

Mohammed Abed Al-JABRI

**Arab-Islamic Philosophy
A Contemporary Critique**

Introduction

by Walid Hamarneh

This introductory collection of essays by Mohammed `Abed al-Jabri is the first of his works to appear in the English language. The fact that very little is known about him in North America may seem rather strange, as his writings and ideas have been at the center of most debates in the Arab world since the mid 1970s.¹ This situation being so, my main objective in the following is to provide the reader with some background on Jabri's life and work, to summarize the intellectual and cultural context within which his work is seen as a new and fresh challenge, and to point out some of his ideas and hypotheses that are not represented in the following essays. I will, therefore, try to complement the essays here rather than summarize them only. In doing so, my emphasis will be on certain aspects of his work that I think are extremely important especially to researchers, scholars, and academics interested in Islam, the Middle East and the Arab world.

Mohammed `Abed al-Jabri was born 1936 in Figuig in southeastern Morocco. He was brought up in a family that supported the Istiqlal Party (a party that led the struggle for independence and unity of Morocco when it was under French and Spanish occupation). He was sent first to a religious school, then to a national private school (*madrasah hurrah wataniyah*), which was founded by the Independence movement. From 1951-53 he spent two years at a government high school in Casablanca. When schools were shut by the French colonial authorities as a result of the deposing and exile of Sultan Mohammed ben Youssef (later king Mohammed V), he worked first as a tailor, then as a primary school teacher, studying much on his own. Following Morocco's independence, he succeeded in earning the Arabic High School Diploma (Science Section).

Mehdi ben Berka (who led the leftists in the Istiqlal party and later split from it to found in 1959 the Union Nationale des Forces Populaires

[later Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires], and who was assassinated in France by agents of the Moroccan government (?), guided the youthful al-Jabri. He prompted him to begin working for al-`Alam, which was then the official organ of the Istiqlal Party. In 1958 al-Jabri started studying philosophy at the University of Damascus in Syria, but left one year later to join the newly founded University of Rabat. His political activities never ceased, and in July 1963 he was incarcerated under the pretext of conspiring against the state (like many of his comrades in the UNFP).

From 1964 al-Jabri taught philosophy at the high-school level and was active in the sphere of educational inspection and planning. In 1966 he published jointly with Mustafa al-`Omari and Ahmed as-Sattati two textbooks designed for the final year of high schools. One was on Islamic thought² and the other on philosophy.³ The latter book had a great impact on students during the late sixties and early seventies; it emphasized the relationship between culture and society and the importance of the role culture and knowledge play in changing society.⁴ As a result of his activities in the educational sphere, problems of education constituted a fairly important part of his intellectual production during that period; every few years al-Jabri published a few articles on issues and problems of education, especially those found in Morocco.⁵

After completing his state examination in 1967 (his unpublished thesis was entitled *Falsafat al-tarikh `inda Ibn Khaldun*, "The Philosophy of History of Ibn Khaldun," under the supervision of M. Aziz Lahbabi), he started teaching philosophy at the University of Mohammed V in Rabat. In 1970 he completed his state doctorate with a thesis on the thought of Ibn Khaldun under the supervision of Najib Baladi.⁶ During the seventies al-Jabri was active intellectually and politically. He began publishing a series of papers on Islamic thought that immediately drew the attention of many intellectuals and academics in the Arab World, especially those in the Levant who did not know him. He also published in 1976 two volumes on epistemology (one on mathematics and modern rationalism, the second on the empirical method and the development of scientific thought). However, most of his energies were dedicated to political work and in 1975 he became a member of the political bureau of the USFP, of which he was one of the founders. By the early eighties, however, he felt he had to concentrate his energies on his intellectual and scholarly work and quit his position in the party's political bureau (but not his other functions and activities) in 1981 to concentrate on writing.

In 1980, he collected a number of papers he had written earlier and presented in conferences on Islamic philosophers. The title of this volume, to which he added in later editions some more essays, is *Nahnu wa-al-turath*, which can be loosely translated as “our heritage and us.” Two years later he published a book on modern Arab thought, *al-Khitab al-`Arabi al-mu`asir: Dirasah tahliliyah naqdiyyah* (Contemporary Arab discourse: A Critical and Analytical Study). This was followed by his three-volume magnum opus entitled *Naqd al-`aql al-`Arabi* (Critique of Arab Reason) published in 1984, 1986, and 1990.

