

Reference:

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Our Academic studies and the birth of contemporary Arabic philosophy

by : Adeep Nayef Zyab

Review

In this work, the author analyses the current conditions of contemporary Arabic philosophical thought and the prospects of appearance of a new authentic Arabic philosophy.

The author bases this work on three premises. First, different societies (or nations, civilizations, etc) possess its different and unique philosophical view. Second, Contemporary Arabic 'societies' (or nation, civilization, etc) possess, or should possess, a unique philosophical view that reflects its heritage, its reaction to the external philosophical world, and to real live societal conditions. Third, positive encounter of the Arabic academic philosophical studies with real life problems is essential for the success in establishing the unique Arabic view in an abstract philosophical formulation.

The author introduces his analysis by stating the following,

This article is based on a well-known assumption, which is that for every society there exists 'civilizational - societal particularities' that affect in a profound way the formulation of its philosophical thought and its inquiry. And there is no escape for the philosophical experience, no matter to what extent it tries to reach an abstract human experience or a metaphysical transcendence, from getting imbued by a specific imprint gained from the overall nature of the civilization in which philosophers live. Hence, the editors of the English Encyclopedia of Philosophy, printed 1967, were right when they reserved separate articles for the 'Islamic Philosophy', 'Indian Philosophy', 'Polish Philosophy', and 'Yugoslavian Philosophy', etc. For, despite that the traditional metaphysical subjects exist in general, but these same subjects are dealt with through points of views that are affected by religion, or the prevailing sect, and are affected by the dominant rational methodology, as well as the types of the social problematic, and the civilizational status whether rising or declining. Consequently, we shouldn't be astonished when we see specific types of philosophies or ideologies prevail over others in a specific society in a specific period of its history. P. 151

Based on this preliminary introduction, the author stresses on that the Arab/Islamic civilization, despite its gradual decline since the 12th century, possesses its unique view. Within this general position he cites the gradual revival of Arab/Islamic philosophical thought since the beginnings of the twentieth century as well as the different endeavors to present a modern 'formulation' of the Arab/Islamic philosophy and the different views toward such an aim. With respect to the academic endeavors, he cites the gradual proliferation of philosophy departments in the newly founded Arabic universities with its different views toward philosophy, in general, and teaching philosophy in particular. (P. 152 – 153)

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The author, afterwards, analyses contemporary Arabic academic philosophy programs on the basis of its position from, first the Arab/Islamic heritage, second, contemporary Western thought, and third, the realities of contemporary Arabic societies. Each one of this triple sided relation represented, in his view, a challenge for the new Arabic philosophy.

With respect to the first challenge, which is the relation with our Arab/Islamic heritage, the author cites two main tendencies. The first tries to revive the Arab/Islamic heritage as a whole despite that a great part, as he sees, bears only a historical value. The second refutes such a philosophical heritage as irrelevant to today's philosophical thought, despite that, as he sees, it includes a wide variety of rational and methodological positions that can inspire today's endeavors. Consequently, he concludes by a call for deeper academic critical studies of the Arab/Islamic heritage to differentiate between these two types of the Arab/Islamic philosophical heritage and the two types of making use of such a heritage. P. 153 – 158

The second challenge is the relation between contemporary Arabic academic philosophical studies and modern and contemporary Western thought. He cites, first, that Western philosophy, whether ancient or modern, comprise the vast majority of the material of programs of philosophy. However, he cites also the hardships that such programs face in teaching Western philosophy. Amongst such hardships are, the relative obstacle of language, and the reductive tendency of contemporary Western philosophy and hence the relative absence of overall philosophical views needed for philosophy teaching.

For the first obstacle, the author stresses on the need to increase the rate of translation to cope with the vast amount of philosophy production in the West, from one side, and on the importance for philosophy professors to speak one or two Western languages. With respect to the second one, the author advances several proposals such as gathering different related articles in one translated book in order to formulate some general perspective that can be used for academic teaching and studies. P. 158 – 162

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The third challenge, which is dealing with the realities of realities of the Arabic societies, represents the most essential motive toward the appearance of the new Arabic philosophy. He states,

We move to the third panel of our study, where gradually what we call contemporary Arabic thought is formulated. The central topic of such a thought is our political and social problematic. It is not a philosophy in the strict meaning of the term, for it is concerned with studying our current civilizational conundrum. Recently, an new current of Arabic thought has appeared within which we can see signs for the birth of the new Arabic philosophy, and bears within it its seeds. For this reason, contemporary Arabic thought gains a special interest despite its immaturity and the limitation of its field of study. A small handful of Arabic philosophy professors have distinguished contribution into this field, whereas the efforts of some others are limited to socio-historical studies of the modern period of the Arabic thought. However, pure philosophical studies based on analysis and criticism is generally, rare. P. 163

However, despite that the author is concerned with the signs that point to the birth of a new 'abstract' Arabic philosophy, he stresses on the importance for such a philosophy to be related to, if not emanating from, realities of the Arabic societies. He expresses this requirement as follows,

The realities of our social live are so complicated that pre-formulated overall general philosophical thought, whether imported from Arab/Islamic heritage or from Western or Eastern thought, can't deal positively with it. All these problems require form philosophers and thinkers new points of view and new proposals that take its lead from thinking about problems of real world and from the sources of our societal anxiety. Confrontations of these problems should make use of the 'rational' positions of our heritage and the overall subconscious of the society. It is imperative for the thinker, here, to make use of the experience of other nations and other thinkers as much as the problems in hand bear. The contemporary Arabic thinker, not only the academic or the researcher, can't bypass our real live problems

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that confront him and takes classical philosophy as his starting point. In other words, there are new horizons that are enforced by this historical period over the nature of our philosophical thought. This thought, if it purports to be a living one that undertakes the ambitions of the society and its culture, can't avoid such horizons. P. 164

Within this general view, the author finds that the work of the 'Frankfurt school' and the critical theory in its elaboration on social criticism and philosophical engagement with social problems a support for his views about the future of Arabic philosophy. On the level of philosophical methodology, he stresses on the requirement of the consistency between real problems and the methodology implemented. However, in the final analysis he finds that principles of analysis and criticism are inevitable in our research work if we purport really for lively and realistically philosophical thought. P. 168

Finally, the author concludes his article by a call for establishing 'the Arabic philosophical society' that should undertake the responsibility of implementing the required conditions made above for the appearance of the new Arabic philosophy. P. 169