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# Religion and Mysticism in philosophy of Avicenna: Non-Aristotelian Elements

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### ABSTRACT

Avicenna has revived Peripatetic Philosophy, and he was influenced by some of foundations and principles of Aristotelian philosophy. But, Avicenna, in his Islamic philosophy, has transcended from Aristotle, and has presented other and further foundations and principles. Among new foundations that he has presented are his religion and mystical principles. In his religion principles, Avicenna has talked from fivefold principles of Monotheism, Prophecy, Resurrection, Leadership (Imamate), and Justice: God has the whole qualities of perfection and is creature, originator, knower, and omnipotent; Divine Foreknowledge suitable being of prophet; Divine Foreknowledge suitable being of Resurrection; for prophet is better to attribute on his next leadership(imam) and caliph; and legislator must bring laws that invite to justice, that is moderation in affairs. In his mystical principles, Avicenna has insisted on principles of hierarchy of causes and effects; principles of priority of knowledge and purification on arriving at active intellect and other intellects and, at last, on arriving at the most high God; and he has talked, with detail, about true love and diffusion of love in whole world and things, from devotion and worship, from degrees of itinerary of spiritual path in arriving at the God, from mystical degrees of interior purification and exterior purification, and from spiritual dispositions of mystics.

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## Introduction

Among texts that we have available, we must search for beginnings of philosophy and wisdom in ancient Greece. Among Greek philosophy, Aristotle philosophy has realistic logical and intellectual frameworks and so that One can deliberate its truth and false according to reason. Philosophy of Aristotle has become famous to peripatetic philosophy and Avicenna (Ibn Sinā) is the most important defender of it. Also, among texts that we have available, there are three interpretation from Islamic philosophy and wisdom: peripatetic interpretation, illuminationist interpretation, and sadra interpretation. Peripatetic interpretation is the continuity of Aristotle philosophy and peripatetic philosophy, search for a realistic interpretation from Islamic philosophy and wisdom, and, with Avicenna interpretation, it has reached to very growth and development.

Avicenna, from the one hand, has developed and extended peripatetic philosophy and, from the other hand, under several decisive elements, has provided a new interpretation from peripatetic philosophy.

Elements that have brought up Avicenna new peripatetic philosophy and have been effective in its appearance are: Greek philosophy, religion of Islam, mysterious aptitude, and intellectual genius.

1. Philosophy of Avicenna roots in Greek philosophy. Greek philosophy, and especially philosophy of Aristotle, is the first element in appearance of Avicenna philosophy. Aristotle, in his philosophy, thought that the world is eternal (Aristotle, 1984, 278 a 26; 1069 b 35-1070 a 1); He thought that the First Principle is the immovable mover of the first sphere and believed that the movement of the first sphere is caused by the desire that the first sphere indicates to the first principle (Aristotle, 1984, *Metaphysics*, 12, 8); the existence of world was a compound of its Matter and Form (Aristotle, 1984, 1043 a 26-29) and didn't believe that the Being (*Wojod*) is a thing different from them; imperishability of individual souls and the immortality of potential intellect were ambiguous; soul was a form of body and, together, were one thing and not different substances (Aristotle, 1984, 412 b 6); ...

Avicenna has made use of Greek elements that weren't Aristotelian or erroneously had ascribed to Aristotle. The doctrine of Emanation is among most important of them. Among elements that erroneously has been ascribed to Aristotle is the doctrine of Emanation; For, it has been thought that it is Aristotle who has composed the books *Uthulujiyā* and *Al-Kheir-o-Al-Mahz* some thought that the doctrine of emanation is an Aristotelian doctrine. Perhaps Avicenna is the first person that recognized *Uthulujiyā* isn't of the works of Aristotle and he has mentioned this subject in his different works, nonetheless, he was greatly influenced by that work under the title Avicenna (1947), his marginal notes on Aristotle's *on the soul*, in Badavi, *Arasto-end-Al-Arab*, p. 121; also *content of Avicenna's work*, margin the book of *Al-Insāf*, specially margin Dr. Yahya Mahdawy).