Aziz Abbasi’s English translation found in the following pages was made from the French *Introduction à la critique de la raison Arabe*, translated from Arabic to French by Ahmed Mahfoud and Marc Geoffroy, published by La Découverte in 1994. The occasion of this French publication was an effort to provide an introduction to al-Jabri’s thought prior to publication of a translation of his three-volume *Naqdd al-`aql al-`Arabi* referred to earlier. The essays contained were selected from al-Jabri’s earlier work, especially his collection *Nahnu wa-al-Tuath*. The author helped and advised in the selection of the texts and revised the French edition, thus making it authoritative. And, although the present text was translated from the French, it was compared with the Arabic original.

During the past few years, al-Jabri has published essays and shorter monographs on issues ranging from democracy and human rights in the Arab World to further elaboration and discussions of his main theses in his previously published work. Because al-Jabri’s work is a direct and critical intervention in problems and issues that are central to modern and contemporary Arab thought, and because his interpretations and readings of modern and classical Arab thought in more than one instance challenge that thought, I will not only summarize some of his ideas but also discuss briefly the main trends that have dominated intellectual discussions in the Arab world during the past few decades.

Arab thought, since the middle of the nineteenth century (a period generally called the renaissance [*nahdah*]), has been dominated by acknowledgment of the inferiority of the Arab and Islamic world of the present, when seen in the light of and in contradistinction to the two models of the modern West and the classical “golden” period of the Arab-Islamic Empire. Thinkers and intellectuals were torn between the seduction of the West and its superiority in the economic, scientific, technological, and military spheres while attracted to the Arab past, since it provided an authenticity and a real proof that Arabs and Muslims are capable of holding

a leading position in world culture and learning. It also provided a reassurance that Arabs were not necessarily inferior in all spheres, but still held the upper ground in religion, literature and social ethics. Reactions and proposed solutions diverged, but all were implicated in this tension between the two models.⁷ The basic problem was how to catch up and rebuild while preserving identity and authenticity. And although there were a few voices that proposed becoming a part of the modern world by completely shedding the past, most voices and movements advocated one type or another of eclecticism that combined what was seen as positive in the two models. There were, of course, those voices that advocated a return to the vaof the early past, which was, according to them, the only way for the Arabs and Muslims to regain their place in the world.

Following the second world war and the political independence of many Arab states coupled with the rise of radical brands of nationalism, socialism, and Islamism, the discourse of the *nahdah* was conceived as having been too reformist and as having over-emphasized aspects of culture and education. A new “revolutionary” discourse developed, especially during the fifties and the sixties, that emphasized the political and the economic, and laid more emphasis on the voluntarist revolutionary ideologies of transforming societies. Despite these differences, both the “reformist” and the “revolutionary” discourses were implicated with the same old problematic of catching up while preserving authenticity. The central aspect of these issues that is relevant to our present purpose is that the past (read tradition or heritage) was always present and determined in many ways the parameters for what was conceived as authenticity.

With the Arab defeat in 1967, discourses began to change rather quickly. And although the more radical revolutionary discourses assumed central stage during the immediate aftermath of the war, it was the resuscitated Islamic discourse (in both its “conservative” and “revolutionary” brands) that gradually but surely set the parameters for the discussions explaining the Arab defeat and the collapse of attempts at modernization and catching up. This does not mean that Islamist discourse reigned supreme. To the contrary, it was still a minority view among the educated elite and intellectuals. But at the center of most discussions starting with the late sixties was the issue of the past. Or to put it differently, there was a shift from discussing the problems of the present as such to discussing them as extensions of the past. But as the past is always constructed in ways that are implicated with the present, the intellectual battles shifted from being interpretations of the present to interpretations of the past.

