Islamic Philosophy in Our Narrative of Western Philosophy

Ferkl, Albert

Islamic Philosophy
in Our Narrative of
Western Philosophy

Albert Ferkl

2022

Master's Dissertation

Global and Comparative Philosophy

Supervised by Dr. Ahab Bdaiwi

Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

To many friends in Leiden's intercultural philosophy programme,
a refuge for curious spirits.

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Islamic philosophy as the Question of Western philosophy

This dissertation questions these three axioms:

1. 'Our' Western philosophical tradition is uniquely rational among the world's 'other' intellectual traditions.
2. Philosophy originated in classical Greek thought, with modern European thought as its direct culmination.[1]
3. Islamic thought is foreign or antithetical to Western thought.[2]

On these established premises, philosophical rationality is Western by definition, and the West is European by definition. Let us call this the *Eurocentric view*.[3] This view is presupposed in countless current discourses, scholarly and popular. It shapes our way of understanding ourselves and each other, not least through our education. When we learn the Western philosophical 'canon' in Greek, Latin, and modern languages, we are rarely introduced to sources in Arabic, Persian, or Turkish.[4] Of course, some of us 'Westerners' eventually come across some such sources, perhaps the writings of towering Muslim thinkers Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d.1037), Ibn Arabi (d.1240), or Mulla Sadra Shirazi (d.1635/40).[5] And we may find them highly intellectually interesting, on their own terms. But perhaps even more interesting is their profound and complex *relation* to philosophy, rationality, Greece, Europe, etc. – incongruent with the Eurocentric view. And on reflection, what is most interesting is that this evidently partial view nevertheless appears

[1] Which is to say, there is a direct continuity of philosophical method and ideas from Plato (d.347 BC) all the way to Ludwig Wittgenstein (d.1951) – who wrote in the 20th century that "the same philosophical problems which were already preoccupying the Greeks are still troubling us today". Cited by Anthony Kenny, 'General Introduction', in *A New History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[2] Muhsin Mahdi, 'Orientalism and the Study of Islamic Philosophy', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 (1990): 74: "Islam is an Eastern religion, [and] a Muslim is not a Westerner".

[3] This immediately situates the dissertation within current discussions over the legacy of colonialism.

[4] Per Garth Fowden, *Before and after Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 3: these sources are "excluded from the conventional narrative by historians eager to draw a *direct line* from late Antiquity, through the European Middle Ages, to the Renaissance and Modernity." Emphasis mine.

[5] For good introductions to their ideas and significance, see entries in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* by leading scholars Dimitri Gutas ('Ibn Sina', Fall 2016 Edition, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/ibn-sina/), William Chittick ('Ibn 'Arabî', Spring 2020 Edition, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/ibn-arabi/), and Sajjad Rizvi ('Mulla Sadra', Spring 2021 Edition, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/mulla-sadra/).

as common sense. This is the problem pursued in this dissertation. How are the Islamic sources of Western philosophy so effectively *marginalised*?

Taking Islamic philosophy seriously confronts us with these three alternative axioms:

1. The Islamic intellectual tradition is explicitly philosophical, in ways which uniquely illuminate the meaning of rationality.
2. Philosophy was developed in Arabic, through original responses to classical Greek thought (among other earlier sources), with decisive impact on modern European thought (among other later developments).
3. Western thought and Islamic thought are so deeply related that they cannot be understood in separation.

On these other premises, 'Europe' is not the only homeland of our philosophical tradition. Our thought belongs just as much to the 'Middle East'.[6] Let us call this the *intercultural view*. Today, many of us may find this other view attractive. Some knowledge of global history, an inclination towards 'multiculturalism', or a critical outlook on the 'grand narrative' of European modernism (or of Islamism, for that matter) can all be sufficient ground. Nevertheless, due to the persistence of the established Eurocentric view, the intercultural view remains counter-intuitive and uncomfortable. The ultimate implication that our Western philosophical thinking is already Islamic – that Arabic is as close to us as Greek and Latin, and the Quran is a foundational text of our intellectual tradition – rings controversial.

This very tension between the Eurocentric and intercultural views is philosophically significant, challenging, and exciting. The dissertation seeks to resolve it by fully understanding the established view and its persistent power. No evidence is provided for the intercultural view (although many of the scholars cited along the way do just that). Rather, the analysis details the full structure implicated in the first three axioms, as *our established narrative of Western philosophy*. But this itself serves as the first step towards the possibility of a more inclusive narrative, predicated on the second three axioms. The driving question is how Islamic philosophy is *narrated* as marginal to the Western philosophical tradition.

The core argument, in chapter 2, is that Islam as forever foreign and irrational provides a necessary contrast for our familiar canon of 'classical philosophy' (mainly the pre/Socratics,

[6] That is, European philosophy is only one branch of Western philosophy, and a branch that is not self-sufficient, nourished as it was also by strong Islamic influence.

Plato and Aristotle (d.322 BC), and the Hellenistic schools) and 'modern philosophy' (mainly Descartes (d.1650), rationalism and empiricism, Kant (d.1804) and Hegel (d.1831), and then either Nietzsche (d.1900) or Frege (d.1925) as departure points). As a neighbouring *Middle Eastern* tradition, Islamic thought is the perfect counter-image of this European philosophical tradition – complete with briefly 'babysitting' it in the mediaeval Islamic golden age. Our narrative serves as a gatekeeping mechanism for what sources can inform our way of thinking.[7] Islamic thinking represents a 'gate', a margin keeping out all *Eastern religious thought*.

Since Western philosophy or Islamic thought are obviously vast generalisations, the narrative structure in question is very broad. This is necessarily a preliminary and experimental work, approaching a profound philosophical, historical, and cultural problem. The task is formidable – but timely. For how can we honestly continue studying Western philosophy, our own intellectual tradition, if we do not understand what it *means*? Islamic philosophy, more so than any other intellectual horizon, makes it clear that this meaning has not been properly accounted for. And this problem is especially salient to our present academic and societal situation, which shakes with debates over 'decolonisation' and 'Islamophobia'. Many now agree that we ought not to privilege Western 'modes of knowing' and marginalise non-Western cultures (Islam being of special concern in the European context),[8] but few agree on what that entails. A bold philosophical foray into the fundamental meaning of these terms is urgently needed.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 A Narrative Analysis

This dissertation questions the ground of the afore-mentioned Eurocentric view in a certain narrative. Narrative here means a *structure of fundamental ideas*, or axioms. Let us assume that this structure operates in the following way. It maps onto concrete facts observed in the world, providing a way to make sense of the relations between them (and us). These facts include philosophical texts and their geo-historical contexts. For instance, consider records of a work of Avicenna, a work of Aristotle that it referenced, 11th century Isfahan where it was written, its use

[7] I owe this formulation to Li-fan Lee.

[8] This also means that a very similar project to this one could be carried out by inquiring into the marginalisation of another intellectual tradition. In the same context, Eastern European/Russian/Orthodox thought would be especially interesting. Nevertheless, Islam appears here as the best choice, our most intense other.

in a 15th century European university, etc. Our narrative determines how we interpret these, not inherent in the facts themselves. But it is also entrenched deeper than a hermeneutical framework or theory. A narrative is not a lens that we can very easily adapt and depose. Rather, it also determines the possibilities of specific (philosophical) theories, methods, and terms. It is a kind of meta-level ideological veil through which our intellectual world can even begin to appear as meaningful. A narrative determines our thought on the most fundamental level: of underlying ideas, the possibilities of intellectual imagination.

Let us further assume that insofar as we recognise the Eurocentric view of our philosophical sources, we are subject to a single underlying *established narrative*. Established here means fundamentally presupposed as a hegemonic ideological structure. This narrative operates as a set of premises from which we construct (more or less unconsciously) the meaning of powerful terms such as Islam or philosophy. It is 'our' narrative, as contemporary Western(ised) thinkers and citizens.[9] It perpetuates itself through our own thinking. We may today awkwardly ridicule or even passionately resist the specific implications of the Eurocentric view, but it is still entrenched in the way that we speak and live together. Its marginalisation of Islam, for instance, is *structural*, not necessarily something that anyone does on purpose. When 'us' appears throughout this dissertation, therefore, it means us who think through this narrative.[10]

An established narrative usually remains implicit, in the 'background' of our thought; yet it is possible to foreground and analyse it explicitly. In fact, narratives are constantly negotiated in thought and discourse. Despite their subtle structural nature, they can be reflected upon, criticised, and internally transformed. This dissertation is dedicated to such a *narrative analysis*.[11] It critiques our established narrative of Western philosophy (and Eastern religious thought). This narrative is approached in its most general form. Notably, the text cites and analyses almost no concrete discourses in which the narrative is rooted or manifested. Rather, the analysis unfolds on the same meta-level as the narrative itself. It is an analysis from within, critiquing the narrative's internal structural principles. The argument is a kind of *reductio ad*

[9] 'Western' and 'our (own)' are thus effectively equated.

[10] The text is therefore sometimes written in the voice of the narrative's 'narrator'; sometimes by the voice of the narrative's 'critic'. The tone and context should always make clear which speaks. The critical voice prevails in footnotes and places reviewing the argument.

[11] Indeed 'narrative analysis' or 'narrative inquiry' can designate social research of the way we use narratives to make sense of our lives. Here, this takes the form of questioning how we make sense of our philosophical legacy.

absurdum of the Eurocentric axioms. Inquiring into the role of 'Islamic thought' in this narrative, specifically, makes explicit its full abstract structure.

Such an ambition to grasp this general narrative, the right to speak for the fundamental axioms of our Eurocentric philosophical canon, can arise through reflection on our own past education. The target of critique is abstracted *from* the vast array of discourses and images which introduce this generation of Europeans to our intellectual tradition. They represent the entry into the Western way of thinking, our philosophical self-understanding – on every level of upbringing, from schooling through popular culture to scholarly work. The analysis brings out the narrative as a pattern that replicates itself across the totality of such diverse instructions, and imprints itself in us through them. It would be misguided to target any of these sources specifically, for we perpetuate the narrative no less than they do.[12] The approach taken here instead is a type of self-critique, identifying the complete narrative structure as it presently unfolds in our own Westernised thought. From such an analysis, more comes clear about our presupposition than about specific arguments that we should oppose; this is precisely part of the method. Thus, we take full responsibility for our own narrative and canon. The concern is also for present and future education, for what imprints itself in Westerners to come.

This approach of analysing an abstraction without grounding it in any concrete discourse itself risks perpetuating untestable generalisation. It may be objected that many of the ideas discussed are outdated, were never accepted even in the heyday of modern colonialism around 1900, and do not fully map onto the views of even a single author. What if the subject of critique is no established narrative at all (if there ever was one), but an empty construction? Indeed, the binary structure of Western philosophy and Eastern religious thought drawn up here is a preliminary sketch, at times taking the shape of a caricature. Nevertheless, a reader knowledgeable about some of what is implicated in it (our idea of the mediaeval, for instance) should immediately be able to judge its value. Insofar as some narrative axioms highlighted are recognisable, and some findings help us clarify how we relate to our sources, the analysis will have proven its own practical success. Further, its relative incompleteness should be contextualised by the project's simultaneous scope and urgency. The usefulness of the conclusions drawn should be extended by application to further research, for which some suggestions are provided below.

[12] Even those of our teachers who deliver to us this narrative, after all, simultaneously impart on us the abilities to analyse narratives, as well as to take our sources seriously in their own context.

Further, dealing with a generalised narrative has major advantages. First, it allows an approach so necessarily presupposed in all our concrete readings as the meaning of Western philosophy. Second, since it is also not targeting any concrete intellectual 'opponents', it can bring out that presupposition with unrestrained polemical force. Indeed the rhetorical style employed is often more literary than argumentative, seeking to bring out the narrative's power on the level of not only reason but also imagination. This shock force can make explicit structures that are extremely subtle. And in turn, this may make their transformation possible. For, finally, this is also a radically creative project, seeking to empower the pursuit of a full-fledged alternative narrative. Remaining in the abstract allows a philosophically more profound, provocative, and productive attempt at a complete narrative rupture.

The abstract structure itself is narrowed down here by testing all its dimensions in their simultaneous relation to our ideas of Western philosophy and of Islamic philosophy. Any conclusions drawn should also be understood in this relation. They do not address wider narratives of Islam and the West, Western culture/civilisation, (post-)modernity, Abrahamic religions, empirical science, political liberation, etc. Insofar as these are discussed, it is always with the core philosophical question in view. Many of the conclusions may well be relevant in these related areas as well. For philosophy promises a unique way to the heart of religious, scientific, or political ideas. But this extension of the argument would doubly need to be tested by further research.[13] At times, intellectual history in general is analysed, but always in respect to what 'thought' counts as philosophical.

