

## Aristotle from the Viewpoint of Muslim Philosophers

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### Introduction

Islam began its heavenly message with the command to “Read!” encouraging its followers from the beginning to acquire knowledge and wisdom. Islam places emphasis on gaining knowledge through verses such as “Are those who know and those who do not know alike?” symbolizing frequently the people of wisdom.

The outcome of these teachings was the establishment of a culture and civilization that placed its pillars on knowledge and wisdom through fledgling educational centers and circles of argumentation the core of which was the beloved prophet himself (Peace be upon him). He, through the adage that says, – Go after the knowledge even if it is in China–, persuades the Muslims to search for knowledge beyond their geographical borders. He also taught the people to add the knowledge and culture of others to their own ones, and digest them as if they were their own from the beginning. Aristotle’s teachings got the same process when entering the Islamic culture.

### Aristotle in the Islamic Culture

At the onset of translation period in the second century after Mohammad’s departure to Madina, and the access of Muslim scholars to books translated from foreign languages into Arabic, Aristotle entered the argumentation circles of Muslims, and his views received deep analytical survey by the Muslims.

In the book entitled “Tohid Mofazal” as quoted by Imam Sadeqh, the 6th. Shiite holy leader, Aristotle is praised when opposing material philosophers. In this book the holy Imam says, “In the past some people denied the existence of the inner will to help creation; they considered creation as an accidental

phenomenon. They tried to support their theory by pointing to the people being born as a freak or with extra fingers. Aristotle rejected them and reasoned that being born as a freak or with extra fingers are rare phenomena intercepting the natural cause of creation, and these can not be considered as natural ones that occur in sequence and in the same way". The holy Imam addresses Mofazal and continues that the act of production among the animals is carried out in one fixed way, as it is for the humans being born with two hands, two legs and five fingers. To be born as a freak can be traced back to the problems occurring inside the womb in which the fetus lives.

On the other hand, when searching among the works of some distinguished pupils of the holy Imam, we come across "Hosham Ebn Alhakim" who, in his treatise opposes Aristotle's views taking a criticizing stance toward him. This, through the guidance of the religious leaders, shows the critical views of the Muslim scholars toward the ones beyond the Islamic centers.

In line with this moderate trend, there existed some extremist ones that either rejected Aristotle's entire philosophy as atheistic or praised his works, according to some holy quotations, as divine ones.

### Aristotle and Logics

Aristotle's most prominent appearance in Islamic thoughts is in the field of logics. His works became translated into Arabic. Ebne Moghafa and Ebne Behrizebne Hnin began to introduce Aristotle to the Muslims through translating different parts of the "Organon". Most of Aristotle's works were translated from Samaritan into Arabic. As there were few Arab people to be familiar with Greek language, most of the Greek philosophy books were translated into Samaritan language and then into Arabic, and Aristotle hence was introduced as the founder of logics among the Muslims.

Fouroughi says, "Aristotle adopted Socrates and Plato in his philosophy, but his deep discovering desire was not confined by Socrates argumentation" and Plato's belief in the origin of knowledge and the way how to reach wisdom. In contrast, he focused on rhetoric and scientific debates. He by adopting the lead

of Plato and Socrates could outline the system of syllogistic reasoning from true propositions, that later came to be known as categorical logic which has remained unique so far.

Fouroughi also says, "Aristotle was born in 384 B.C. in Stagria, Macedonia. His parents were Greek and his father was a doctor. At the age of 18 he went to Academy and spent twenty years of his life studying there as Plato's student. When Plato died, he returned to his native Macedonia and participated in the education of Alexander, the Great, for some years. He then came back to Athens and established his own school at Lyceum, a park at the outskirts of the city. After Alexander's death as the Athenians were not happy with the king Alexander, Aristotle could not live in Athens any longer, and left the city. He died at the age of 63.

Fouroughi advocates the possibility that the science of logics had previously been known in Iran, and Aristotle only had to compile this science. To support his theory he reasoned that "Greygour 1st." in the book «The Summary of the World History» says, "Aristotle is entitled "The First Teacher" not because he is the first to introduce logics, as misconceived by some people, but because he is the first who compiled the individual parts of this science".