Radical (including Marxist) as well as the different modernizing discourses positioned themselves not only as agenda—setting for the future. The agendas also were formulated in such a way as to show that they are extensions of age-old dimensions that go back to the early stages of the development of Islam and have indigenous roots and are, therefore, authentic. “Liberal” modernizing trends emphasized that Islam promoted values like hard work and private property, or emphasized rational tendencies in Islamic thought (both philosophical and religious), or emphasized democratic practices that were re-interpreted to look like modern democratic ones.⁸ Many leftists, on the other hand, saw their own ideological and political roots in social and revolutionary movements in Islam, or tried to find in the history of Islam since its earliest stages a left and a right that represented well defined class interests.⁹ There were also pioneering attempts by some Marxists (like the Lebanese Husayn Muruwah and the Syrian al-Tayyib Tizini) to interpret and explain trends in Islamic thought and philosophy by relating them to their social and political roots.¹⁰

The past (read constructed tradition and heritage)¹¹ was seen as the legitimizing principle for the ideas of the present, and due to that the traditionalists fought the ideological battles now in what was considered their own turf. The traditionalists, therefore, gradually set the parameters of the ideological discourse and dominated it. This, I should emphasize, was not due to their presenting the most potent or convincing arguments and interpretations, but was due to their having forced others to concede to a conception of legitimacy that was their own. After all, it was traditionalists who had been constructing tradition and heritage in the Arab-Islamic area for at least the past nine centuries. This came as the icing on the cake, since the Arab World and especially its cultural institutions became more and more dependent upon money pumped into those institutions by conservative Arab oil-producing countries, in whose interests it was to promote ideological constructs based upon Islam and Islamic discourse rather than secular (nationalist, liberal, or Marxist) discourse. These governments, after all, had spent most of the previous decades fighting “revolutionary” nationalisms (like the Ba’th Party and Nasserism) as well as Communism in the Arab World.

It is within such an intellectual climate that al-Jabri made his contributions. But before I try to introduce and summarize some of his ideas, I have to mention that the following belongs to that category of reading that al-Jabri calls one-dimensional,¹² by which is meant an attempt to provide a

so-called detached and objective summary that tries to reproduce the original ideas in the texts. Such readings are necessarily selective, and the unspoken criteria of exclusion/inclusion turn them into latent interpretations. Bearing this in mind, I hope that the following will prompt the interested reader to read al-Jabri, as the emphasis in what follows will be on the issues that he raises and the questions that he discusses rather than on a summary that functions as a substitute for the reading of his work.

Al-Jabri's criticism is directed at the three trends mentioned earlier: the traditionalist, the liberal (which includes the orientalist tradition), and the orthodox Marxist. His earlier works had emphasized his reading strategies (in the French sense of "lecture") that he suggested as alternatives to those readings performed by those three trends. Since those ideas are well summarized in the essays collected in this translated volume, it would be useful here to highlight two aspects of those earlier essays.

First, let us examine his three-dimensional reading strategy. By this he means that he reads the texts structurally, historically and ideologically. The justification for this lies in that he sees thought being determined by two things: the field of knowledge (*al-haql al-ma`rifi*) and the ideological content (*al-madmun al-idyuluji*). The first implies the field in which thought moves, which is composed of material of knowledge (*maddah ma`rifiyah*) and a thinking apparatus (*jihaz tafkiri*). The second implies the possible social and political functions that thought has. Such a reading, according to al-Jabri, provides an alternative to those other readings that emphasized either the material of knowledge or the ideological content. Al-Jabri also starts from the premise that due to the development of knowledge and especially the sciences since medieval times, the material of knowledge in classical Arab-Islamic philosophical and scientific thought is useless from our perspective. Emphasis should be given to the thinking apparatuses, but within the context of ways the material of knowledge was treated. This means that although the material of knowledge is useless for us today, it is however relevant to any intellectual enterprise that attempts to understand classical Arab-Islamic thought.

The second aspect in these essays that needs to be highlighted is that although these were separate essays written on different occasions, yet they are connected by a thread of thought that is very interesting.¹³ Such a thread of thought is an hypothesis that disagrees with a consensus amongst almost all who have studied classical Arab-Islamic philosophy. That consensus is shared (for different reasons) by most orientalists, traditionalists, liberals, and Marxists. It looks at Muslim philosophers as thinkers who have operated

within an Aristotelian paradigm (or such a paradigm that followed the late Hellenistic interpretations of Aristotle, tainted with some Neo-Platonism mainly derived from the false ascription of the *Enneads* of Plotinus to Aristotle). Although there are some differences as to the extent to which the Muslim thinkers conformed to (and even understood) Greek thought, especially that of Aristotle, they are seen as a chain of transmitters and commentators on Greek philosophy.