1.2.2 Literature: Critical Traditionalism

This dissertation thus treats effectively no primary sources or concrete examples. No landmark works *in* the history of philosophy are analysed, nor any subfields such as ethics or aesthetics, as if to test whether we are right to centre (or marginalise) them. If Averroes (Ibn Rushd, d.1198) or Descartes are mentioned, this is only in respect to their role in the narrative, not their actual philosophies. Nor are really any landmark works *about* the history of philosophy analysed, which could themselves serve as 'primary secondary sources'. This is not the kind of critical scholarship (of which Said and Park, cited just below, are good examples) that researches

[13] It would be interesting, for instance, to see the narrative play out in the history of art and literature. One starting point is offered by *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, ed. Suzanne Akbari and Karla Mallette (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

concrete texts perpetuating the Eurocentric ideology. This is more of a systematic thought experiment than it is conventional philosophical research, whether historical or critical.

On the other hand, a wide range of secondary sources appears. These do engage in scholarship of both kinds just mentioned, treating a vast variety of primary sources. But here, they represent reflections on various dimensions of the general narrative. Through thinking along with these reflections, its complete structure becomes clearer and clearer. Thus they function primarily as inspirations and resonances for the project's own reflection. As per above, they help us understand ourselves, not something external to be disagreed with. This dissertation unites all these secondary sources around *its own grand primary source*, our established narrative.

This does not mean that this is not a rigorous contribution to scholarship. The narrative analysis arises precisely from the bottom-up effort of historians and philosophers to understand our diverse intellectual sources in their original contexts. Without this work, there could be no question of a narrative concerning these sources. For only such work can question pre-established judgments about what their intellectual significance is supposed to be. This analysis is only meaningful in relation to such an effort. The analytic framework constructed could make this kind of research easier and more impactful. The project's conclusions should be tested and developed by application therein. For here a parallel battle is waged, as it were, on the level of ideas, responding to the task called for by Mahdi: "If the study of Islamic philosophy is to make a contribution [to our present way of thinking], it must first *free itself from the commonly-received notions* that have transformed it into a ghost of its true self."[14] In clearing up the notions through which we approach primary sources, this project aims to empower us to engage with them in a genuinely transformative way.

Specifically, the question, method, and goal have primarily been inspired and honed by the combination of two kinds of sources:

- Reflections on non/Western philosophy, through the lens of postcolonial critical theory, especially in Richard King's *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'the Mystic East'*,[15] Lucy Allais' 'Problematising Western Philosophy as One Part of Africanising the Curriculum',[16] and Peter Park's *Africa, Asia, and the History of*

[14] Mahdi, 'Orientalism', 98. Emphasis mine.
[15] London: Routledge, 1999.
[16] *South African Journal of Philosophy* 35, no. 4 (2016): 539.

Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830.[17] King grounds the exclusion of Eastern intellectual traditions from philosophical rationality in their mystical and religious status. Allais's rare published critique of the idea of Western philosophy warns us that by opposing this monolithic construct with another (such as 'African philosophy') we cement its centrality. Park's landmark study traces the origins of our established philosophical historiography to the Enlightenment-colonialist context. All these are engaged in the broad field of 'intercultural philosophy' and motivated to take non-Western 'world philosophies' seriously.[18] They are all indebted to Edward Said's seminal critique of the asymmetrical binary of Western and Eastern thought in *Orientalism*,[19] which centres on Euro-American constructions of Islam. His view that 'manifest Orientalism' (explicit discourses on the East) is rooted in 'latent Orientalism' (the fundamental implicit East-West distinction)[20] also informs the present approach of primarily critiquing a latent binary structure, over its concrete manifestations.

- Reflections on Islamic and Western thought, combining the critical lens with an attention to traditional Islamic texts, especially in Matthew Melvin-Koushki's 'Taḥqīq vs. Taqlīd in the Renaissances of Western Early Modernity',[21] Muhsin Mahdi's 'Orientalism and the Study of Islamic Philosophy', and the project's own supervisor Ahab Bdaiwi. Melvin-Koushki critiques the marginalisation of Islam by Western thought as Enlightenment-colonialist, provocatively raising against it a Greco-Arabo-Persian philological trajectory that is progressive and rational in a different, superior way. He calls for reframing this trajectory as central to a broader concept of the West and investigating its utterly neglected significance for our present intellectual horizon. Mahdi provides an in-depth review of 19th–20th-century Euro-American expert views of Islamic philosophy, tracing their to German Romanticism. Bdaiwi critiques the suppression of Europe's intellectual debt to Islamic philosophy which denies the relevance of mediaeval Arabic sources to our rationality. These authors sometimes relate to more traditionalist scholars such as Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who generally critique the

[17] Albany: SUNY Press, 2013.
[18] This dissertation itself is written for the first dedicated 'global philosophy' programme in continental Europe.
[19] New York: Penguin Books, 1978. This critique is itself indebted to critical and poststructuralist approaches arising from within Western philosophy, especially Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.
[20] Said, Orientalism, 205–6.
[21] *Philological Encounters* 3, no. 1–2 (2018).

> Enlightenment as the obscuration of philosophy and highlight the expression of ancient wisdom in Shia theology. Like King, all of these also critique the asymmetrical binary of philosophical and religious thought.[22]

Together, these provide the basic resources for inquiring into the narrative basis of the Eurocentric view. Some of them also defend the afore-mentioned intercultural view. Such defences are best found in the field of global (intellectual) history,[23] such as Richard Bulliet's *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*[24] and Garth Fowden's *Before and After Muhammad*. Bulliet argues that the age-old love-hate relationship between Christendom and Islamdom, as two twins competing and collaborating over the same legacy, is essential to understanding the present situation of the Western world. Fowden lays down the view that no ancient and mediaeval thought can be understood without taking Islam seriously. All these are good starting points for readers interested in the kind of scholarship implicated in this project. Melvin-Koushki represents perhaps the most far-reaching culmination of all their tendencies.[25] All other citations are situated somewhere on this intersection of intellectual critique and intellectual history.

In this intersection crystallises a general methodological attitude which could be designated "critical traditionalism".[26] This project is a type of postcolonial critique, but driven by taking 'precolonial' religio-philosophical traditions seriously. Simply put, it approaches colonialism as decisively intertwined with secularism, understood as the construction and destruction of 'religious thought'.[27] By essentially equating the East-West binary with the religion-philosophy binary, projected both geographically (over the non-European) and historically (over the premodern), this dissertation grasps beyond all these distinctions towards a kind of

---

[22] This last concern is also generally inspired by John Milbank (e.g. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2013)) and Wouter Hanegraaff (e.g. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)). The latter is a founding figure for 'Western esotericism', an emergent field in which a debate is unfolding about that very designation. (For an overview, see Earl Fontainelle, 'Julian Strube on the Debate over Dropping the 'Western' in 'Western Esotericism'', SHWEP.) Melvin-Koushki's reflections on the Western also arise in this context. The debate is obviously equally pertinent to 'Western philosophy'.

[23] For an introduction, see Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[24] New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

[25] To some extent, this project is an attempt to incorporate his concerns fully into philosophy. But perhaps his vision of a yet grander Western tradition reaches almost *too* far, towards establishing a new Persocentric monolith.

[26] A term used by Indian psychologist Ashis Nandy, cited by Richard King, 'Philosophy of Religion as Border Control', in *Postcolonial Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Purushottama Bilimoria and Andrew B. Irvine (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2009), 43.

[27] This follows the 'sacred' strand of post-colonial thought identified in Bill Ashcroft, et.al., 'Re-thinking the Post-colonial', in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 212. 'Secular/ism' remains closely associated with modernism throughout the dissertation.

'postsecularism'. Furthermore, it does so through understanding and re-appropriating colonialism, etc., rather than rejecting it. The goal is not to attack *or* defend any intellectual movements – even ones so immense as 'Islam', 'Enlightenment', or 'decolonisation' – but to reveal the relations between them. The motivation of the critique is creative: to make possible deeper narratives of the way in which our traditions have already shaped us.

This text can therefore be read as 'philosophy of history of philosophy': a philosophical analysis of how our history of philosophy is constructed. For that history is not just *about* or *for* philosophy, it itself *is* philosophy. It is a story about our thought, and stories exist by being (re)told. The project is to examine and transform the fundamental way in which we approach our intellectual sources. For that approach is ridden with "errors in *self-understanding*, with serious consequences for Western and Muslim societies alike."[28] Hence this conceptual analysis also has a 'therapeutic' dimension, rectifying our usage of powerful terms. The final philosophical goal is a healthier understanding of our own historical roots.

1.2.3 Alternative Approaches

While this dissertation identifies almost no concrete instantiations of the narrative structure, this could be done in a way that would directly complement it. In fact an additional chapter was originally planned on this subject: the historical development of the narrative. This would entail analysing the most popular (secondary) sources which perpetuate it. Here is a rudimentary backward sketch of its possible targets:

1. Popular contemporary introductions to Western philosophy and the way in which they marginalise Islamic thought to a side-note.
2. 19th–20th century Euro-American studies of premodern Islamic philosophy. According to Mahdi's 'Orientalism', which outlines some of them, these tended to puzzle over how the opposed essences of Greek philosophy and Arab religion could coexist therein.
3. Canonical histories of Western philosophy. Peter Park presents a detailed analysis of how our 'canon' was established in early 19th-century German Enlightenment historiography, inspired also by Kant's and Hegel's philosophies of history. He claims that this grounded the exclusion of non-European sources from serious philosophy, naively perpetuated by

[28] Mahdi, 'Orientalism', 78. Emphasis mine. Mahdi believes that this challenge is especially urgent for Westernised Muslim students. I can only reflect on it as a Westernised Eastern European student.

Bertrand Russell and many others. Indeed it may well be that c.1750–1850 German sources contain the paradigmatic expressions of every aspect of the narrative structure that this dissertation details.[29]

4. Premodern Western Christian narratives of Islamic thought. Scholastic and Renaissance authors are the prime target here. One could expect to find very ambiguous and inconsistent discourses, motivated both by the competing spiritual and political claims of Christianity and Islam *and* by appreciation of Arabic intellectual achievements.
5. Classical Roman and Greek discourses on ancient Middle Eastern thought. These may carry a similar ambiguity, and perhaps the seeds of later 'us-them' relations.
6. Further, Islamic narratives of Christian thought (which may also carry an ambiguity) and of modern European thought (which may also carry an essential opposition).
7. Even further, Eastern Orthodox narratives of Western and Islamic thought. This is as yet a complete unknown. Other directions, including Jewish and Indian narratives, could likewise be interesting.

Albert Hourani's 'Islam and the Philosophers of History' provides one good starting point for approaching the roots of 1.–3. in 4.[30] Such research could investigate the issue of *agency*. Which single author (perhaps Hegel) most impacted the structure as analysed here? Just how deep do the roots of the narrative go? How does it arise from the very sources that it eventually marginalises from Western philosophy, namely the various premodern religio-philosophical traditions (including the Islamic) in their intercultural interaction? This last question is also central to the possibility of a more inclusive narrative. Such a positive alternative would entail another project, the preliminaries for which were also drafted as a full additional chapter and are presently found abridged in section 3.2.

1.2.4 Terminology: Binary Narrative Structure

Throughout the analysis, all major terms pertaining to Western and Islamic philosophy are being interrogated. Their definitions emerge throughout, but always in context of the entire structure. They are to be approached as intrinsically 'problematic'. This brings out the following

[29] A recent French study by Catherine König-Pralong on the same subject, reviewed by Ariane Revel, 'How the History of Philosophy Was Born' (*Books & Ideas*, April 30, 2020), pushes in the same direction.
[30] In *Europe and the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 19–73.

binaries. Notice immediately their asymmetry: the minor terms (right) are negations of the major terms (left), but not vice-versa (with the possible exception of 'irreligious' philosophy).

our	>	their *(other)*
Western	>	**Eastern** *(non-Western)*
philosophy	>	**religious** thought *(unphilosophical)*
rational	>	mystical *(irrational)*
humanist	>	repressive *(inhuman)*
modern	>	**archaic** *(premodern)*
European	>	**Afro-Asian** *(non-European)*
classical (*proto-modern*)	>	mediaeval *(postclassical)*
Greek (*proto-European*)	>	Semitic *(non-Greek)*[31]

The same goes for other implicated terms, including Arab/ic, Islamic, Near/Middle Eastern, ancient, Jewish, (Judeo-)Christian, and Latin. Since a narrative of philosophy is concerned, all these are adjectives, whose meaning within its structure can be tested by application thereto. The adjectives on the right fit philosophy poorly and are instead narratively neutralised by being applied to (religious) 'thought'.[32]

The central adjective in question is obviously the *Western*. As designating our intellectual tradition, this term usually appears as a geo-historical given: a direct intellectual tradition self-produced within 'Europe', the Western part of Eurasia. It supposedly delimits the geo-historical borders of our rational intellectual community. The people who we can think along with – our heroes, our interlocutors, our audience – are Westerners like us. Hence even in today's globalised world, only a "small amount of 'Western' philosophy is concerned with the question of what makes its philosophical tradition 'Western'".[33] The continuity of method and ideas by major thinkers from the Greeks down to contemporary European Americans is taken for granted. Here this givenness is precisely questioned. For as Edward Gibbon once mused, "the difference of

---

[31] Rationality is not 'unmystical', nor is modernity 'post-archaic' (or 'post-mediaeval'), etc. The following also fit the binary neatly, but are only mentioned in passing, since space does not suffice for questions of race and culture:

white	>	brown *(non-white)*
civilised	>	barbaric *(uncivilised)*

It would also be interesting to consider the masculine-feminine binary in this light.