Dr. Mofateh, the Martyred, in the book «Aghalit» quotes Aristotle that the laws pertaining to each individual science and technique would evolve gradually, and no science could have been completed overnight. First, the fundamentals are discovered by some person, and then, processed and completed by others. He continues quoting Aristotle that he himself had learned much from the past scholars, but had been the one to introduce syllogistic reasoning, argumentation and debate. Aristotle believed that those who were skillful in debate, as «Gergias» was, could only manage to teach the people the skill of how to debate in general course, and tried to bring the students closer to logic; but logic itself was not the core subject to be paid attention to. Aristotle says that it was he who after so long a period and by the help of contemplation could introduce logic.

Sabzevari, God may bless him, says, "It was Aristotle who compiled and developed logics, but he is not the founder of it". Sabzevari, at the end of his book

"Manteghe Shafa", quotes Aristotle who says, "I inherited a large amount of the laws of logic in disorderly fashion, and through years of vigor and sleeplessness I could put them in order". This connotation supports the possibility that Aristotle managed to introduce only parts of the science of logics, and he got the rest from his foregone scholars. The Reverend Mafateh, the Martyred, advocates this theory and says, "In the year 343 B.C. Aristotle made a trip to Asia Minor, and the king of Macedonia appointed him the teacher of his son. The son later became Alexander, the Conqueror. Aristotle returned to Athens and through the fame obtained by teaching Alexander could establish his own school, a challenge to Academy. The school bearing its royal atmosphere became more prosperous than Academy did. Aristotle, then, got the notion to change the school into a university putting the disorderly knowledge bequeathed to him into an orderly one. He divided his students into different groups, each assigned to study one specific branch of knowledge. The outcome of the joint work was a great encyclopedia with its first chapter on logics.

### Summary

To come closer to the objectives of this essay I may draw your attention to further points:

First, at Aristotle's time the sophists who denied truth, and prompted mischief and cruelty, were still busy misleading the youth. Socrates and Plato had tried much to send them out of the scene, or at least make them discreditable, but with little success. To confront them thoroughly, Aristotle set up to introduce a compiled form of logic.

Second, as it was mentioned before, Aristotle entered Academy at the age of 18, and continued to study there for 20 years up to the time when Plato died. Three years later, at the age 41, he left Academy for Macedonia where he was appointed the teacher of Alexander, the young prince. He returned to Athens after years of educating Alexander and established his own school at Lyceum, a challenge to Academy. He then decided to bring all the branches of the science of the time together including logics.

Third, Alexander was of great influence to encourage his teacher to compile logics so much so that Sazevari says, "Logics is a science bequeathed to us by Alexander".

With regard to the points mentioned the incentive to force Aristotle to compile logics was not merely his desire to challenge the sophists. He could have done it years before, when he established his own school at Lyceum, or when he was Plato's student, or, at least, during the three years after Plato's death when he was fully free at home; but the compilation of logics appeared many years later perhaps, after Alexander's victories, and maybe through his order.

What were the obstacles to really hinder Aristotle to achieve his great task years before?

We know that Aristotle was well familiar with the past Greek scholars and with his contemporary sophists as well. He was also genius enough to be called "The Intelligence of the School" by Plato. During Plato's time when Aristotle produced books containing science, he was reprimanded by Plato for revealing secrets. He perhaps had the desire to compile logics but the time was not ripe for it.

He might be looking for something lost to make the puzzle, the one that Alexander, after conquering Iran, brought to his great teacher as a souvenir from the great Iranian libraries and the Persian cultural centers. That is why it is recorded that logics is a science bequeathed to us by Alexander. If it had not been for Alexander and the Persian scientific sources being left at Aristotle's disposal, how could he have introduced his book "The First Instruction"? To discover and narrate historical events of so far distant time, is really a hard task, I confess, left before researchers.

### Aristotle and Knowledge

Knowledge is divided into and theoretical ones. The theoretical one, in turn, is divided into three branches: theology, biology and mathematics. The applied one is also divided into civil politics, home management and morality. Farabi in his book "A Compromise of Views among Philosophers" expresses the

commonalities and discrepancies existing between the views of Aristotle's and those of Plato's. He classifies the deductive philosophy as theology, biology, logics, mathematics and politics.

### Aristotle and Theology

Aristotle was introduced to the Arab world, through translations by the Persian, ..... and Nestorian Christian philosophers, as the representative of peripatetic school. The Muslims became, hence, familiar with Aristotle. Some of Plato's works were also introduced but in the name of Aristotle.

Kendi, who is believed as the first Arab philosopher, believed that through wisdom, man can produce a valuable theological philosophy. He was not so familiar with the differences existing between Plato and Aristotle's philosophies and believed that the first incentive for Aristotle was the theological cause.