Al-Jabri developed a new hypothesis to which he maintained that there was not such a chain, nor was there such a continuity amongst all these philosophers. To the contrary, there was what he called an epistemological break¹⁴ between the philosophers of the East (the eastern parts of the Islamic Empire) and those of the West (Andalusia and Morocco). This epistemological break can be seen not only in the writings of philosophers, but also in the writings of jurists and legal scholars (such as Ibn Hazm), as well as theologians (such as al-Shatibi), and very prominently in the writings of Ibn Khaldun. In conjunction with this, al-Jabri provided a controversial and unorthodox interpretation of Ibn Sina as not being the best representative of Islamic rationalism in the East, but as being a thinker who consecrated irrationalism not only in his texts on Eastern philosophy, but also in his philosophical legacy. According to this interpretation, both Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali (considered to be opposing intellectual figures by most historians of Islamic thought) are seen as a part of the same philosophical problematic (in the French sense of *problematique*), who disagreed about solutions to certain problems within it but who, none-the-less, shared it. Such a problematic is one that they also shared with al-Farabi and most other Eastern thinkers.¹⁵

These and similar ideas were later developed in al-Jabri's three-volume critique of Arab reason (*Naqd al-'aql al-'Arabi*). And since this work represents the most developed form of the thinking of al-Jabri, which is seen in its early conceptions in the following translation, it is imperative to look at the ideas in *Naqd al-'aql al-'Arabi* in some detail. In the first volume, he developed the basic concepts to be used in his analysis and emphasized that the purpose of his study was not the ideological content of Arab-Islamic thought nor its material of knowledge, as much as the epistemological systems present in it. He then developed another idea (well represented in this translation) that the frame of reference for Arab thought is neither the pre-Islamic period nor the era of Muhammad and the first four Caliphs, but is the **Age of Recording** during the second hijra century (eighth century). He then developed a genealogy of the main ideas present in Arab

thought in the classical period, and arrived at a conclusion that there are three epistemological systems present in it which he called the systems of (Indication) explication (*bayan*), that of (Illumination) Gnosticism (*'irfan*) and that of Demonstration or inferential evidence (*burhan*). By epistemological system, al-Jabri means something that is similar to Foucault's episteme, and not just merely precedural rules or protocols of research.

The second volume in the critique is dedicated to the analysis of these three epistemological systems. The analysis develops their basic characteristics and concepts, and then follows with an analysis of examples, taken mostly from texts that have assumed some kind of a status within Arab classical thought.

For al-Jabri, the epistemological system of (Indication) explication (*bayan*) is historically the earliest within Arab thought. It developed to become dominant in the so-called indigenous sciences like philology, jurisprudence and legal sciences (*fiqh*), Koranic sciences (interpretations, hermeneutics and exegesis), theology (*kalam*), and non-philosophical literary theory. It started out being a combination of rules for interpreting discourse and determining the conditions of discourse production.¹⁶ Its fundamental concepts combined the methods of *fiqh* as developed by al-Shaf'i with that of rhetoric as developed by al-Jahiz. It was centered on the relationship between utterance and meaning, in addition to what later jurists and theologians have added like conditions of certainty, analogy, subject matter of the report, and levels of authenticity or reliability.

The overall result was a theory of knowledge that was explicatory (*bayani*) at all levels. At the level of its internal logic, that theory of knowledge was governed by the concept of (Indication) *bayan*, which implied elocution, enunciation, understanding, communicating, and reception. This is true also at the level of the material of knowledge, which was composed mainly of the Quran, the Hadith, grammar, *fiqh*, and Arabic poetry and prose. This is true also at the ideological level, since the determining authoritative force behind this level had been Islamic dogma, and it was therefore restricted from the beginning to the boundaries of equating knowledge with the belief in God. But it is also true at the epistemological level, where humans are conceived as being endowed with the capacity of *bayan*, which is grounded in two types of "reason": one innate, the other acquired.