[32] 'Islamic philosophy' and 'Islamic thought' can be read throughout in the general sense of 'ideas produced by confessed Muslims'. (The related and competing designation 'Arab/ic' philosophy is discussed briefly in section 2.3.1., but not essential.) 'Islamic thought' is used more often, to highlight the narrative's denial of philosophical status to such ideas, as a particularly problematic instance of 'religious thought'.

[33] 'Problematising Western Philosophy', 539.

East and West is arbitrary, and shifts round the globe."[34] And geographically, Europe is nothing but one corner of the interconnected 'old world' of Afro-Eurasia. That Europe and the West are meaningful regions of intellectual-historical identity at all is determined *narratively*. They are "not primarily ideas about place and geography …[but a] set of images", as cultural theorist Stuart Hall usefully points out.[35] The Western and all its related terms must be understood through their *relations* within the narrative structure, not through essential correspondences to the facts which they map onto.

But even geographically, something can only meaningfully be Western by *contrast* with something Eastern. This clarifies why the structure is binary. Said's thesis remains paradigmatic here: "the Orient [or the East] has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience".[36] The West cannot be simply a self-contained intellectual tradition. It depends on its other. It is only meaningful through the underlying interdependent East-West distinction. But again, this relation is asymmetrical, with a major and a minor term. There appears a single West, the universal centre of our intellectual world, surrounded by an ocean of many different non-Wests (which Hall collectively calls 'the Rest').[37] Yet all these non-Wests are rendered Eastern in the same way. This splits our thought into two opposed monoliths, each defined by not being the other. Their exact value and meaning can be philosophically shifted, for instance with the traditionalists lamenting a corrupt Western dusk of eternal Eastern religious wisdom,[38] but the grand binary remains. It obscures the mutual continuity and internal differences of our world's traditions – including the European.[39] In the ensuing analysis, the core binary is always that between Western philosophy and Eastern religious thought.

The dissertation focuses on the ambiguous tensions of certain terms within the relational structure of the narrative, above all Islamic philosophy. The question is how everything Islamic is *marginalised* from the Western side towards the Eastern. This is different for instance from the

---

[34] Cited in Earl Fontainelle, 'Matthew Melvin-Koushki on 'The West'', SHWEP.
[35] 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power', in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. Bram Geiben and Stuart Hall (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 276–7.
[36] *Orientalism*, 1–2.
[37] The exact same is preserved in the current North-South binary, in which the 'Global South' is seen forever catching up to us in 'development'.
[38] Of which René Guénon's *East and West*, trans. Martin Lings (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), may be the paradigmatic expression.
[39] To get a sense of Western internal diversity, one need to look no further than to the methods and ideas of so-called continental philosophy, only united as a 'tradition' by opposition from analytic philosophy. Indeed the very approaches used by Hall, Said, and others to critique the East-West binary arose from this continental diversity.

Chinese ‘Far East’, which is fully *excluded*.[40] In fact, the marginalisation of Islamic philosophy appears as related to that of Jewish and even Christian philosophy, through the geo-historical binary between classical Greek and mediaeval Semitic thought. Islamic thought appears as the quintessence of the ‘Middle East’, which represents every term on the right (of the above sketch) and yet is dangerously near to the left.

The narrative itself is defined as *Enlightenment-colonialist*, a term borrowed from Melvin-Koushki.[41] This definition has a primarily methodological motivation. It allows Western philosophy to be analysed along a simultaneous historical (modernist) and geographical (Eurocentric) axis. The hyphen represents the unity of both axes. (Other -isms and anti-isms, even such difficult ones as secularism or ‘anti-archaism’, are then used to designate associated tendencies.) But the term also highlights the roots of the narrative in major geo-historical movements, converging around the early 19th century. The Enlightenment aspect is associated with Kantian and Hegelian historiography, as mentioned above. But since there is no space for their proper discussion here, this remains only a hint. The exact same applies to the term *Romantic Orientalism*. By this is meant the ‘shadow’ of Enlightenment-colonialism, which fixates itself on a narrative of (Middle) Eastern religious thought, again both historically (archaism) and geographically (Afro-Asianism). Romantic Orientalism designates the unity of every term on the right side of the above binary, which completes the Enlightenment-colonialist unity of every term on the left side.

[40] Unlike Islam, its trajectory from antiquity to the present is seen to have absolutely no relevance to the Western. The only established narrative we have of it is that of an eternal mystical *Dao*.
[41] ‘Tahqiq vs. Taqlid’, 226.

2 How Our Established Narrative Marginalises Islamic Philosophy

This narrative of essential Islamic un-Westernness*, still ubiquitous … radically betrays, distorts and even deletes* our *sources; … its modern justification is Enlightenment-colonialist, an ideology fatally hostile to all early modernities but one.*[42]

2.1 The Enlightenment-Colonialist Narrative of Western Philosophy

We fundamentally narrate Western philosophy as *the development of universal humanistic rationalism from a classical Greek origin to a modern European horizon*. This narrative can be analysed in two primary dimensions: historical and geographical. It maps out certain sections of time: an ancient, mediaeval, and modern era. It also maps out sections of space: Greece, Europe, and the Afro-Asian Orient that they colonise. The first, which can be called Enlightenment, has a modernist tendency: the narrative of an expansion from antiquity to modernity. The second, which can be called colonialism, has a Eurocentric tendency: the narrative of the expansion of a single region. The driving question is how the entire structure marginalises Islamic thought as non-Western, which is to say both premodern and non-European.

2.1.1 The Modernism of Enlightenment

Historically, Western philosophy is *modern* thought. It belongs to what philosopher Muhsin Mahdi calls "the West of the Enlightenment…, the West of rationalism and discovery".[43] Enlightenment here represents the modernist ideal of rational humanism. This philosophical ideal is simultaneously scientific: each researcher working to replace obscure superstitious faith in supernatural powers with clear logical hypotheses about natural laws, rigorously tested by the scientific community, thus building functioning technologies that use natural resources optimally for human wellbeing. And it is political: each citizen working to replace violent arbitrary force with free self-government and self-legislation, enacted by the universal (inter)national community, thus building functioning institutions and markets that use social resources justly for

[42] Ibid., 226. Emphasis original.
[43] Mahdi, 'Orientalism', 75.

human wellbeing.[44] Such intellectual modernity appears as an enjoyed actual past and present state, already reached. But it also appears as a desired potential present and future direction, goal, ideal, which *must* be reached, although it perhaps never quite can.[45] Ultimately, it must be "a time and place in which the Enlightenment view prevailed, wisdom became available to all, everyone who was not mentally deranged was a philosopher, and great philosophers were not rare exceptions".[46] Symbolically, the West is the direction of the Sun, enlightening our daytime for conscious discovery of the world. Philosophy as a universal rational method gradually harmonises science and politics into a perfect education system, liberating every individual to pursue the human truth and good, until everyone is fully Enlightened.

This Enlightenment narrative unites our established ideas of the West, philosophy, modernity, rationality, humanity – and indeed history itself. Its history is linear – the traditionalist philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr calls this the "idea of unilateral progress".[47] The West is that which is historical, that which moves forward. It is a civilisation, a colossal process of becoming-citizens. It exists as growth, expansion, development. This makes modernisation central not only to our narrative of philosophy, but our understanding of history as such.

While the appeal of narrating Western philosophy as the rise of clear rational thought is obvious, notice that this must simultaneously be a downfall of obscurity. Its movement forward is a movement away from something: the dark ages of religious tradition. Modernism is also secularism: the severance of the world's latest (*modo*) generation (*saeculum*) from what was supposedly eternal. It only affirms its new horizon by contrast with everything old, the awkward childhood of human thought, which it rejects. Modernity thus means a radical break with the past. Decisively, it cuts off all naively received intellectual and social authority. Thus, Descartes, the father of modern philosophy and science in our narrative, must first wipe the *tabula rasa* of his mind clean of *all* the muddy scholastic education of his Jesuit teachers and books. In its place, he self-produces a perfect new system of clear and distinct ideas built solely from his own

---

[44] Notice how core ideas of critical free thought, universal rational laws, and maximal human utility unite both domains. This ties philosophy to both science and politics, making this analysis potentially relevant to both – to our narratives, that is, of 'Western science' and of 'Western politics'. The scientific side would connect with the ideas of naturalism, materialism, positivism, etc. The political side would be paradigmatic of liberal democracy, but also applies to socialism and nationalism.

[45] This tension may be internally resolved by positing that the West, while not fully actualized, has gathered critical mass and is now self-sufficient as an ongoing process.

[46] Mahdi, 'Orientalism', 88.

[47] *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 268. According to Peter Park's afore-cited analysis, this idea's paradigmatic expression lies in Kant and Hegel's philosophies of history.

observations and deductions. Thus he establishes a strict separation of knowledge and superstition. Our modern thought is philosophically perfected by asserting itself against all the prejudiced insufficiency of *archaic*, *premodern* thought.[48]

Simply put, Enlightenment's optimistic positivism is also a pessimistic anti-archaism: an absolute historical dualism. Western philosophy is defined as modern in opposition to archaic religious thought. As the light of human reason, it shines against the dark background of past inhuman irrationality. Our thinking is civilised by the dispeling of barbaric myth, which ever renders philosophy (as well as science and politics) impossible. The condition for using reason to pursue human wellbeing is the destruction of repressive mystical mentalities. For our own ancestors were possessed by irrational beliefs about dreamed-up mystical powers (spiritual entities, magical words, ritual places), keeping them in a repressed intellectual state. This went on throughout prehistory into archaic Greek, Etruscan, Germanic, Slavic, Celtic, and other tribal cultures – and again under the unquestioned mediaeval authority of the Church. Even premodern 'European' thought is thus categorically non-Western; as will be discussed, colonialism only geographically maps this premodernity onto all Afro-Asian thought.

Amidst this marginalisation of everything archaic, however, modernism does narrate Western philosophy as having ancient origin or principle (*arche*). It is supposed to have begun 2.5 millennia ago with the pre-Socratics, perhaps the oldest recorded European authors, from the end of the archaic Greek period. It famously thrived in classical Athens and Rome, the birthplaces of rationalism-humanism. This is the original golden age of Western civilisation, inspiring the modern golden age of the Enlightenment through its revival in the Renaissance. The root of most of the terms here discussed, including philosophy, is Greek and Latin. We still prize education in classics. The Renaissance ingredient in Enlightenment's radical break from the religious past makes it also a critical *return* to another, philosophical past: the recovery of our lost Greco-Roman sources.[49] Does not our narrative's insistence on the classical pedigree of Western philosophy problematise the view that it is anti-archaic?

---

[48] This negative side of modernism need not invalidate its positively Enlightening achievements and ambitions. They remain irreducibly fundamental to our thinking. But it does imply a fundamentally distorted and tormented relationship with its own historical roots.

[49] This dissertation lacks the space to investigate the complex relationship of Greek thought and of Latin Roman thought in our narrative, and henceforth speaks only of the former. The latter is notable for reaching into North Western Europe, giving rise to the 'Latin West' that historically precedes the North Atlantic Anglo-Franco-Germanic West central to Enlightenment and colonialism. But the Latin West is also ambiguous because of its firm association with mediaeval religious thinking, through the Roman church.