2. The religion of Avicenna was Islam, and he was, in a narrative sense, in follower of Ismailian Shia, and, in the other narrative sense, in follower of Twelver Shia, intended to conciliate between religion and philosophy. On the principles of Islamic intellectual subjects, Avicenna had defended that all perfections are gathered in God (See, for example, Avicenna, lunar 1404, *Al-Ilāhiyāt*, 9, 1) and He the same is eternal as is the creator of the world (Avicenna, solar 1331, 9); the world is possessing from essential advent and any temporal is trying to eternal (Avicenna, lunar 1402, manner 5, problem 5); the world of sensibles, in addition to Matter and Form, is possessing of Being (*Wojod*) (Avicenna, lunar 1404, *Al-Ilāhiyāt*, pp. 342 and 347); in addition to spiritual, even there are bodily resurrection (Avicenna, lunar 1404, *Al-Ilāhiyāt*, article 2, chapter 34) and rational souls and reasons are eternity alive and eternal (Avicenna, lunar 1402, manner 7, problem 1); soul is a substance other than body and should be properly form of body and perfection to body (Avicenna, lunar 1404, *Al-Tabiyāt*, art 6, pp. 11-16). Avicenna tried to intellectualize the principles of his Religion and, then, made an effort to accommodate philosophical principles of Peripatetic with them.

3. Avicenna was possessed from very intellectual genius, and this intellectual genius is the origin of his special philosophy. Under this intellectual genius, Avicenna neither perfectly put away Aristotle's philosophy nor accepted the whole of that. In view of the variety that existed in Aristotle's discourses which appeared in his numerous books during his life, and the different viewpoints of commentators in commenting of his opinion brought about, Avicenna, relying on his powerful genius, tried to comment on them and calls together or criticizes and renders them and produces a new philosophy; a philosophy that is compatible with intellectual doctrines of Islam.

4. Avicenna also was possessed from very mystical insight. In this mystical insight, also, he was under the influence of peripatetic philosophy and religious mysticism he had flowed his mysterious insight in the whole of his philosophy. Even when he speaks of reason and its impression on the mode of attaining one's cognition, reveals mysterious nature of his philosophy; and he clarify the one gets cognition when it is in close connection with active intellect and this emanation is intelligibly reflected in his soul (Avicenna, lunar 1402, vol. 2, pp. 367-8). Avicenna considers attaining Truth [God] and divine knowledge is possible through stability in the same line of the connection with active intellect and as a result of this stability this intelligible world becomes equal to the world of the whole Being (*Wojod*) and sees goodness and beauty and absolute gracefulness and unites co-substance with them (Avicenna, lunar 1404, *Al-Ilāhiyāt*, 9, 8).

Under the influence of these factors, Avicenna gradually avoided from some Aristotelian elements and turned toward to some non - Aristotelian elements, attained to his special philosophy, and this is a philosophy that, in spite of being Peripatetic, is in accordance with Islam and intellectual and religious teachings of Islam.

I have discussed three following elements in the other article: (1) on the doctrine of emanation and proceeding world from First Principle; (2) on the reason and soul and body; (3) on the matter and

form.<sup>1</sup> In this article, in brief manner, I will present a description and explanation of the Avicenna's religion and mysticism that is non-Aristotelian and have a great impression on Avicenna's philosophy, and finally detect some agreement of opinions in their works.

## Religion and Mysticism

### Religion

There is no doubt that Avicenna was religious and intended to establish his philosophical foundations and principles on it.<sup>2</sup> In his opinion, God is not only the first mover, but also He has the whole qualities of perfection and is the knower and the omnipotent on creation and origination. God is an agent that His act is on His consent and His knowledge and reasoning is the source of emanation and actuality of the world. He was a true disciple of religion but as a scholar and philosopher interpreted his religious doctrine in accordance with reason and rational principles. In his opinion, the emanation of the world is from God, but according to the principle of "*ex uno non fit nisi unum*" he inevitably maintains that the mediator of procession is the first intellect.