The type of reason that is innate is God-given. That which is acquired is through report and cogitation. Report is determined by the authenticity of

transmission, whereas cogitation involves thinking not about reason as much as about the proof that lies outside or beyond the boundaries of reason. Reason's function is to examine the world as manifestations or signs of that which is there, but cannot directly be perceived (according to the rules of the reasoning of the analogy of the unknown after the known *qiyas al-gha'if 'ala al-shahid*, which is explained in the essays that follow).

Al-Jabri proceeded to uncover the basis of the *bayan* mode of reasoning and showed how it operated in Islamic law, in grammatical and philological studies, and in theology (*kalam*). He also arrived at a conclusion that the system of explication is governed by the two principles of separation (Discontinuous ?) (*infisal*) and possibility (Contingency) (*tajwiz*). These principles are manifest in the theory of the individual substance (Atom) (*al-jawhar al-fard*), which maintains that the relationship between individual substances (of which bodies, actions, sensations, and everything in the world is made up) is one based upon contiguity and association, but not influence and interaction. This theory leaves no place for a theory of causality or for the idea of a (natural) law.

Al-Jabri posited that the origins of such an epistemological system lay in a misconstrued idea of the Bedouin (*A`rabi*): the sole referential authority was not only given to the Quran, but also to its reading through a sole referential authority, which is the world view of the pre-Islamic nomadic Arab (the vehicle of which was the pre-Islamic Arabic language). That language became the sole arbiter and frame of reference, because it was seen as the language of the Quran. This, according to al-Jabri, is a construct that was made during the **Age of Recording** and which was used as a legitimating principle.

The systems of (Illumination) Gnosticism for al-Jabri originated in Eastern and Hermetical thought and are based upon what is termed inner revelation and insight as an epistemological method. These include Sufism, Shi`I thought, Isma`ili philosophy, oriental philosophy of illumination, theosophy, magic, astrology, alchemy, and, interestingly, esoteric and Sufi Quranic exegesis. Gnostic epistemological systems are based upon the dichotomy of the (obvious) **manifest (*zahir*) and (esoteric) latent (*batin*)** according to which the latent is accorded a higher status in the hierarchy of Gnostic knowledge. Gnostic analogy (*mumathalah*) is different from both explicatory analogy (*qiyas bayani*) and from logical syllogism in that it is based upon direct similarities and therefore lacks a middle term. But, since Gnostic analogy is based upon similarity, it is not rule-bound and acquires an infinite number of forms and levels. It can take the form of a simile or a

figure of speech, it can be a representation, but it can also be borrowed from the analogy of the unknown after the known, and it can also be based upon correspondence. But al-Jabri saw that there were basically three types of such analogies in Gnostic epistemology: similarity based upon numerical correspondence, similarity based upon representation, and rhetorical and poetic similarity. Al-Jabri saw that this epistemological system had been productive in literature and the arts, but as a rationalist, he saw no value to it in matters of reason. To the contrary he called it the resigned (reason) intellect (*al-`aql al-mustaqil*).

The epistemological system of demonstration based on inferential evidence, al-Jabri saw as having its origins in Greek thought (especially Aristotle), but he did not restrict it to those who had based their analysis on logic. His concept of demonstration is much wider and encompasses the rationality of Ibn Rushd, the critical attitude of Ibn Hazm, the historicism of Ibn Khaldun and the fundamental theology of al-Shatibi. In contradistinction to *bayan* that develops its understanding of the world on the principles of separation (discontinuous) and possibility(contengency), and Gnosis which bases its understanding on the principles of correspondence and similarity, the epistemological system of demonstration is based upon the causal connections between elements, thereby making the idea of a (natural) law possible. And since al-Jabri equates this with a rationalist attitude, which is generally well-known, I will not spend more time discussing it, but will move towards the last two points to be highlighted in this introduction.

Al-Jabri developed a hypothesis that the demonstrative epistemological system was used in many cases in the service of the two other epistemic systems. A case in point is Ibn Sina who utilized inferential evidence to serve his fundamentally gnostic philosophy. Al-Jabri maintained that this was essentially the destiny of the system of demonstration in the East (again implying the eastern parts of the Islamic Empire), but was generally not the case in the West (Andalusia and Morocco), thereby emphasizing the earlier hypothesis of the epistemological break between the two.