But ironically, our classicism (or 'classicocentrism') precisely serves to marginalise the bulk of premodern thought. For it fixates us on classical rationalism as our single significant historical source, defining Western philosophy as classical-cum-modern. This ultimately renders our entire history irrelevant. The core of the issue is the following. Our narrative is not concerned with ancient philosophical sources on their own terms. Rather, it retrospectively projects onto them (and discovers in them) modern ideas. This is the meaning of the *classical*: that aspect of the ancient which we deem *proto-modern*. It stands in direct opposition to the archaic as the premodern aspect of the ancient. Classicism is a kind of proto-modernism, upholding the seed and image of our presently established way of thinking. Its value is instrumental: to serve us as a prototype. Decisively, it must be dissociated from religion. Any dimensions of pre-Platonic, Platonic, Aristotelian, and Hellenistic thought that could be deemed mystical are marginalised,[50] by contrast with their original exercise of strict discursive-empirical reasoning, which is centred. Enlightenment thus extracts from this tradition its own version of secular rationality. This is done at the sacrifice of all other tendencies, bound and cast off as irrational. Thus *ancient thought is divided against itself*. In it, the archaic perpetuates religious thinking, while the classical births philosophical thinking. Our narrative of ancient thought is one of classical philosophy overcoming archaic religion, itself nothing but a 'rehearsal' for the ongoing movement of Enlightenment modernity overcoming mediaeval religion. The moderns finalise the Westernisation that the ancients left incomplete.

If the classical golden age foreshadows the modern golden age, then, the *mediaeval* dark age falls back into the archaic dark age. Our anti-archaism is most immediately an anti-mediaevalism. Every mystical and repressive limitation associated with primitive, tribal, prehistoric thought is also associated with mediaeval (Judeo-)Christian thought.[51] Indeed Enlightenment invents the very idea of the Middle Ages, separating modernity from antiquity in our tripartite periodisation. The mediaeval is not just before modernity, but between the modern and classical: it is *postclassical*. Where earlier Christian thinkers may have seen themselves as modern (by contrast with the pagan ancients), they are now decisively not modern, but a painful

[50] For considering the actual unity between mystical practice and rational theory in ancient philosophy, the seminal work is Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

[51] Judeo-Christian here signals the union of the Jewish and Christian in our narrative, as the theological thought directly present in European history. For a critique of this term, highlighting its invention to suppress Jewish difference within US religio-political identity, see Arthur Cohen, *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971). The term Abrahamic functions in the same way, while extending also to the Islamic.

transition phase. To be mediaeval means to be stuck, retarded, repressed – to persist in archaic religion in spite of classical (proto-)Enlightenment. Modern philosophy must emerge through the same radical break (with mediaeval Abrahamic dogma) as classical philosophy did (with archaic pagan myth). Enlightenment is the 'second' philosophical revolution, rescuing the original one from its regress in the intervening 'Middle' Ages. Mediaeval religious thought can only count as Western insofar as it preserves the classical philosophical essence for its modern revival.

Thus, our identification with the classical over the mediaeval is precisely what makes our philosophy historically modern. Our narrative converges on a single historic event, the victory of *logos* (equated with Enlightenment reason) over archaic *mythos* in the Socratic movement. It only goes downhill from there. The late ancient crisis sees classical philosophy fall prey to the mystical tendency in Platonism, with Plotinus (d.270) establishing his grand dogma. This paves the way for Judeo-Christian religious thought, ushering in a mostly irrelevant postclassical period. Philosophy is doomed to a blind handmaiden of dogmatic theology, exercising its logic on futile questions (of angels dancing on tips of needles) while waiting to throw off its shackles once again. If modern philosophy admits mediaeval sources at all, narrowed down around Augustine (d.420) and Aquinas (d.1225), it does so marginally and with qualifications.[52] While mediaeval thinkers saw themselves as theologians committed to Catholic practice, they only concern us as philosophers who preserved rationalism during its long sleep between the ancients and the moderns, making curious contributions of deeply limited significance. For the classical rational essence, after Plotinus, becomes so polluted by archaic mystical residue that purging it becomes less and less worth the bother. The thought of millennia is discarded as rotten, an era of no significant philosophical activity or development, safely left to quirky specialists (perhaps nostalgic Christians 'living in the past'). Hence, "philosophy undergraduates typically learn the history of their subject through two core classes: 'ancient philosophy' and 'modern philosophy'."[53] We can happily jump from Hellenism straight to Descartes.

The clear implication of this narrative is that *(Judeo-)Christian thought is not Western*. As mediaeval religious thought, it is unmodern, unclassical, unphilosophical. Since Enlightenment

[52] Our modern philosophical canon is in fact not a canon, in the older sense of an age-old unbroken chain of transmission of textual tradition. For it emphasises a radical break with naively received textual authority. Our modern tradition begins with Descartes, Kant, Hegel, or Frege, as a canon of individual thinkers who show us precisely how to break with a canon. And yet, paradoxically, this canon itself is often naively received, unquestioned in its origin and nature.

[53] Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach and Leah Kalmanson, 'Views from Everywhere: How Academic Philosophy Can Become Truly Diverse and Global' (*Aeon Essays*, 2022).

itself arises from the shadow of an immense Christian intellectual hegemony, it cannot be fully excluded. But the tendency is to corner it into a strictly delimited religious intellectual space.[54] Only classical-cum-modern philosophy offers a neutral universality fit for empowering individual free-thought. All religion is irreducibly committed to arbitrary irrational claims, which always oppress individuals if taken seriously. As metaphysician Henry Corbin remarks, "there was no such thing as Christian philosophy ... to the philosophical conceptions of the *Aufklärung*. …a perfect rationalist [cannot believe] that the contents of the Holy Books could be the basis and medium for philosophical meditation and investigations".[55] Our modernism therefore 'tames' Christian thinking, seemingly upholding it as Western, but in fact gradually emptying it of all independent power. This is achieved through its effective division into a mystical side (which can be harmlessly isolated in private life) and a rational side (which can be harmlessly assimilated to public philosophy). That is: if there was any truth in Abrahamic faith, it was only the truth of Hellenistic reason, now safely absorbed into Enlightenment itself. To retain its former hegemony, modern Christian thought tends to ally itself with this narrative, but so it only participates in its own emasculation. Modern means post-Christian. This difficult truth is evident from the following. Today, most Western philosophers can complete their historical education without being introduced to the Torah or to the Gospels, texts that rival Plato's dialogues and Descartes' meditations in sheer impact on the history of philosophy.

To restate this fundamental problem: 99% of our thought, including many of its core historical sources, is irrelevant to Western philosophy – because it is religious. It is too mired in the irrational (mystical, occult, esoteric, magical, spiritual, etc.) to be sanitised as a respectable tool for secular rationalism. Jewish and Christian thought is rendered a superstitious dogmatism. Even heterodox strains of modern European thought are rendered pseudo-philosophy or pseudo-science.[56] From the premodern, Socratic schools may be the one possible exception.

---

[54] Where Enlightenment allies with Christianity, it tends towards deism or 'minimal theism': the view of God as nothing but the fundamental power of the human mind to discover the material world. This in fact enables religion to be fully replaced by philosophy, which can now use God as an abstract idea with no need for any mystical or repressive beliefs or practices. And one reason why our historical narrative is classicist and anti-mediaevalist, admitting Plato and Aristotle more readily than Augustine or Aquinas, is because the monotheistic tendency of the former can be sanitised as deism, while the latter seem committed to the 'maximal deism' of organised monotheism. Indeed the latter even interpret the former in line with Catholic practice, thus extending a Christian challenge to the Enlightenment claim on the classical legacy. (I owe the gist of these observations to Arnold Mol.)

[55] 'Biographical Post-Scriptum to a Philosophical Interview' (Paris, 1978). As he points out, "this is to deny both Jewish and Islamic philosophy" also.

[56] This entails entire thinkers and schools, such as the modern esotericisms of Carl Jung or Alesteir Crowley or René Guénon, as well as strands in the most canonical, such as Kant's or Hegel's unorthodox Christianity.

But our dismissal of premodern religious thought masks a more fundamental fear. Its obscurity has not been (can never quite be) fully overcome by Enlightenment, superstition still lives within us. If we take the archaic seriously, it might once again take over our minds and institutions. The mediaeval, holding out the incomplete death of Christian thinking, poses an especially intimate threat.[57] Thus, Western philosophy historically constructs Judeo-Christian thought as its own internal other, a paradoxical quasi-philosophy which it is afraid to look at. Indeed the more we dispel religious thinking with philosophical clarity, the greater the threat of it striking back. It could yet corrupt our achievements and put reason back to sleep.

Once we see that the Enlightenment narrative of Western philosophy as classical-cum-modern has at its heart this phobia of everything premodern, it is easy to see how it is Islamophobic: Islamic thinking is seen as forever premodern. Forged through the annexation of Abrahamic revelation by a primitive tribal mentality, it uniquely appears as both archaic and mediaeval. It is the final form of religious thought, succeeding both pagan mysticism and Judeo-Christian theology. And where Christian thought finally yields to post-Christian modern philosophy, Islamic thought remains theological, 'stuck in the Middle Ages'.[58] Thus, the historical dimension of our narrative already entails its systematic marginalisation. We treat Islamic thought as still less significant than Judeo-Christian thought. But in fact it is a greater threat, more imminent than the mediaeval remnants of post-Christian thought. For Islamic thought is *still* fully mired in archaism and bent on spreading its corruption over our own scientific and political ideas. Let us now consider how this fear echoes in the second, geographical dimension of the narrative.

2.1.2 The Eurocentrism of Colonialism

Yet more obviously than modernity, Western philosophy is geographically *European* thought. This lies at the heart of the second of the three axioms we began with, rendering our entire narrative Eurocentric. Philosophy arises from within European borders, from among Europeans

---

[57] Of course, even scholasticism never ended and remains alive in neo-Thomism and other currents.

[58] As Fowden (*Before and After Muhammad*, 13–14) notes, the question of Islamic sources in our canon starkly illustrates the broader one of how salient *any* of our premodern theological sources are today. "Numerous exponents of modernity have been hostile to any form of religion, especially to Islam, which has so far responded to Enlightenment concerns much less than either Christianity or Judaism."
This already implies that on some level, Islam now serves as a double of Christianity for the post-Christian narrative. The real historical relation of the three is obviously much more complicated. Here, the only relation between modern secular thought and *any* religious thought is opposition. But the exact narrative role of Christian thought remains highly subtle, a core problem throughout this text.

as a broadly identifiable culture and race. This "includes the Greeks, Romans, Celts, and Germans";[59] Indo-European in language, white in appearance. It begins in Greece and ends towards America, the New World settled by Western Europeans. The narrative settings are the agora of classical Athens and the villas of republican Rome, then the palaces of renaissance Florence, the forts of golden-age Amsterdam, the libraries of Enlightenment Weimar, the dormitories of wartime Oxbridge, the cafes of postwar Paris, and the high-tech classrooms of today's Stanford. Euro-American philosophers and Greco-Roman philosophers form a natural intellectual community. They are white men, first with beards and togas, later with long hair and splendid robes, and finally with pipes and suits. They ponder over scrolls, manuscripts, photocopies. In these clean-cut scenes of a Eurocentric imagination, the rational legacy of all humanity is seen carried forth in direct line.

Non-European scenes feature only indirectly, by contrast (as *other* traditions) and/or by application (as colonies to be educated). Our Eurocentrism is also an intellectual racism directed against everything *Afro-Asian*. In the old opposition of "sapient societies who fostered philosophical learning [as] racially superior to uncouth savages beguiled by irrational mysticism and occult practices",[60] the former are now European by definition. Egyptian scribes, Hebrew prophets, or Tibetan sages are culture heroes parallel to the Greek philosophers in antiquity, but irrelevant to philosophy. They are brown archaic thinkers, while the Greeks alone are white and proto-modern. (Arabic translators copying the works of Aristotle in mediaeval Baghdad play a supporting but not a starring role, as detailed in section 2.3.) And 'postclassical ' non-European thinkers (such as Buddhist logicians, Sudanese Muslim scholars, or even Byzantine theologians) might as well not exist, not even as a question mark. If modern European education then replaces their teachings in Turkey, Ethiopia, or India, it is not replacing living philosophies. Rather it introduces philosophy to cultures which, if they ever had anything philosophical whatsoever, had inevitably lost it. Western philosophy was made by Europe alone, removed from and superior to any Afro-Asian tradition. Finally, it replaces them all as the *only* philosophy, henceforth to be studied and continued in every land to Enlighten all nations. This is simply the same exercise of human reason dispeling repressive mystical thinking through which it already defined itself in Europe. For we have, "by classifying them as religions, subalternized… the world's wisdom

[59] John Tolan, 'Forging New Paradigms: Towards a History of Islamo-Christian Civilization', in *A Sea of Languages*, ed. Suzanne Akbari and Karla Mallette (University of Toronto Press, 2013), 62.
[60] Bdaiwi, 'Brief Remarks on Islam, History, Philosophy, and European Triumphalism' (*The Muslim 500*, 2019).

traditions", rendering them non-philosophical.[61] Western philosophy is defined as European against an ocean of archaic Afro-Asian religious thought, which it must Europeanise.