Farabi knew Greek, Arabic, ....., ..... and Persian languages. He was familiar with Aristotle and Plato's views. In his book "A Compromise of Views among Philosophers" he says, "Some think that Aristotle believed in the old origin of the universe denying the creation of the universe. Maybe Aristotle's question "Does the universe stood from the beginning or not?" which was raised in his book «Toubigha» had been the cause for this kind of misinterpretation. Farabi says, "This was given as an example, and does not imply that Aristotle intends to describe the universe, instead he intends to describe the collective deduction got from the routine introductions".

Farabi further says that Aristotle's belief that the creation of the universe does not bear any time beginning, has made some people think that he believe4d in the old origin of the universe denying the creation of it. But this is not true, because Aristotle believes that time is an indicator of the movement of the universe and is created by the universe itself, and therefore it can not hold the universe, and it is not possible that universe bears a time origin. God created the universe at once, and time is created by its movement.

Farabi then refers to the book «Esolougia» and brings forth some testimonies supporting Aristotle's belief in God. Because of Farabi's reference to this book

many Muslim philosophers thought that «Esolougia» belonged to Aristotle, whereas it belonged to Platinus, the philosopher of the 3rd century, who supports Plato's views rather than Aristotle's.

Farabi quotes Aristotle as in the book "The Songs of Nature" who says that creation of the universe cannot be imagined accidental. Farabi continues quoting Aristotle who points to the unique law that brings all the universal elements together. There Aristotle refers to the causes, and proves the subjective element. He refers to the cause and moving force, and says they cannot be created by themselves.

Farabi also invokes the treatise by the name «Laminous» or «Layounios» quoting Aristotle and Plato who prove the creator of the universe. He, then, exaggeratingly admires Aristotle and Plato and says, "If God had not saved the people of wisdom for the sake of these two wise men, Aristotle and Plato, mankind would have left astray and ignorant".

Farabi, through his book, provides us with the implication that there were some people among the Muslim philosophers who accused him of impiety, but Farabi is highly critical of them. He by the help of Aristotle's words proves that Aristotle believed in God and the creator of the universe.

### Aristotle and Motion

A very important subject introduced by Aristotle is that of "motion", which is well-known among Muslim philosophers. «Avicina» classified this issue in natural science category; and some other scholars such as «Sadrolmotaehelin» categorized it in theology class. Avicina considered motion as a phenomenon being occurred in nature, so it had to be dealt with in nature. But the second group believed that motion is part of existence and hence it is to be categorized in theology class.

From Aristotle's point of view motion is a change of the source of power into action. To him the source of power is prerequisite to action. According to Aristotle's view substance is composed of solid material (form), and life. The form is a vessel to contain the source of power and it is in motion by this power.

According to this interpretation if something is made to its ultimate purpose, it won't possess any motion any longer. Motion can be conceived when the substance is made of the source of power and action. In the universe nothing can be imagined as the mere source of power, unless it itself is the action of that source of power, as is "the First Essence".

This kind of approach to motion by Aristotle would confine the motion to physical world in which any substance is considered to be made of the source of power, and hence no motion could be found out of the physical world, because we can't find any material substance there.

There still remained the question whether the physical universe got to exist through the old age or not. Sadrollmoteahelin answered this question, and said that the physical universe was not created through old ages, but it was created by the "inner occurrence". The universe emerged because it needed to exist and not because of time. We cannot imagine the presence of time without the existence of universe. Time depends on the universe and without the existence of the universe, it cannot be imagined.

### Aristotle and the Natural Science

In many books and treatises by Muslim philosophers we can locate Aristotle's views on natural science. In his book, «A Compromise of Views among the Scholars» Farabi refers to the issue of "seeing" quoting Aristotle who says that seeing is performed through the eyes; and then quoting Plato who says that something gets out of the eyes and reaches the object and then we get the result of "seeing".

Here Farabi tries to make a compromise between the two scholars "views". Aristotle is quoted that rain is made through evaporation arising from the Earth.

Some say that the natural science taught by Imam Bagher, the fifth Shiite religious leader, was that of belonging to Aristotle. It is to be noted that there have existed many scientific views in natural science quoted from Aristotle; such as: "If the hen is found to be similar to a cock in voice and song, she will bear a thorn on her leg, similar to the one of a cock"; or "Sparrows when become



blind, they get their food from the tree called "the sun's eye" and then they retrieve their sight"; or "There is hostility between sparrows and donkeys, because sometimes donkeys unknowingly cause the death of sparrows"; and there exist some other views concerning honey, blind mouse, pigeons' age being quoted from Aristotle, that are not proved true.