When Avicenna talks of Prophecy, (Avicenna, lunar 1404, *Al-Ilāhyāt*, article 10, chapters 1-4) in accordance with his philosophical system, and contrary to Motakallemin (Theologians), he explains necessity for the existence of prophet not on the basis of Grace principle but according to the Divine principle of the Foreknowledge of being (*Wojod*) and the essential emanation of God. (Ibid, p. 442) In demonstrate of Prophecy, he states that it is necessary for human beings in order to bring about their needs are requested in fellowship with each other and establishment of communities and cities and,

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1. See Dadjoo, Ebrahim (2025), 117-142.

2. In this section, Avicenna is perfectly non-Aristotelian. Even though commentators as Aquinas and Duns Scotus incline to comment Aristotle piously and even Berentano has tried to show a pious comment of Aristotle it doesn't seem that one can never achieve a religious and pious view point. In this case, see Elser, 1905.

consequently, observance of laws and justice; the existence of laws and justice necessitates the existence of lawgiver and propagator of justice; to insure the perpetuity of mankind, the existence of such a person is more necessary than the growing of a hair on eyelashes and the depth of the sole of the foot; and since the existence of such an honest man to establish the law and administer justice is possible, it isn't permitted that Divine Foreknowledge demands these profits but doesn't demand the existence of such a person that is the basis for realization of these affairs.( Ibid, pp. 441-2)

In explaining the specifications of the prophet, Avicenna, preparing an introduction, affirms that the most superior man is one whose soul has accomplished the perfection of the actual intellect and, in morality, has achieved the practical virtues, and the most superior of these men is one who has the disposition to the degree of Prophecy. Such a person is one whose sensual faculties possess these three specifications: attending the divine speech, discerning the angels visibly, and receiving the voice of revelation from God or angels.( Ibid, p. 435) Such a person must be a human being and enjoys qualities that the others don't have, and therefore must be informed of miracles and, following the revelation, legislate laws for the affairs of human beings.( Ibid, p. 442) About the religion of human beings he should (Ibid, pp. 442-4): (1) Preach God that is One and Maker and omnipotent and be aware of the unknown secrets, and it is His right to be obeyed; He is Owner of the order and law and one who obeys Him is capable of a prosperous resurrection and one who disobeys Him deserves an unblestness resurrection. (2) About resurrection and the divine Foreknowledge should regard the comprehension of the common people. (3) To legislate traditions and acts for people to practice them in close intervals so that His tradition not be forgotten for example worships, and in addressing the resurrection (the beginning and the end) considers the secular benefits, for example explain the pilgrimage and Holy war in detail. And, also, about the

secular world of human beings he should (Ibid, pp. 447-451): (1) Establish organizations to conduct political and industrial and military and financial affairs and appoint experienced persons to control these affairs regarding their hierarchy. (2) Persuading people to work and preventing them from idleness and parasitic, and dismiss the idle people from the city. (3) Allocating special places for the headless and the disabled and appoint executive for them. (4) Preventing trivial actions which has no productivity, or disgrace the esteem and prestige of the society. (5) Preventing any transaction that lacks profits and benefits. (6) To preventing merchants, parasites and traders to deceive people. (7) Persuading people for co-operation. (8) In administering the affairs of people, he should accumulate possessions and the wealthy from the income of people and the fines for violators of the law and the plunders that have been plundered from enemies. (9) To punish violators of law and Divine Law and to suppress the religious invaders. (10) To try in the affair of marriage and laws relating to spouses and family.

Moreover, when Avicenna talks about resurrection (Ibid, p. 443) and its quality, he resorts to the Divine Foreknowledge. He reasons that as God assumes the resurrection to be good, the subject matter of God's knowledge should be designed in a way that He proves it to be good. About other-worldly happiness,( Ibid, pp. 445-6) he says that other- worldly happiness is gained through purification of the soul, purification of the soul is an obstacle in acquiring bodily figures which are opposed to the Causes of happiness; this purification is gained by means of morals and dispositions, and morals and dispositions are gained through actions that dissuade the soul from body and sensation and remind it of its own precious mine; consequently, human beings, by avoiding the body and its attachments and by dominating body, acquires the disposition of attention to the resurrection and avoidance of absurdity, and gains strong capacity for pure happiness at the time of separation of body.