This geographical asymmetry of narrating Western philosophy as originally European *but* decisively valid for all non-Europeans marks our Eurocentrism as colonialist. This intellectual colonisation is highly effective and effectively masked. For its claim is not that particular European philosophies is superior to particular Afro-Asian philosophies, but that only Europe has philosophy as something categorically different. Where all Afro-Asian thought remains arbitrary in its particularity, European thought transcends its particularity to reveal a universally neutral validity (of abstract rationality). This makes Western philosophy a paradox: it is defined simultaneously as a particular European tradition *and* a universal abstract centre. Its Europeanness is to be bracketed. And this "decontextualised narrative renders borrowings from other parts of the world invisible"[62] – the flow of philosophical ideas from the European centre to the Afro-Asian periphery is strictly one-way. European philosophy appears to colonise all human thought naturally and effortlessly, because it is simply universally true, masking its relation to arbitrary imperial force.[63] This relates our present narrative to what African philosopher Kwasi Wiredu calls "philosophical neocolonialism".[64] Under direct colonialism, white European masters taught their colored subjects to imitate the modernist selection from the Western tradition; under neocolonialism (after formal political independence, and in countries never directly colonised), national education systems around the world continue to privilege this over philosophies historically associated with their own geographies. Even when no longer backed by imperial machine guns, Western philosophy as a European-yet-universal centre remains defined as that which must expand to take over all non-European minds.

The core ingredient of philosophical Eurocentrism is Grecocentrism.[65] Of all premodern peoples, only the Greeks philosophise. This grounds the colonialist view that only Europeans can teach rational thinking.[66] Hence Peter Park's analysis of our exclusion of Africa and Asia from

---

[61] King, 'Philosophy of Religion', 35.
[62] Kirloskar-Steinbach and Kalmanson, 'Views from Everywhere'.
[63] In reality, of course, it was and is enforced: Western philosophy realises its own abstract theoretical superiority by practically subjugating every concrete tradition. The global dominance of Enlightenment scientific-political modes of thought is interdependent with Western European military and economic dominance. The narrative of European thought as universally valid precisely reveals the utter profundity to which its particularity is imposed.
[64] Cited in 'Views from Everywhere'.
[65] Schuringa, 'On the Very Idea of 'Western' Philosophy' (*Medium*, 2020). Melvin-Koushki uses 'philhellenism'.
[66] Europa, after all, is a Greek princess. Here it is also interesting to recall that the ancient Greeks themselves famously established maritime colonies around the Mediterranean.

the history of philosophy revolves around this core claim: that philosophy begins in Greece.[67] This geographically defines Western philosophy as Greek-cum-European, just as it is historically classical-cum-modern. Consider again our heroic white lineage. The first philosopher is Thales, the Greek who dared to explain the world with a rational-empirical fact (water) rather than a mythical god or spirit. The discipline is properly established (in parallel with democracy) by three classical Athenians whose faces are enshrined in stone: Socrates the debater, Plato the writer, Aristotle the researcher. The tradition continues into Roman times through the competition of Platonists and Aristotelians with the other 'Hellenistic' schools (Stoicism, Epicureanism, Scepticism) over Socrates' legacy. Skip over other lands and millennia, and this legacy directly culminates in Cartesian scepticism and Kantian criticism, the ground of our own thought. In short, the pre/Socratic Greeks discovered rational humanism (critical, demystified, free thinking), giving Europeans the philosophical gospel to perfect and proselytise into all the world. By definition, ancient philosophy can only be Greco-Roman, modern philosophy can only be Euro-American, and Socrates can only be white.

To function, this European exceptionalism must extract Greek philosophy from its own Afro-Asian context. *Greek* is made to mean *proto-European*. This is not simply given, since Greek thought emerged in the Eastern Mediterranean, millennia before our own European identity, and its legacy has been claimed by non-European traditions. Indeed many ancient Greek thinkers themselves saw philosophy as beginning in other traditions, such as the Egyptian, Persian, or Indian.[68] The Greeks are abducted from this relation and enthroned as direct forefathers *only* to Western Europeans – not even to the inhabitants of the original Grecosphere, such as Turks or Egyptians.[69] (Is it an accident that even modern Greece itself had to be *made* European, by concrete actions such as British and French imperial support to the 1820s Greek War of Independence, the separation of Greek-speaking and Turkish-speaking populations, and the early integration of Greece into EU-predecessor communities in 1981?[70] European Greece

[67] *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy*, 2–4. Among the 19th-century scholars who established this view, Park cites Eduard Zeller, authority on pre-Socratic thought. According to Walter Burkert, Zeller's arguments of 1856, ruling out non-European precedents to Greek philosophy, "have often been reelaborated and repeated, down to the [mid-]twentieth century." 'Prehistory of Presocratic Philosophy in an Orientalizing Context', in *Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*, ed. Patricia Curd and Daniel Graham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 60.

[68] A view defended in some recent scholarship, such as Marc Van de Mieroop, *Philosophy before the Greeks: The Pursuit of Truth in Ancient Babylonia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[69] As well as the Byzantine 'Eastern Roman' Greeks, written out of intellectual history because they appear as too distant from *our Rome* to be relevant.

[70] Notably, the integration happened two decades prior to that of any other Eastern European country.

against Asian Islamic Turkey, like Catholic Spain and African Islamic Morocco earlier – this expresses the borders of Western philosophy as European, *never* Afro-Asian.) Of all cultures from East of Rome, only the Greek is essentially Western – just as classical antiquity is from the ancient. Hence Melvin-Koushki speaks of "the polemical Westernisation of Greece".[71] Greece is the ultimate East, from whose radical break with all other Easts a West is born.

This exception of European philosophy from its own Afro-Asian relations turns even against its other archetypal root: Judea. The Holy Land, irredeemably located in the 'Middle East', is left behind the European border drawn up around Greece. European religion may be Judeo-Christian, but the philosophical essence of Europe is irreligious. Judea is the land of the Bible, of Jesus, of the Gospel even written in Greek; but it is not the land of any canonical philosopher. Our intellectual heroes are neither Jewish nor Christian, but European (Roman, French, British…). This separation of national philosophy from religious tradition is grounded in the geographical, ethnic, linguistic binary of Greek and Semitic.[72] That is, our narrative's Euro-Grecocentric racism against the Afro-Asian is also an anti-Semitism.[73] The *Semitic* (including the Jewish, Hebrew, Judaic) is decisively *non-Greek*, opposing it to Western philosophy. Judaic sources are studied by Hebraists, who fit among Orientalists better than among classicists; by historians not of philosophy, but of religion. They represent precisely the persistence of Afro-Asian religion in spite of Hellenisation (proto-Europeanisation). Hence the mediaeval downfall of classical rationalism is in fact a Semitic Afro-Asian corruption of Greek European thought, making all Christian sources suspect.[74] This anti-Semitic dimension of our secular anti-medieavalism is unacknowledged, of course, since we simply think it a fact that faith obscures reason – but the

[71] Melvin-Koushki, 'Tahqiq vs. Taqlid', 228, fn.28.

[72] Cf. ibid., 222, fn.14, on "the development by European scholars of a neat Hellenism vs. Hebraism, then Aryan vs. Semitic, binary". He refers to Masuzawa, cited here just below. In some extremes, this association of Grecocentrism with the Aryan or Indo-European may lead to the ambiguous view of the Persian or Indian as more commensurable with our thought than the Hebrew or Arabic. Bdaiwi links this to the privileging of Persian over Arabic philosophy by some Orientalists, such as Ernest Renan and Max Horten.

[73] Indeed European anti-Semitism as culminating in the Holocaust can be seen as a kind of inward colonialism, the theater of colonial violence playing out on European soil itself, while outward colonialism reached similar excesses in Africa and elsewhere. (This view is expressed by the father of postcolonial thought, Aimé Césaire, in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 41.) Such violent exercises of European purity are not unrelated to the intellectual exercises of Western philosophical purity discussed here.
Indeed despite the mystical, archaising aspect of Nazism, its ultra-Eurocentric obsession with purging our geography of the Semitic betrays precisely an ultra-modernism or ultra-secularism: the attempt at a final solution of the religious question. Although this topic cannot be addressed here with proper intellectual responsibility, one is reminded of the seminal German philosophers Theodor Adorno's and Martin Heidegger's experiences with Nazism, in opposed ways, as the extreme consequence of Enlightenment. Nazi thinking, after all, emerged right at the end of a long century in which German thought represented the height of modern European philosophy.

[74] This accounts also for our complete absence of sources in the central Semitic Christian language Syriac/Aramaic.

fact is that religion is a foreign import. The Semitic strand in Western thought is marginalised as being strictly non-Greek, non-European, unphilosophical.

This colonialist assertion of the Greco-European against everything Afro-Asian and Semitic naturally converges on Islamic thought as their quintessence.[75] For this is the thought of a religious tribe that stretches from Nigeria to Indonesia, united around a scripture in Arabic (a Semitic language), supposed to be the final, universal perfection of the tradition of Abraham and Jesus.[76] And if Western philosophy asserts itself against the Semitic as its internal religious other, whose threat in the form of both Judaism and Christianity now appears to be neutralised, then Islam as the looming meta-Semitic successor to Judea makes that fear double. At all costs, the non-European claim of the Islamic tradition on the Greek legacy must be suppressed. Hence the claim that philosophy is Greek and Greece is European is delivered in perfect tune with modern European (intellectual) colonisation of Islamic Asia and Africa.[77] The very existence of Islamic philosophy re-highlights the age-old Afro-Asian relations of Greek philosophy, threatening the geographical construction of Western philosophy as European.

2.1.3 The Unity of Enlightenment-Colonialism

Evidently, our narrative is modernist (classicist) *and* Eurocentric (Grecocentric) in the same way. The same logic which historically imposes the classical-cum-modern over the archaic (mediaeval), geographically imposes the Greek-cum-European over the Afro-Asian (Semitic). The one defines itself as Western and philosophical against the other as religious. This is a *double negation*, whose anti-archaism is also racist and whose anti-mediavalism is also anti-Semitic. The "exclusions within the so-called Western tradition's [own] current and historical self-representation", noted by philosopher Lucy Allais,[78] are thus structurally bound to

[75] Indeed philosopher Jan Patočka notes that a united European identity was originally forged through crusades against the Islamic world, and its colonialism began "amid the *westward* suppression of Islam, leading to discoveries beyond the seas and to a sudden wild *scramble* for the riches of the world … this expansion of Europe to the West [sparks] the essential reformation of … Christian practice, turning from the sacred to the secular"; *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 79 and 83.

[76] See Tomoko Masuzawa, 'Islam, a Semitic Religion', in *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 179: for "the newly ethnoconscious Europeans of the nineteenth century … Christianity's… Semitic origin now struck a discordant note with their supposed Hellenic ancestry. Meanwhile, Islam … had been recast as a prototypically Arab—hence Semitic—religion … to acquire a new alienness … defined by the …ethnic character of the Arabs, the most …adversarial of the Semites."

[77] Hence the absurdity of British colonial (or US neo-colonial) educators arriving in Iraq, one region to which the Anglo-American tradition owes its Aristotle, and prescribing the Aristotelian corpus (in English translation) as mandatory reading to Westernise the unphilosophical Arabs.

[78] 'Problematising Western Philosophy', 540.

exclusions of other traditions. We marginalise ‘our own’ (archaic) traditions and ‘other’ (Afro-Asian) traditions simultaneously; after all, ‘the past is a foreign country’. If this separation can be called secular, secularisation is essential to both modernisation and Europeanisation, as two twin movements of intellectual Westernisation. Through both, the philosophical West becomes the only trajectory of human reason, mapping out and educating the vast non-Western periphery. Western philosophy is thus universally reduced to modern European thought, with a classical Greek (proto-modern proto-European) tail.

