the 9th and 13th centuries. This is a very learned and comparative study of the problem mentioned above.

Equally valuable is the Seventh Chapter which is entitled “The Theory of Temporal Modalities in Arabic Logic and Philosophy”. As the title is self-explanatory, Professor Rescher asserts that the theory of temporalized modalities was developed by the Arabs within an Aristotelian setting. In his learned and scientific discourse he has shown that though “the ideas of temporalized modality originated in ancient Greece, they were carried forward and elaborated with a high degree of sophistication by Arabic logicians of the Middle Ages.”

In the Eighth Chapter, Professor Rescher elaborates “Ibn al-‘Assāl’s Discourse on Logic”. This tract, as stated by the author himself, is a short manual of Logic and is of little significance for those who are acquainted with Mulla Muḥibullah’s Sullam
al-‘Ulūm and its commentaries by Mulla Ḥamdullah, Mulla Mubārak, Mulla Ḥasan and Mulla Mubīn. The introduction, _inter alia_, explains the nature of the temporal modalities elaborately.

As the Arabic text published by Father P. C. Edde’ (Khalil Iddih) in al-Mashriq (Vol. 7 (1905), pp. 811-819 and 1072-1078) is not included, nothing can be said regarding the translation which reads very lucid and precise.

In the Ninth Chapter, Professor Rescher recalls the discourses of “Nicholas of Cusa on the Qurʾān”. On the 500th anniversary of the death of Nicholas of Cusa (Latilized Cusanus) Professor Rescher delivered a public lecture and dealt with the works of Nicholas who made a departure from the standard strain of Christian Polemic against Islam. This chapter supplies us the material of the same lecture. In the 15th Century, Nicholas could only appreciate the Qurʾān to the extent to which its contents appeared to him in agreement with those of the Old and New Testaments.

Professor Rescher concludes his discourse by saying: “And come what may, one cannot but honour him not only as a mind of great penetration but as a man of good-will, whose sympathetic vision was able to discern the light of truth where his compatriots saw nothing except the unmixed blackness of error.”

The last Chapter deals with ‘the impact of Arabic Philosophy on the West’. Professor Rescher has given a remarkably succinct account of the subject dealt with. According to him, as he himself explains in clear terms, the expression “Arabic Philosophy” (vide pp. 148-11) “has nothing to do with Oriental Wisdom—it is Greek Philosophy carried forward in an Arabic-language setting. History, however, tells us something different. Arabic language was not only used for translating Greek works, it was also used for translating the Indian Sciences. It is also true that Islam and for that matter Arabic fascinated thousands and thousands of Christians, Jews and followers of other faiths of Egypt, North Africa, Spain, and Asia Minor long before the eleventh century and even afterwards. Again, the expression ‘Arabic Philosophy’ can hardly exclude the Muslim ‘Ilm al-Kalām (theology) which, no doubt, influenced the intelligentsia of Europe through the works of Imam Ghazzālī and other leading exponents of Islam.

Thus, the work under review is a remarkable addition to the Scientific studies on Arabic Logic and Philosophy. The author is to be congratulated for this beautifully printed and bound edition of his critical and learned discourses.

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