About the Vicar and the Leader (Imam) after the Prophet (Ibid, article 10, chapter 5), he says that the prophet should obligate the obedience of his vicar. Vicar is appointed by the prophet himself or by means of the consensus of the proceedings and they must evidently inform people that this person has the political autonomy, the noble reason, the virtual morals of braveness, temperance and good management and is the most learned to the divine law.(Ibid, p. 452) In spite of the fact that Avicenna doesn't make it clear that the Leader (Imam) is immune of sin and error, he maintains that it is better and righties to resolve it on the Vicar.( Ibid, p. 451) He suggests that the prophet should establish the following rules for his vicars(Ibid, pp. 452-4): (1) If one give rise to disunion and contention on the ground of capricious or assemble on other than Him he will be a pagan. (2) If one, owing to his power and wealth, rebels on the vicar and claims vicariate, it is the duty of the people to fight with him and to kill him, and if they can assist him but they neglect they would be blamed on rebelling God and profane and it is permitted to shed their bloods, and for God prior to the great prophet, there is no faith more precious than omitting this invader. If the violator proves that the vicar is defective and imperfect but he himself deserves to be the Vicar, it is better for people of city to help him. (3) Some worships and actions and transactions couldn't be perfected except for the presence of the vicar, like social worships and actions and like marriages. (4)To fight and to eradicate enemies and opponents of the tradition, after inviting them to the Truth, is necessary and the confiscation of their wealth and honours are permitted. (5) If a city enjoys of good laws and traditions, it will not be attached until it is deviated from the Divine tradition. (6) the people who have refused the divine law should be chastised and castigated. (7) The order of the city is charge of politician vicar with knowledge to hierarchy of guards and income and expenditure of the city and preparing equipment of war

and castles and boundaries.

It is surprising that Avicenna regards some people to be naturally slaves (Ibid, p. 453) and he says those who are trained in un noble climates are people of not good genius and healthy reason, so they should be obliged to serve for people of just city.

Finally, also about justice, (Ibid, pp. 454-5) Avicenna discusses and maintains the legislator should establish laws in morality and traditions which are the cause of justice. Following Aristotle, he believes justice as moderation. He says justice is desirable and good morals and traditions in two ways (or may be in several ways): once moderation, breaks up the prevalence of faculties, and it is good for purification of the soul and gaining a higher situation and neat deliverance of soul from body; since it employs these faculties is good for worldly utilities; and as it employ pleasures is good for duration of body and race; as for bravery it is good for duration of city. He signifies human motives as passion, wrath and intellectual faculty and estimates the three virtues that are middle terms of these three as chastity, bravery and wisdom (a wisdom that is a moral virtue and is a section of practical wisdom) and he receives the whole of these three as habit of justice.

### **Mysticism**

Avicenna's mystical view should be considered in terms of his philosophical order. He is a scientist and philosopher, and believes creation of the world in terms of the divine generosity and emanation and also the hierarchy of causes and effects and propounds the hierarchy of middles for intellects and spheres.

Avicenna, in mysticism, remains faithful to the universal principle of causes and effects and therefore, in contrary to mystics, he maintains that journey to and arrival at God is dependent on acquiring its knowledge. In his opinion, in order for the soul to arrive at God, due to studying, and disputing and

Gaining reasonable, perfections, purification and clarification and completion of its substance is prepared for the Divine Light, it gains the Light by arriving at the active intellect, and if it insists on its attempt on arriving at the active intellect by means of its stability on edification and purification, it will find the way for other intellects and, finally, the Supreme Deity that is the principle for emanation of the whole being (*Wojod*). (Avicenna, lunar 1402, vol. 3, pp. 292 and 294.)