Another point to be emphasized is that al-Jabri did not see these three epistemological systems present in ideal forms in the thought of any individual thinker. Each is always present in a more-or-less contaminated form. However, he differentiated between having elements of one system present as a minor part within a dominant system in the thought of a specific thinker (Ibn Rushd is basically a proponent of the system of demonstration), and two systems (or even three) present in the work of some thinkers. To

return to one of his earlier hypothesis that Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali belong to the same problematic, he emphasized that both thinkers are hybrid (he does not use the term), in the sense that in their work one can see the epistemological systems of demonstration and Gnosticism. What is also interesting is that, despite many of the points in which they disagreed, both, according to al-Jabri, opted for using the system of demonstration in the service of the system of Gnosticism.

In the third volume of *Naqd al-“aql al-Arabi*, entitled “Arab Political Reason,” al-Jabri shifts his focus from uncovering the epistemological systems governing Arab thought to those governing thinking about reality. He, therefore, does not resort to his earlier classification based upon the three epistemological systems, but introduces new concepts that fit his different subject matter. Utilizing a number of concepts from the modern French “social imaginary” in conjunction with concepts derived from classical Arab thought, he develops his ideas around three concepts: the tribe (*qabilah*), the spoils(Plunder) (*al-ghanimah*), and the creed or faith or dogma (*al-‘aqidah*). He then moves to study the manifestations of these conceptual frameworks, especially during the latter stages of the development of Islamic polity.

I hope that the previous dense (and by definition distorting) summary has given a taste of the depth of the ideas and hypotheses of al-Jabri. I think one has to reiterate here that in addition to these general theoretical hypotheses, al-Jabri is at his best when he analyzes texts. Not only texts that are relatively unknown, but most importantly texts that have been analyzed many times by competent scholars. What he does with many of these texts is find something new and interesting. This is not only due to his method of textual analysis, nor his knowledge, but is also because he does not approach texts as instances of an institutionalized knowledge practice as much from a theoretical perspective. A text by a grammarian, or one by a legal scholar or a theologian, turns in his hand into a fresh and “new” text.

¹ There is a short summary of some of Jabri’s ideas in `Issa Boullata’s book: Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought. Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, pp. 45-55. See also a different kind of exposition of his ideas with a special emphasis on his reading of Averroes in Anke von Kugelgen: Averroes und die arabische Moderne: Ansätze zu einer Neubegründung des Rationalismus in Islam. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994, pp. 260-288.

² Al-Fikr al-Islami li-tullab al-Bakaluriya. Al-Dar al-Bayda': Dar al-Nashr al-

Maghribiyah, 1966. Many later printings of this book were made.

³ Durus fi al-falsafah li-tullab al-Bakaluriya. Al-Dar al-Bayda': Dar al-Nashr al-

Maghribiyah, 1966. Many later printings of this book were made.

⁴ See M.A. al-Jabri: "Masar katib" in: al-Karmel 11 (1984), p. 162, and the roundtable discussion under the title "Naqd al-`aql al-`Arabi fi mashru` al-Jabri" in: al-Wahdah, vol. III, 26-27 (October/November 1986, pp. 135-165.

⁵ His book Min ajl ru'yah taqaddumiyah li-ba`d mushkilatina al-fikriyah wa-al-tarbawiyah. Al-Dar al-Bayda': Dar al-Nashr al-Maghribiyah, 1977, includes some of these essays. He published articles in al-Aqlam on education in Morocco, as well as some as recently as last year in the daily al-Sharq al-Awsat.

⁶ This thesis was published as Fikr Ibn Khaldun: al-`Asabiyah wa-al-dawlah: Ma`alim nazariyah khalduniyah fi al-tarikh al-Islami. Al-Dar al-Bayda': Dar al-Thaqafah, 1971.

This book was later published in Lebanon and went through a number of printings.

⁷ For a fine survey of Arab thought during this period see Albert Hourani's Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

⁸ The most prominent of these was Zaki Najib Mahmud who was until the sixties the most prominent logical positivist in the Arab World who had completely rejected classical Arab-Islamic thought as completely irrelevant to our modern times, but turned his attention to it and produced a number of books showing his change of mind by emphasizing what he saw as the rationalist trends in Islamic thought.