This is why the universalist narrative of our thought can be encompassed in the double term Enlightenment-colonialism. Colonialism is outward Enlightening, and Enlightenment is inward colonisation. The hyphen between them represents their ideal unity, ultimately abstracted from both. The two axes purify each other: modernism transcends all premodern European thought (it is not really European), while Eurocentrism transcends all non-European modern thought (it is not really modern).[79] What remains is strictly modern European thought (and its classical Greek blueprint). But even the vast majority of that intellectual context is marginalised as religious or pseudo-philosophical, an irrelevant archaic residue or Afro-Asian echo. Only the universal, the abstract, the neutral can really be rationally humanist, forever purging itself of all violent arbitrary confusions. The strange final meaning of ‘modern European’ (and ‘classical Greek’) in our narrative is thus ‘where the movement of abstracting from all context plays out’. Something incredible took place only in 5th–4th century Hellás and 17th–19th century Western Europe: certain thinkers broke through their own (religious, ethnic, linguistic) context to the core of all thought. The rigorous rational method outlined in their canonical texts therefore provides a universal centrepoint for all human thought. From that rational centre (‘the West’), all specific intellectual contexts can be mapped out on the periphery, Enlightened and colonised. This sublimates Western philosophy from a concrete tradition into the subtle universal fulfilment of any and every concrete tradition.

Nevertheless, the present analysis is concerned with how this narrative universalisation marginalises Islamic philosophy. Hence it remains with its geo-historical binaries, the classical Greek as against the mediaeval Semitic is being the most concrete and therefore the most interesting. It strictly juxtaposes the two great ancient sources of modern European thought,

[79] In other words, the historical axis makes itself non-geographical (modernity a universal horizon beyond an archaic eternity), while the geographical makes itself ahistorical (Europe a perennial centre beyond an Afro-Asian periphery), so that Western philosophy proper is both non-geographical and ahistorical (pure human rationality).

casting classical Greece as the seed of Enlightenment and archaic Judea as the seed of the dark ages. This 'Athens over Jerusalem' rhetoric directly reverses the older Christian philosophical view (which reduced Socrates' arbitrary human *logos* to an instrument for Jesus' universal divine *logos*). Semitic religious thought is relegated to a bygone era, the prime relic of all the religious particularity that Western philosophy forever leaves behind.

But if the intellectual power of Jerusalem has been relatively safely deposited, another challenger appears: Mecca.[80] The perfect religious crystallisation of everything Semitic, Afro-Asian, archaic, *and* mediaeval, it resists Europeanisation and modernisation both externally and internally. Hence the full force of our non-Western negation converges on this scapegoat. As political theorist William Connolly observes: "to be European is to express religious beliefs [only] in the private realm and to participate as abstract citizens in the public realm. This innocent and tolerant-sounding definition promotes Christian secularism into the center of Europe and reduces Islamic peoples into a minority unlike other minorities; they are distinctive because they alone are unwilling or unable to abide by the modern agenda".[81] Indeed a genuine Islamic philosophy would mean a *competing agenda* – a religious claim to the classical Greek legacy that could well amount to its own Enlightenment modernism and colonialist Arabo-centrism (or Perso-centrism, or Turko-centrism). After all, Islam as organised around the universal abstract principle of *tawhid* is capable of expanding into vast areas of Africa and Asia.[82] The philosopher Shabbir Akhtar calls this 'Islamic exceptionalism': the narrative of Islam as "a unique ideological religion of universal import, … a spiritual globalization project",[83] casts it as the perfect competitor to modern European universalism. That is why "Muslims are seen as vandals and barbarians, hyper-enemies of culture and civilization."[84] The Muslim mind is the final boss of religious thought that Western philosophy is up against.

---

[80] This signals a fundamental intra-Western tension, well expressed in Derrida's musings (in *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 63) that "there is *today* the same feeling …of danger, of anxiety before the possibility of other wars with unknown forms …uncertainty concerning the ["spiritual"] borders of Europe… around the idea of philosophy, reason, monotheism, Jewish, Greek, Christian, and Islamic memories, around Jerusalem – a Jerusalem itself divided, torn apart".

[81] 'Europe: A Minor Tradition', in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*, edited by David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 78.

[82] It would be interesting to research parallels between the actual early modern spread of imperial Islamic power, for instance, and colonialism as we know it – without suggesting that they are the same. We could even contemplate an alternative history in which a secular post-Islamic modernity emerges, for instance, between Turkey and Persia. Would it not universalise itself across the globe and effortlessly reduce Christian European thought into a forever premodern religious other?

[83] *Islam as Political Religion: The Future of an Imperial Faith* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 69.

[84] Akhtar, *Islam as Political Religion*, 245.

Thus, in Ariane Revel's review of philosophical historiography, "the rational and secularized modernity of which Europe was the theatre had as its counterpoint the elsewhere, namely the Orient and the Middle Ages, Islam and Greece, Judaism and ancient India, mysticism and barbarism."[85] Or as Melvin-Koushki's says, "Enlightenment requires the *endarkenment* of all Others."[86] Our narrative of modern Europe as the launchpad for neutral philosophical universality leaves behind a trail of these intellectual otherings. Islamic thought is the ultimate leftover, since it ties together all of them (indeed even Greece) and remains incessantly present everywhere in and around Europe. The next section therefore zooms in on this objectified Islamic image of the Orient that stands against Western philosophy's Occident.

2.2 The Romantic Orientalist Narrative of (Middle) Eastern Religious Thought

Every step in our positive narrative of Western philosophy (analysed above as the universalisation of humanistic rationality) depends upon a simultaneous negation. This section studies how that which is negated, subjugated, and othered yet attains positive content, directly from within the narrative. The archaic as the object of our anti-archaism is cemented by what could be termed (Romantic) archaism, the Afro-Asian as the object of our racism by a kind of (Orientalist) Afro-Asianism. These reified others can be studied *by* (not *as*) Western philosophy as the many images of what it is not. In other words, Enlightenment-colonialism has a shadow narrative, which can be called 'Romantic Orientalism': the narrative of all 'Eastern' religious thought. The present analysis of this intellectual dark side is focused on the special role of Islamic thought therein, inquiring into why and how it is rendered 'Middle Eastern'.

Orientalism stands for the shadow of colonialist Eurocentrism: modern European thought about Afro-Asian thought. Its 'Orient' encompasses the periphery of the European centre (Occident). In Edward Said's seminal work of the same name, "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and "the Occident." …[countless] poets, novelists, philosophers, [etc.] … have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate … accounts concerning the Orient, its people,

[85] 'How the History of Philosophy Was Born'.
[86] Melvin-Koushki, 'Tahqiq vs. Taqlid', 222.

customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on."[87] Said analyses this distinction as an aspect of intellectual colonialism, the asymmetrical subjugation of Afro-Asian traditions by European knowledge. He already notes that even where such knowledge is enthusiastic to the point of worship, this only more objectifies the East for the purposes of the West, obstructing the possibility of genuine dialogue. And he treats representations of the Muslim mind as a paradigmatic case. Thus Orientalism is defined as "a code by which Europe could interpret both itself and the Orient to itself… [which] already carried within itself the imprint of the great European fear of Islam".[88] This emphasises the geographical basis of the East-West binary.

By Romanticism we mean the shadow of Enlightenment modernism: modern European thought about archaic thought. It is driven by a curious anxiety about the (real or imagined) excesses of modern history, a nostalgic longing to return to healthier roots. Its symptom is fascination with everything archaic and religious, as the desired antidote to secular poisons. But just as with Orientalism, even the most genuine Romantic embrace of premodern religious thought is nothing but an intensification of its modern narrative condition. By seeking to 'reunite' with our spiritual roots, Romanticism affirms the Enlightenment narrative that we really are separate from them.

Again, these are two dimensions of a single narrative: Romantic Orientalism. This is the double shadow of our established 'Occidentalism'. Indeed, Mahdi grounds the Orientalist paradigm of key 19th- and 20th-century Euro-American experts on Islamic philosophy, such as Ernest Renan, Carl Becker, and Hans Schaeder, in German Romanticism.[89] Thus it was fundamentally motivated by the desire to integrate Eastern visions of the sacred into Western thought.[90] It sought in another geography something that has been historically 'lost' in our own. As has just been discussed, the West of Enlightenment-colonialism is not just Europe, but also modernity, and ultimately beyond both. Likewise, not only (forever premodern) Africa and Asia, but *premodern Europe is also the East*; it is not really Europe. (This conclusion is notably not drawn by Said.[91]) The fascination with the thought to our East also points to our past: the longing to return is a longing to escape. Thus again, even something so fundamental to the West as Judea is

[87] *Orientalism*, 2–3.
[88] Ibid., 253–4.
[89] Mahdi, 'Orientalism', 90.
[90] Ibid., 75–6.
[91] Even where we narrate 'our own' tradition as superior to 'other' traditions, this apparent hierarchy only masks their common fate. Our tendency to hold onto Christian thought as preferable to Islamic thought, for instance, is precisely due to Christianity giving way to post-Christian modern thought where Islam is seen as resisting it. The Pyrrhic victory of the European intellectual tradition is that it happily allows itself to be abstracted from.
Perhaps this insight may help us deposit any preservation in Said of the very us-them East-West binary he critiques.

rendered Eastern. Romanticism is a kind of ‘inward Orientalism’, the othering of our own intellectual roots, while Orientalism is a kind of ‘outward Romanticism’, the appropriation of other intellectual roots. Both are projected from the modern European position as its counterpoint. Henceforth, Romanticism and Orientalism is not to be analysed in isolation, but as a united narrative of a monolithic religious East, with Islamic thought as its pinnacle. It establishes our universal philosophical West by contrast. Since this is a narrative of everything that is marginalised from the centre of our thought, it may itself be marginal (as a tangential tendency or curiosity) – but this precisely reveals its significance. It appears as the necessary completion of Enlightenment-colonialism, into a unified double narrative of Western philosophy and (Middle) Eastern religious thought.

2.2.1 The Excluded East

That which Western philosophy is not, non-Western religious thought, has a name: it is Eastern. The East is the objectified image of everything on the intellectual periphery, beyond our Western centre. At geographical face value, the East-West distinction could be symmetrical. But in our narrative it is deeply asymmetrical; the East is projected as the shadow of the moving body of the West.[92] As philosophy is sublimated from context as a pure universal ideal, it leaves behind all concrete traditions. But the Romantic Orientalist shadow narrative turns back on these and collects them into a single immense image of Eastern religious thought. These then serve as the ever-broader intellectual object for the ever-narrower Western subject. They are the objectified, reified, narrated unity of everything non-Western, everything that is fundamentally irrelevant to our thought. This does not mean that it cannot be interesting. Any Eastern thought can be an object of our curiosity, our contemplation, ultimately even our obsession. But since the East is relegated to the past, as against our present Western horizon, this interest is strictly archival, museal, encyclopaedic. It must *not* be canonical in the sense of instructive for our own rational way of thinking. Only classical-Greek-cum-modern-European thought provides a sound philosophical method. For Western philosophy alone gives us the starting point for universal reasoning – precisely leading us to overcome all Eastern religious prejudice.

The geo-historical core of the Eastern is Afro-Asian archaic thought, by definition *excluded* from Western philosophy. Eastern ideas are so many tribal superstitions, which no one in their

[92] The fact that what should be symmetrical is not may hint at a lack of intellectual balance.

right mind could categorise together with the reasoning of a Kant or an Aristotle that lays out a path for our own thinking. A concrete counter-example, pointing out a text or author such as the *Lun Yu* of Confucius (d.479) to say that an archaic Chinese work can be just as seminal to our humanistic rationalism as a modern European one, may challenge the implications of this, but never the narrative itself. For its latent structure will continue to render all Asian thought a single arbitrary Eastern mass, lacking our kind of universality. And since Egyptian and Algerian thought obviously falls into this mass, and sub-Saharan Africa is nothing but its even further periphery, Afro-Asian is its proper geographical designation.[93] An interconnected intellectual world of Afro-Eurasia is a strictly premodern possibility, which the West overcame by abstracting itself from the 'rest' of it – and in turn making itself the global centre to which everything must connect. But this exclusive separation is itself a kind of relation: Western philosophy needs the Eastern religious other to realise itself against.