### Aristotle and Ethics

There existed plenty of views on moral issues in Muslim philosophers' works, which are quoted from Aristotle. He is quoted that the absolute happiness is spiritual elevation, and the margin kinds of happiness such as being wealthy and educated will provide the ground to reach spiritual elevation.

According to Aristotle, every person is naturally in search of happiness, avoiding savagery. The only way to accomplish happiness is through a moderate way of life. He says bravery is an instinct between the two extremes: fearlessness and fear.

In contrast, there are some quotations from Aristotle such as "Cruelty originates" from the nature of man and only two factors can stop it, either the religious one that reminds man of the 'Resurrection Day', or the political one which means "sword".

With regard to the effect of education on human soul, Ebne Moskovay quotes Aristotle that a mischievous person could sometimes be guided to the right path by training and education, but this can not always be generalized. Frequent preaching should be accompanied by timely punishment. Some people are easily educated and head for good conducts; on the contrary, some take the training but are very slow to achieve good conducts. Moskovay's deduction from Aristotle is that "An ill-tempered person can be cured and put in the right path, and hence his misconduct cannot be considered natural and intrinsic".

Moskovay quotes Aristotle that there exist some blessed gifts which are noble, and some other ones which are to be praised, and some others which are useful.

He then elaborates on them and says, "Nobility is a gift and intrinsic, and he who discovers it will become noble. The gifts of this sort are knowledge and wisdom. Some gifts are to be praised, as they are the good products of the will,

and some other ones are useful, which are the means to reach the ends". He then quotes Aristotle and says that it is hard to be noble and take noble steps without being generous, being lucky and enjoying abundant friends. Knowledge is to comprise governing technique and social management, and these qualities are considered as the nobility of knowledge, and because of this, all the things bestowed to mankind by God, are blessed ones, and the gifts by Him. The perfect man will be vested, by God, with the supreme gift.

According to Aristotle, one can reach happiness in five ways:

1 / In having a healthy body, which is an indication of a moderate way of life.  
2 / In possessing money, as well as friends who help him spend the money in the right way, and on benevolent purposes.

3 / In fulfilling job success.

4 / In obtaining a wholesome mind and faith in either his religion, or something that keeps him away from mischief.

5 / In gaining the fame of good name among his fellow people, as well as the knowledgeable.

Anybody who owns these five blessings would feel happy, and the amount of happiness depends on them.

Moskovay says that he had much benefited from Aristotle's ethics book "Nikomakhos", and tried to bring a new and comprehensive arrangement to his subjects.

He sometimes used the Islamic quotations to support his own views, and sometimes criticized Aristotle's views on ethics.

### Aristotle and Politics

It is quoted that Aristotle and Plato held the same views on politics, and believed that the word "citizen" meant "freedom from obligations", and it was the duty of the laborers to provide him and his family with all the services needed. Aristotle advocated this view by reasoning that a citizen whose job is to manage the city, should be a person who naturally possesses wisdom and bravery to continue his rule over the city, and has the time to provide the people with the due utilities and services.

There will be no time left for him to provide for his own personal needs, and furthermore, his status keeps him away from manual jobs which decrease his high ranking position. Therefore, there should be somebody to carry this responsibility. Here nature presents some nations who are of little intelligence but of high physical strength. They are the laborers who carry the responsibility to cater for the citizen.

In the works of Muslim philosophers this kind of social discrimination has been expressed in a different way. They place emphasis on the personal qualities and talents. According to Farabi, the laborers are those who lack the ability to understand the reasons behind the orders, but possess the physical ability to fulfill the orders perfectly well.

### The Resurgence of Aristotle

Aristotle's views appeared in the Islamic civilization nearly one thousand years after his death. He affected various domains of thought. Muslim thinkers participated in his debates, and criticized him as well. They, in time, corrected him, and helped the establishment of new schools of thought. Four hundred more years passed, and then Aristotle, through the works of the Islamic philosophers such as Ebne Rosht, returned once more to the western world.

During these four centuries Aristotle's views had been criticized and corrected time and again; and the Aristotle that the Europeans of the Middle Age came to know, had got a new image.