⁹ It is worth noting here that many books were published during the late sixties and early seventies with titles like "the left and right in Islam" or series of book on the Quran,

Muhammad, the caliphs Abu Bakr, `Umar, and `Ali reinterpreted from a rather mechanical and naïve right/left dichotomy that was seen as reflecting a class struggle between the poor classes and the rich classes. I have to emphasize a number of points in this respect. First, there were a number of Marxists, who did not accept these simplistic interpretations of Islamic history. Second, that these interpretations were not new but were basically developed by historians like Bandali al-Jawzi (a Palestinian who studied and taught in the Soviet Union during the thirties and forties) and depended mostly on the writings of orientalist. Third, that with the rise of religious minorities in the political leadership of some Arab countries and some “leftist” political parties, such interpretations were welcome as they tended to justify the “revolutionary” traditions of these same minorities or their historical antecedents.

¹⁰ I should note here that works by these authors were criticized by many scholars including Marxists like Nayif Balluz and Tawfiq Sallum. Muruwah and Tizini were taken to task because both resorted to what was seen as a simplistic materialism/idealism dichotomy which was dominant in soviet Marxism, and for resorting to a rather crude interpretation of the socio-economic history of the Islamic Empire. Tizini, who teaches philosophy at the University of Damascus, studied with the (then) East German philosophy Professor Hermann Ley, while the work of Muruwah was originally his doctoral dissertation prepared in the Soviet Union. Both, but especially Tizini, had some influence on the work of al-Jabri.

¹¹ I should note here that the Arabic word “turath” is a very loaded term both semantically and ideologically. I have not been able to find a word in English that

conveys the sense of the word in Arabic. I have, therefore, resorted to the words tradition and heritage as a pair.

¹² See al-Khitab p. 9.

¹³ This thread of thought is embodied in all his readings, whether it is the political philosophy of al-Farabi, or the re-interpretation of Ibn Sina, or the reading of the philosophers of North Africa and the Andalus (especially Ibn Tufayl, Ibn Bajjah, and Ibn Rushd) as rationalists who have broken with the philosophical paradigms of the eastern parts of the Islamic world.

¹⁴ Al-Jabri borrows the (by now very popular) term from the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard.

¹⁵ This hypothesis is developed in his papers on al-Farabi and Ibn Sina in his book Nahnu wa al-turath pp. 55-166.

¹⁶ Al-Jabri here disagrees with an idea advocated by most orientalist and many Arabs including Taha Husayn that the shift within indigenous sciences from the emphasis on the conditions of discourse production to one on rules of interpretation was the result of the influence of Greek thought and logic. He maintains that it was actually due to the development of `ilm usul al-fiqh (theory of jurisprudence). He also goes into detail showing the many differences between the Greek (read Aristotelian) logical qiyas (syllogism) and the qiyas (analogy) of the jurists and grammarians.

A Contemporary Critique. By Mohammed al-Jabri. A radical new approach to Arab thought, one that finds in the past the roots of an open, critical rationalism. Series: No. 12. Center for Middle Eastern Studies, The University of Texas at Austin. The distinguished Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, in this summary of his own work, examines the status of Arab thought in the late twentieth century. Al-Jabri rejects what he calls the current polarization of Arab thought between an imported modernism that disregards Arab tradition and a fundamentalism that would reconstruct the present in the image of an idealized past. Both past and present intellectual currents are examined. Any critique of the discourse of Arab intellectuals must bear in mind the political conditions within which these individuals operate. 40 Mohammed al-Jabri (Trans. Aziz Abbassi), *Arab-Islamic Philosophy: A Contemporary Critique*, Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1999, pp. 49-51. 11. All of this gave rise to two intellectual currents, the gnostic or illuminationist current of the Persians that hides behind Shi'ite movements (e.g., Isma'ilism and Ikhwan al-Safa), and the rationalist current of the Mu'tazilites. Islamic philosophy is the product of a complex intellectual process in which Syrians, Arabs, Persians, Turks, Berbers, and others took an active part. The Arab element is so preponderant, however, that it might be conveniently termed Arabic philosophy. The medium in which writers, hailing from such distant countries as Khurasan and Andalusia, chose to express their thoughts from the eighth to the seventeenth centuries was Arabic.