Thus the entire intellectual world 'out there' is Easternised, which also means antiquated. For again, our historical past and geographical others are mapped out onto each other. African, Oceanic, or Native American thought is primitive, shamanic, prehistoric in the same way as Etruscan, Germanic, or Celtic thought. Egyptian, Persian, Indian, or Chinese thought is ancient in the way that classical Greco-Roman thought overcame. And Islamic thought is mediaeval in the same way as Christian thought. These divisions are not clear-cut (with Hebrew thought perhaps spanning all three), but the common essence remains: *none* of these can ever be modern, a serious alternative for humanity's current intellectual horizon, on its own terms. 'Native' traditions cannot reach developments contemporaneous to European modernity. This is what Melvin-Koushki means by "an ideology fatally hostile to all early modernities but one".[94] We can still speak of modern Persian philosophy, for instance, but this means philosophy that developed in Iran through neo/colonial Westernisation. And while such modernised Eastern philosophy might make for a nice niche interest (and its representatives for nice guest lecturers at Western universities), few would look to it for decisive future insights – even when it is so Westernised as to be simply modern-European-philosophy-in-Iran, retaining no meaningful difference.[95] A priori

[93] This dumping of the African with the Asian is nicely enshrined in the 1938 addition of 'and African' to the name of the School of Oriental Studies, some 30 years after its establishment in London.
[94] Melvin-Koushki, 'Tahqiq vs. Taqlid', 226.
[95] Indeed Mahdi ('Orientalism', 77) notes that modern academia within the Islamic world itself replicates the "Western image of Islam" as unphilosophical. Interestingly, in Iran specifically this modern academia co-exists with prestigious traditional philosophical seminaries which pretend to preserve the Greco-Arabo-Persian intellectual tradition from any modern European influence.

incapable of approaching any Afro-Asian thought with anything other than a nostalgic Romantic antiquarianism, Orientalism enthrones modern European philosophy as the only horizon.

It is already clear that what really unites everything Eastern in this narrative is its being religious (unphilosophical), and more specifically mystical (irrational).[96] Mystical religion is that which is antiquated. 'Western religion(s)' has a strange ring to it, because in our narrative it is an oxymoron. All religion is Eastern by definition, our three 'Abrahamic religions' together presenting merely a special (Middle Eastern) case. Likewise, all Afro-Asian thought, even so apparently philosophical, rational, and independent from any concern for divine or spiritual powers as a treatise on Nyaya logic, is religious by definition. And again, this means that it can only serve as material, never as a method, for philosophical interpretation. So long as we are bound by this narrative, no matter how profoundly we study religious thought, we cannot really take it seriously. For our rationality must distance itself from mystical thinking and judge it by the standards of its own abstracted modern European context. Thus all so-called religious voices are fixed as epistemic objects and never as respectable subjects for intellectual dialogue. Per Said, we see "many Eastern sects, philosophies, and wisdoms domesticated for local European use".[97] Any interest we have in Eastern religious thought is precisely on account of its mystical charm, a curiosity which must in time sadly be replaced by our strict rationalism.

Therefore, 'Eastern philosophy' ('non-Western philosophy') and 'religious philosophy' are also oxymorons. For we know 'philosophy is Greek', by which we mean the grain of Western secular reason. We may speak of some archaic and Afro-Asian philosophies, but really they are a kind of mystical pseudo-philosophy, not truly worthy of the name. When romanticising about Eastern philosophy, therefore, "one goes on using the expression 'philosophy', but after emptying it of all its forms and contents and replacing them with feeling, the irrational, the imaginative."[98] Any term for 'Eastern thought' in the singular obviously also expresses an immense generalisation, bundling a plethora of highly diverse texts as being essentially different from Western philosophy (whose diversity is thus equally suppressed). Such umbrella othering is expressed in Mahdi's quote of Orientalist H.A.R. Gibb: "Oriental philosophy [Gibb is … speaking about … Islamic philosophy, Indian philosophy, Chinese philosophy, and perhaps others as well] had

[96] Following King's *Orientalism and Religion*, this dissertation focuses on the mystical-rational distinction between Eastern religion and Western philosophy, leaving the repressive-humanistic distinction on the side. On the latter much can be found in Said, in the sense of 'despotic'.
[97] Said, *Orientalism*, 4.
[98] Mahdi, 'Orientalism', 90.

never appreciated the fundamental idea of justice in Greek philosophy".[99] And the severity of the binary is demonstrated in a remark he attributes to Schaeder, that "there were no Muslim philosophers. These were all infidels."[100] The marginalisation of Islamic philosophy is simply the utmost expression of the common destiny of all Eastern philosophy. Its potential claim on appropriating classical rationalism is ruled out a-priori by its being religious. For insofar as one is a philosopher one moves away from Eastern religious thought, and vice-versa, their unity being a contradiction. As we will now see, this constitutes Middle Eastern thought as something situated uncomfortably on the margin of the East-West/philosophy-religion binary.

2.2.2 The Marginalised Middle East

That which Western philosophy almost could have been, *quasi-Western* religious thought, also has a name: it is Middle Eastern, or Near Eastern. It persists in being essentially archaic and Afro-Asian despite being so near and intermediary to modern European thought. The Middle East is the westernmost East, more fundamentally Eastern than Western, but ultimately not quite either. It is our most intimate other, the midpoint between 'us' and every distant 'them'. At the Middle Eastern edge, all the binaries – of philosophy and religion, us and them – are separated.

The geo-historical core of the Middle Eastern is mediaeval Semitic thought, already seen above *marginalised* by definition from Western philosophy. This means that it serves as the simultaneous temporal and spatial frontier, border, *margin* that keeps the Eastern out. In the Enlightenment-colonialist narrative of the gradual Westernisation of all thought, this margin is never actually crossed. Rather, it is extended farther and deeper, until the Eastern mystical aspects of every mind are safely cornered into its periphery and Western rationalism rules its centre. This same process of internal division and suppression is applied to (especially premodern) textual sources and to (especially non-European) living thinkers. Even more than the East which is beyond the margin, Romantic Orientalism narrates the Middle Eastern margin itself. This marginalisation thus has a basic relational function for the entire narrative structure.

---

[99] Ibid., 89. The idea of justice is presumably the "one which Roman and Hellenistic heritages had taken over from the Greek *polis* … the striving for a community of a perceived truth and justice as the highest moral idea of ancient philosophy", so identified as the perennial basis of European greatness and tragedy in Jan Patočka's seminal *Heretical Essays*, 81. (Unlike Gibb, however, Patočka notes that "not even Islam is wholly devoid of kinship with [this] idea of the sacred community of true being". Ibid., 68.)

[100] Mahdi, 'Orientalism', 81.

The marginalisation of the Middle Eastern amounts to its *partial exclusion*. It cannot be absolutely excluded, as the Eastern proper is, but only relatively subjugated. That is, where Celtic myths or Chinese texts can be completely ignored in relation to our philosophy, the existence of the Bible, Seleucid syncretism, or indeed 'golden age' Islamic thinkers, is at least worthy of mention – although it need not inform us. It represents a quasi-relevant side-note to our narrative, in which the light of Greek reason becomes obscured by Semitic mystical thinking to varying degrees. We are aware that Western thought bears some relation to it, although we now neutralise it as simply philosophy finally letting go of religion. This fixes the Middle Eastern right next to the Western, never fully lost from sight.

This corresponds to the Middle East as primarily a geographical term, referring to the intermediary status of the Eastern Mediterranean lands in the Eurocentric geographical perspective towards the Asian (Far) East. But this perspective is also historical, insofar as the Indo-Chinese intellectual traditions of the Far East are seen as forever ancient (in the far past), whereas the Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Egyptian, Turkic, etc. of the Middle East seem to wedge themselves between classical Greece and modern Europe and can be meaningfully seen as mediaeval (in the near past). They are deeply archaic, insofar as they represent the 'cradle of civilisation' far preceding the emergence of Greek philosophy; but they also persist after being Hellenised, and that in a specially mystical way. The Middle East is thus the site from which first, Christian thought, and second, Islamic thought, arises to bring about the late ancient end of classical rationalism and then a properly mediaeval religious era. Thus, Middle Eastern thought is that which encircles Greek philosophy, both geographically (with Turkey as 'Asia Minor' being its most intimate site) and historically (preceding it as archaic *and* succeeding it as mediaeval). Its being mediaeval concedes that it is intermediary between classicism and modernism, while stripping this role of any major significance (it is merely intermediary, never a legitimate contribution in its own right). Classical Greece (and Rome) is seen intellectually extracting itself from the archaic Eastern Mediterranean and colonising it – then in turn being overtaken by its Abrahamic religion, essential to the formation of mediaeval thought.

Although not all Middle Eastern thought (such as the Persian or Turkic) is meaningfully 'Semitic', this term geographically expresses it for three reasons. One, like the mediaeval represents the persistence of the archaic, the Semitic represents the persistence of the Afro-Asian. Ethno-linguistically it is a special category of the 'Afroasiatic', extending to

Hebrew, Egyptian, and Arabic thought. Geographically, these converge around Sinai, the bridge between Africa and Asia. Second, insofar as the Semitic primarily signals the Hebrew/Judaic/Jewish, the target of anti-Semitism, it makes palpable the function of the Middle Eastern as the most intimate other of Western thought, the subject of colonialism *within* Europe itself. Third and above all, the Semitic is central to our narrative of religious thought. In its most archaic it connects to Egyptian and Babylonian traditions, the most foundational 'polytheisms' and 'esotericisms' for the philosophical imagination. The three Abrahamic religions are obviously named after the Semitic patriarch Abraham, emphasising their common roots in ancient Hebrew thought. Indeed if the mediaeval European tradition is designated Judeo-Christian, so can the 'mediaeval Afro-Asian' be designated Judeo-Islamic, emphasising their Semitic common thread. With the spread of Christianity and Islam, even the Turkic and Persian intellectual traditions become 'Semitised' in this sense – as does the Greek, Latin, or Germanic, in the form of Christendom. But the European traditions alone are seen finally resisting mystical Semitisation, by transforming themselves into Enlightenment secular philosophy and giving final victory to the opposed force of rational Hellenisation. The Semitic thus appears as the ethno-religious core of Middle Eastern thought, locked in an age-old struggle with the Greek ethno-philosophical core of Western thought.

This intimate marginalisation of the mediaeval Semitic maintains the coherence of our entire narrative structure. It coalesces into a single image, the narrative gate in the Middle Eastern margin between Western philosophy and Eastern religious thought. This image is the primary object of Romantic Orientalist obsession. It represents all those mystical qualities that Western philosophy itself was once overcome by, before in turn overcoming them. By condensing them all into one image, our narrative makes sure that they remain fixed in their place, separate from our strict rationalism. Hence it is the counter-image of Athens, serving to preserve this classical Greek ideal in place as our blueprint. As already indicated, this image is first of all Jerusalem, marking the millennial mediaeval Semitic rule in the form of (Judeo-)Christian thought. But with the image of Jerusalem ever more neutralised as a relic,[101] Mecca appears, strange yet familiar, directly following from Jerusalem and yet more virile. As the 'children of Ishmael', Arabic Muslim thinkers have an equal claim on Judaic origin as Latin Christians, intensified by their

[101] For Eastern Christian thought this neutralisation is somewhat less finalised (as clear from the current ideology of war between a humanistic secular West and a repressive Orthodox Russia), but still more than for Islamic thinking.

appropriation of Greek origin also. Hence the image of Islamic thought now provides the perfect counterpoint, the resistance needed to maintain our East-West dynamic fixed.

Thus, Islamic thinking becomes our most intense other – the thorn in our side. To paraphrase the Quran itself, it is nearer to the West than its jugular vein.[102] It succeeds the Judaic as our most intimate, internal counter-image. But it also remains openly opposed, external. Indeed the closer it is to us, the more foreign.[103] Unlike the Judeo-Christian, whose Western/Middle Eastern status is ambiguous, its Eastern/Middle Eastern status is ambiguous.[104] Islamic thought looms over our intellectual centre, stands on the margin, but also stretches far beyond to the periphery.[105] For as we have seen, it is both dangerously mediaeval and fully archaic; both dangerously Semitic and fully Afro-Asian. This double location intensifies itself. It makes Islam becomes the scapegoat for everything feared and suppressed in 'our own' thought; and our narrative's presenting these as the essence of Islamic thought only shows them to be continually decisive for modern European thought. Everything our rationality is not supposed to be becomes magnified in it, as its own caricature. This also lies behind any narrative of a 'clash of civilisation',[106] here functioning as a 'clash of intellectual traditions'. Western philosophy needs an enemy against whom to project its own rational purity, so that this narrative war can never admit a complete peace. Islam is simply the current version of such an intellectual enemy; if it effectively submitted, as Western Christianity did, our attention would shift to another. It is cast as the most intimately hostile intellectual tradition, the perfect reversed mirror image of the Western.

