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**On The Philosophy of Islam:
Histoire de las Philosophie Islamique:
I. Des Origines Jusqu'a la mort d'averroes**

Review Author: Thomas J. O'Shaughnessy

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ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF ISLAM

HISTOIRE DE LA PHILOSOPHIE ISLAMIQUE: I. DES ORIGINES JUSQU'A LA MORT D'AVERRONES. By Henry Corbin. Paris: Gallimard, 1964c. 383 pp.

The preface of this book states that the history of philosophy and that of spirituality are inseparable in Islam, thus making it clear that this is not a history of philosophy in the usual sense. What the author really proposes to treat is Islamic prophetic philosophy. This is drawn not merely from the data supplied by the human mind left to its own resources, but from reflection on what Muslims accept as revelation. Prophetic philosophy so understood is immense in its scope, as its thought-content "does not allow itself to be shut in by the historical past nor by the letter which immobilizes the teaching of that thought in the shape of dogmas nor by any horizon which puts bounds to the powers and laws of rational logic" (p. 43). It would therefore include not only philosophy in the Western sense but also theosophy and anything touching on religious experience in the widest sense of the term.

In order to emphasize the religious character of the subject, the author prefers the term "Islamic philosophy" to the more usual "Arabic philosophy," because today "Arabic" has ethnic, political, and nationalistic connotations which do not suit the religious intent of the book. Islamic philosophy is guided by the Islamic religion as a positive determinant, not as a mere negative norm.

The history here begun will extend over several volumes and three distinct stages. The first of these latter—from the origins of Islamism up to the death of Averroes in 1198—is the subject of the present book. The second and third stages will cover the periods from 1198 to the end of the fifteenth century and from the Safawid Renaissance in sixteenth century Iran up to the present.

The work opens with a short chapter on the Koran and on the translations from Greek, Syriac, and Persian which brought Aristotelian, Neo-Platonic, and Gnostic influences to bear on Islamic thought. The author then devotes 112 pages or about one third of the entire book to a second chapter dealing with the Shi'ite sect and its two principal sub-sects. The next six chapters, including about 196 pages, are spread over the Sunnite or orthodox schools of dogma, philosophy and the secular sciences in Islam, the Neo-Platonic Aristotelians, Sufism, Suhrawardi and the illuministic school of Iran, and philosophy in Arab Spain. The vast amount of matter surveyed and the brief space allotted to each chapter require that for many important figures in Muslim religious thought the author content himself with what in the preface he planned to avoid—dictionary articles.

The seemingly disproportionate amount of space given to Shi'ism, whose adherents now number less than ten per cent of all Muslims, is justified by the claim that Shi'ite thought is highly important as a source of inspiration for Islamic philosophy as here treated. One might more easily accept this explanation if some of the other chapters had been further developed. Sufism, for example, is justly praised as the outstanding effort in Islam to interiorize the teachings of the Koran, to break with legalism, and to relive Muhammad's religious experience (p. 47). Yet the four centuries that saw the initial flowering of this ascetical movement are covered in twenty-one pages. Al-Maturidi, whose school with al-Ash'ari's has dominated Sunnite theology for the last ten centuries, is given only a few lines on page 171. Much of the material in Chapter IV on the contributions of Muslims to medicine, grammar, and mathematics seems to cast little light on the main topic of the book and could have been abbreviated or omitted in favor of a more extensive discussion of figures like al-Hārith al-Muhāsibi, al-Hallāj, al-Ghazzālī, and Ibn Tumart. Muhāsibi and Ibn Tumart are merely named—the latter with an incorrect date—and al-Hallāj, one of the greatest Muslim ascetics, is allotted only three pages. Likewise, the five pages given to al-Ghazzālī seem insufficient for the Aquinas of Islamic religious thought.

The bibliography, covering fifteen pages and arranged according to chapter and sub-section, omits little of importance within the limits set down in the introductory note on page 348 where it is announced that no exclusively Arabic or Persian works are to be cited. One outstanding article that might have found a place in it is that of J. Maréchal, "La problème de la grace mystique en Islam," *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, XIII (1923), 244-92. But as it stands now, this up-to-date and detailed piece of documentation by itself makes Corbin's book worthwhile for any student of Muslim philosophy and theology.

THOMAS J. O'SHAUGHNESSY, S.J.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND ETHICS

NATURE AND CULTURE: Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment. By Lester G. Crocker. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963. xx, 540 pp.

In this volume Lester G. Crocker, chairman of the Department of Romance Languages at Western Reserve University, presents his second study of philosophical thought in France during the eighteenth century. The first study, *An Age of Crisis: Man and World in Eighteenth*