In arriving at God, as he rejects the union of the knower and the Known in any case other than the knowledge of soul to its essence (Ibid), contrary to mystics and Plotinus (Plotinus, solar 1356, pp. 52-3), he doesn't maintain the mystical union with God (or One). (Of course, Avicenna, in other places, for example, Avicenna, solar 1363, p. 7, and Avicenna, lunar 1404, *Al-Ilāhiyāt*, article 8, chapters 6 and 7, and Avicenna, lunar 1402, manner 8, chapter 6, maintains the union of the knower and the known in case of knowledge of soul to things that have matter and form, but this issue doesn't have anything do with our present discussion).

It is evident that, in the itinerary of spiritual path to God, the spiritual ecstasy and disposition and aspiration is of the most importance and studying, disputing and learning and reasoning is of no value. In spite of the fact that Avicenna deems such a spiritual ecstasy and disposition necessary, he doesn't think that they are sufficient, and therefore later on manner 8 and in the manners 9 and 10 of Avicenna, lunar 1402, he has intended to explain mystical dispositions and give an account of mystical terms and generally bring together the Path of people of mysticism to the minds of people of argument and dispute.

In the following discussion, in a brief and proper order we recollect the subjects that he has propounded in these three manners (Avicenna, lunar 1402, vol. 3, pp. 359 ff)

1. In the final part of manner 8 he propounds true love and refers to

the difference between love and ecstasy, and explains the diffusion of voluntary and natural love the whole world and things. He points out that the diffusion of loves has six degrees:

(1) In the first degree there is God Almighty that is essentially lover and beloved.

(2) In the second degree there are intellectual and sacred substances that are blessed to God and its essence; because these two degrees lack potency, they lack ecstasy, too.

(3) In the third degree there are rational and spherical souls and perfect human beings who still care for their bodies, and this are eager lovers and in addition to love they also have an ecstasy.

(4) In the fourth degree there are human souls that have stages between divinity and the lowest stage, and this stage is the stage of rational and middle souls.

(5) In the fifth degree the souls are drowned in the world of sinister nature, and this degree is the degree of unperfect rational souls.

(6) In the sixth degree there are bodily things, and they have a special perfection of themselves and a voluntary or natural love to this perfection; and also, these human souls and things possess a voluntary and natural ecstasy.

2. At the beginning of manner 9, there is a definition of devout, worshipper and mystic and he explains the intention of mystic and non-mystic from devotion and worship and maintains that the intention of mystic is only God, but the intention of non-mystic is gaining otherworldly reward and recompense.

3. Following the discussion, he expounds the degrees of itinerary of spiritual path in arriving at the Truth, in eleven allusions with the following contents:

(1) Mystics believe that the first degree for the motions of mystics is called volition. And volition is a thing that he who has spiritual vision for demonstrative certainty or he whose soul has achieved a tranquility in his belief so that he feels he is too eager to hang on the

Divine Rope and the consciousness of his heart's core moves towards Sanctity to obtain the spiritual connection. And, in this degree, he is still a disciple.

(2) After this spiritual disposition, the disciple needs mortification. The intention of mortification is three things: Firstly, to obtain everything other than the Truth voluntary, secondly to subject carnal soul to the peaceful soul until his faculties of imagination and estimation have been attracted to illusions that are suitable for the Sacred and have been dispensed of illusions that are suitable for meanness, thirdly that his consciousness becomes pure for awareness. The assistant of the first intention is true devotion; and for the second intention is several things: first is worshipping on account of thinking, the second is the tone that employs sensual faculties and this tone is in a manner which is accepted by estimations, the third is an advisable speech from a clean speaker with an eloquent phrase and harmonious melody and a polisher direction; and assistant of the third intention is a pure thinking and a chaste love in which the impetuous is the countenance of beloved not the domination of lust.

(3) After this spiritual disposition, since volition and mortification promote, he gains the delicious and mystical trances and is informed the Light Truth, like a sparkle that instantly shines and is obliterated. And they call this spiritual disposition Moments. And any moment is embraced by two raptures, a rapture for him and a rapture against him. And after that, if he continues and exaggerates in mortification, the occurrence of this spiritual disposition will increase.

(4) After this spiritual disposition, if he subjects himself to mortification so that even when he is not in mortification this spiritual disposition will happen to him. Hence, wherever he looks he moves towards the Sanctity and everything reminds him of the Sanctity and that spiritual disposition predominates on him so that he apprehends the Truth in everything.

(5) And he might improve to the point that this disposition

Predominates on him so that he loses his tranquility and his companions become informed of his restlessness. Thus, if his mortification is prolonged the disposition doesn't make him restless so he has to find out the way of hiding it.

(6) After this spiritual disposition, his mortification comes to the point that each moment of his life evolves into ataraxy and tranquility, and what was undesirable becomes desirable, and the sparkle that instantly shone and disappeared, changes into a bright light, and a fixed cognition is obtained for him, and he is constantly overflowed by this disposition and take pleasure from the cheerfulness of that disposition, and when he turns away from that disposition become wandering and sad.

(7) And he might advance to the point that the disposition is manifested to him. Therefore, if he promotes this cognition, he will less be manifested. As if, he become a present absent and a traveler resident.

(8) And he might come to the point that this cognition becomes possible for him from time to time, and then gradually he arrives at the position that any time he desires he can have it.

(9) After this spiritual disposition, he ascends to a higher degree so that the appearance of this disposition is not dependent on his desire but he comes to a disposition that if he sees a thing, although he hasn't seen that in accordance with care, it will happen due to his ascent from the world of falsehood to the world of Truth, and it is really a fixed ascent, and they who are careless take around of him.

(10) Thus, when mortification transcends this degree, his interior becomes a clear mirror that has settled on the face of Truth and he takes advantages of true pleasures and is cheerful in understanding the effects of Truth, and in this disposition, he has an attention to Truth and an attention to soul and he is still uncertain.

(11) After this spiritual disposition, he hides from himself and attends only to the Sanctity, and if he attends himself his

attention is due to attention of Truth on him and not for his possession of that ornament. And here he has actually arrive at the Truth.

4. And finally he discourses mysticism. The mystics try to accomplish the interior purification and the exterior purification. Mysticism begins with purification or interior purification; and purification has degrees: dispersion, banish, abandon, heresy. Also, the exterior purification is to be consistent in gathering the attributes of the Supreme Truth so that he is really, endowed with the divine morals; the exterior purification also has degrees; one whose intention of mysticism is the mystics in itself, and one whose intention of mysticism is the Truth.

5. About the moralities and spiritual dispositions of mystics, he believes that the mystic is joyful and unveiled and smiling, and hence he perceives the Mystery of Destiny he has mercy on people and anger doesn't prevail over him and he is brave and heroic and broad-minded and he hasn't rancor and spite.

6. At the end of this manner it has been noted that the Supreme Truth is too exalted to accept any body on His Presence, but there are only a few persons that are accepted to His Holy Presence.

7. In the tenth manner, Avicenna briefly discusses about the secrets and the causes of strange affairs and the unusual, for example, to with a little food and to be able on a difficult work and to give the news of the Invisible which are recollected by the Saints, and generally about the way of the appearance of the strange affairs in this world. In the folding of this manner, propounding these affairs, he criticizes and considers their interior and exterior causes and, by comparing them with the exterior affairs, he tries to show that they are reasonable and possible.

### **Conclusion**

Avicenna, in his religion principles, has defended from fivefold principles of religion and Shiism. Monotheism, Prophecy, Resurrection, Leadership(imamate), and Justice are fivefold principles of Shiism, and

they narrate from his Shiite piety. He, also, in his mystical principles, has obeyed from his wisdom and philosophy, and, with fidelity to principle of causes and effects, contrary to mystics that not deem knowledge necessary in path and arriving at God, he believes wisdom is prior to path and arriving at God, and in spite of that he deems such a spiritual ecstasy and disposition necessary he doesn't think that they are sufficient, and believes that studying, disputing, learning, and reasoning are prior to them.

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