Further, the strict separation of Western and Eastern essences within Islamic thought (as most intense Middle East) enacts the same separation within 'our own' post-Christian thought. Modern European thought is Westernised through Easternising every other tradition and dumping its own supposedly irrational aspects onto this foreign past. But with Islam this also takes the additional form of de-Westernising, mediaevalising. That is, the Islamic tradtiion must be divested of its claim to the classical Greek legacy, to dump modern Europe's mediaeval Semitic specifically onto it. This 'resolves' our simultaneous Greco-Semitic legacy, by rendering one part of it essentially philosophical and Enlightening and the other essentially religious and

---

[102] Qaf 16, in M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[103] This follows from Derrida's "conception of the other as the closest of all possible neighbors". Mustafa Chérif, *Islam and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), XVII.
[104] So also Said's *Orientalism* focuses so much on the Middle East, despite being just as applicable to the Far East.
[105] With today's globalisation, it unfolds within Europe, next to Europe, *and* far from Europe.
[106] Popularised by: Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations', *Foreign Affairs* 72:3 (Summer 1993); Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

dark. This excising of the Semitic from the Western also rules out the dangerous possibility that Islamic thought could use Greek rationalism to develop its own, non-European, Islamocentric intellectual modernism – a competing West, as it were. Hence Islamic thought is de-Westernised. Its philosophical and religious aspects are separated through what Mahdi calls "the old argument: if Islamic philosophy is rational or philosophic in the Greek sense, then it is Greek and not Islamic; if it is irrational, non-philosophic in the Greek sense, then it is the product of Islam or Islamic civilization."[107] 'Islamic philosophy' is fixed as a temporary intersection between East and West, as yet discussed in section 2.3

As with everything (Middle) Eastern, this hyper-marginalisation renders Islamic philosophy an interesting object for Romantic Orientalist interpretation, but blocks it from ever itself truly informing our interpretation. Hence Bdaiwi speaks of a profound "paradigm" that long dominated modern European study of Islamic philosophy: a "philosophical orientalism", which had "to insist that Islamic epistemological sources are incapable of producing rationalistic theses and logical argumentation; second, that original ideas found in Muslim writings are in fact Greek innovations in Arabic garb; third, to recognise that philosophy is not constitutive of the Qur'an and Muslim canonical literature; and fourth, that rationalistic tendencies in Muslim writings should be considered unnatural and at odds with official [Muslim] curriculums".[108] Even with the best intentions and the most rigorous labour, those embedded in the narrative of the Middle Eastern margin could not but fix Islamic thought in its contradictory place.

2.2.3 The Worship of the (Middle) Eastern

Romantic Orientalism also renders the strange Middle Eastern juxtaposition of Western philosophy and religion mysticism ambiguous in another way: its value. Primarily, the East is inferior, to be ignored, subjugated, or educated by the West. But the binary can also operate with its value order reversed, the East itself rendered superior. The entire narrative structure can be flipped, recasting modern European philosophy not as the completion of universal reason but as a *corruption*: as abandoning a universal archaic truth that *could have been* shared by Greek and Christian thought with Afro-Asian traditions. This reversal fuels common narratives of an Enlightened 'Eastern spirituality', as represented by Sufism, Vedanta, Buddhism, Daoism, etc.

[107] Mahdi, 'Orientalism', 91.
[108] Bdaiwi, Ahab. 'From Philosophical Orientalism to Philosophy as a Way of Life: Paradigmatic Shifts in the Study of Islamic Philosophy in the West' (Columbia University, 2013), sec.II.

But it also lies behind much ‘anti-Western’ sentiment. We tap into it whenever we narrate Europe, modernity, or rationalism as alienating, as well as Afro-Asia, tradition, or mysticism as desirable. Indeed from the shadow of Enlightenment-colonialism Western philosophy appears as decadent and Eastern religious thought as the perennial wisdom – and perhaps Middle Eastern thought the living remnant of that wisdom, which may yet save us from ourselves.

Here Romanticism, in the guise of counter-Enlightenment, can render Orientalism a kind of counter-colonialism: the re-Easternisation of the West. The established narrative of philosophy abstracting itself from all traditions is recast as a horror story. The Enlightenment-colonialist fear that religion may resist secularisation and re-emerge becomes a desire for this return, and a second fear: that secularisation may actually succeed and kill all religion for good. For its strict rational separation is felt as threatening to cut off the plant of human thought from its mystical roots. This fear is perfectly expressed in a quote by Nasr: “Philosophy [without spiritual exercises] becomes sheer mental acrobatics and reason cut off from both intellect and revelation, nothing but a luciferian instrument leading to dispersion and ultimately dissolution.”[109] Thus Romantic Orientalism turns to Afro-Asian traditions, apparently not yet as fully Westernised as the European, for resisting this dissolution where the Judeo-Christian tradition has apparently already failed. Where philosophical, scientific, and political development is fully Western, an Eastern refuge is sought in what is marginalised from these domains: religious, artistic, and personal development. This is the most intense form of Romantic Orientalism, actively concerned with ‘bringing back’ the Eastern (from the exotic past).

One could expect such counter-modernism and counter-Eurocentrism to break the narrative structure, but ironically it doubles down on the exact same asymmetry. Does it not marginalise modern European philosophy? Yes, but only from our narrative of Middle Eastern religious thought. It excludes it from Eastern religion. This precisely confirms that modern European rationalism indeed is the centre of a hegemonic Western philosophy. By accepting the East-West philosophy-religion rules of the game, Romantic Orientalism already delivers the victory to Enlightenment-colonialism, no matter how hard it appears to play against it.[110] Masked as a counter-narrative, it remains a residual proxy-narrative. The supposedly positive Easternisation project remains an impotent, counterproductive nostalgia. For the narrative that we ‘want’ the

[109] Cited in Bdaiwi, ‘Philosophical Orientalism’, sec.III. Insertion Bdaiwi’s.
[110] Cf. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 48: “The antimoderns, like the postmoderns, have accepted their adversaries' playing field.”

Eastern affirms that we lack it, that we are not it, that it is foreign and lost. Our desire to defend or restore a religious tradition from its philosophical destruction only reinforces the binary on which that destruction is predicated. Assigning Archaic Afro-Asian religion the positive value of 'noble savagery' only serves to cement its nature as the other to our own civilised thought.

This counter-intuitive principle should already be clear: our narratives of Western philosophy and of Eastern religion are two sides of the very same coin. Both appear as positive accounts of geo-historical trajectories, but are in fact grounded in their mutual contrast. The more sharply opposed they become, the stronger. The most extreme pro-Eastern or anti-Western feelings merely deepen the binaries.[111] They rehearse the archiving of premodern non-European thought into irrelevance, with ever greater fervour. And this on the basis of a profound and undisturbed Eurocentrism, where all thinking starts in a modern European condition and from it must go somewhere else. In this lonely position at the cusp of the universe, we fear everything we desire, and vice-versa. To some extent, we thus always *simultaneously* despise and admire Eastern thought, narrating it as an object of both worship and control. We remain self-centred, interested in 'strange' thought only insofar as it can answer our own pre-established problems. Thus the romanticised image of a mystical East is ever cut to fit the rational West.

Indeed the narrative drives to Easternise and to Westernise complete each other. We first Easternise every tradition, Westernising our modern European horizon by contrast. Then we are struck by the horror of the world being Eastern, and set out to Westernise it. But meanwhile, we are struck by the horror of everything being Westernised, and set out to re-Easternise it. Any resistance between the two drives is only apparent. It is a faux dialogue *within* the Western centre (a sign of an intra-Western anxiety), never *with* the Eastern periphery, which can by definition never speak. As Said observes, "the Oriental, *en soi*, was incapable of appreciating or understanding himself. Partly because of what Europe had done to him, he had lost his religion and his philosophic … it became [Europe's] obligation, then, to associate itself with the Muslims' desire to defend their traditional culture" – to supposedly give Islam back what we ourselves have taken from its. In this complete form, our narrative ever more mystifies the vast majority of human thought: first to break the Western away from it, second to break all of it into a universal all-Western future, third to save it from that future.

---

[111] This is why most traditionalism, archaism, religionism, etc. is at bottom a reactive anti-modernism, pre-modernism, anti-secularism – a bitter Romantic Orientalism which, by despising it, intensifies the separation of modern thought from archaic wisdom. This reveals it as nothing but a hyper-modernism.

This faux reversal of Enlightenment-colonialism has clear implications for the Middle Eastern specifically. First, whether Eastern religion is despised and Western philosophy admired or vice-versa, the Middle Eastern remains split between them. If the two terms have no independent reality of one another, the middle term has even less. Second, as that East marginal to the West, the Middle East appears as our first escape route whenever we are gripped by a fear of Westernisation. It is the mysticism most intimate with our rationalism, the religion best accessible to our philosophy. Thus it is the nearest possibility of an 'Eastern philosophy'. But retreating to a 'Middle Eastern philosophy' does not bring about a holistic view of philosophy as both-rational-and-mystical, or beyond the distinction entirely. Its status as a religious negation of a hegemonic Western philosophy is cemented.

With Islam as the most intense image of the Middle Eastern, it may appear as the one intellectual force that could preserve and restore religion to secular thought. This temptation follows directly from our established narrative: to simply replace the triumphalism of the West with a triumphalism of Islam.[112] As if saying: 'Jewish and Christian thought have spawned a corrupt colonial modernity, but rejoice! Islamic thought has already superseded them. It keeps the beautiful Eastern metaphysical essence of all our ancient sources alive, and so holds the power to save the contemporary mind from its Western decadence.' Iranian Shia thought may make an especially attractive candidate for such anti-Western redemption, because of its claim to an age-old Eastern intellectual tradition never quite broken by colonialism. The idea of an Oriental illumination – an eternal dawn outshining the false light of Western Enlightenment, as nothing but the dark dusk of all spiritual insight – provides the perfect resort for the Romantic Orientalist flight from secularism. But this should already alert us that this kind of redemptive Islamism is a direct projection, no matter how niche and contradictory, of the same narrative which marginalised it in the first place. Not even a mystic East so close and powerful as Islamic thought will ever save us from the rational West, so long as the two are narrated as opposed.

2.3 The Babysitter Narrative of Golden Age Islamic Philosophy

Middle Eastern thought as the paradoxical margin between Western philosophy and Eastern religion is embodied in the specific narrative of a 'golden age' of 'classical Islamic philosophy'. As the story goes, philosophy, science, and general culture *once* flourished in the Islamic world.

[112] I again owe this formulation to Arnold Mol.

The golden age dates from the Greco-Arabic translation movement peaking in 9th-century Baghdad, to the Mongol conquest of the Middle East in the 13th–14th centuries. This roughly coincides with a Christian dark age in which philosophy is 'lost' in Europe. Hence this is 'chapter' of our narrative of Western philosophy that frames mediaeval Semitic thought. Its dark age/golden age binary is extremely relevant to our entire narrative structure. This section inquires into how exactly it fixes Islamic philosophy in its marginal position as a Middle Eastern side-note to the history of Western philosophy.

If any Muslims whatsoever are mentioned in our philosophical history, it is the heroes of the golden age, from al-Kindi (d.873), through Avicenna (the latinised name of Ibn Sina), to Averroes (Ibn Rushd). Their Aristotelianism was picked up in Catholic Europe beginning with the Arabo-Latin translation movement in the 12th century. That already hints at the meaning of their golden-age status. Far from celebrating the greatness of Islamic thought, this status highlights these thinkers *for* modern European philosophy. Like the latest great historian of Western philosophy Anthony Kenny, we are only concerned with golden age "Muslim and Jewish philosophy … to the extent that these philosophies entered into [what we now presume to be] the mainstream of Western thinking, not in proportion to their own intrinsic philosophical value".[113] The golden age narrative is not motivated by the intrinsic realities of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Rather, it delimits the tradition's supporting role in the pre-established trajectory of humanistic rationalism from classical Greece to modern Europe. Far from giving Islamic philosophy a voice, it neutralises it, keeping it in a quasi-relevant place that can safely be skipped in the main plot-line. This converges on the image of a hollow mediaeval Arabic vessel for classical Greek philosophy. In the context of our established double-narrative of Western philosophy and of (Middle) Eastern religious thought, this could be our *established narrative of Islamic philosophy*. But it is only a marginal chapter in the Enlightenment-colonialist narrative, not a narrative about Islamic thought in its own right.[114]

That this chapter in fact marginalises Islamic philosophy is clear from what it implies; that basically anything written by Muslims after Averroes is *not* golden. The 'postclassical', later

[113] *Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[114] Obviously, its roots lie in earlier Latin Christian thought. And through it, it may bear the actual influence of Islamic voices. Avicenna's revitalisation of the Greek heritage, for instance, has represented something of an actual 'classical' moment for many later Islamic thinkers (albeit more as a starting point for ongoing inquiry than as lost gold). Indeed our present narrative structures may be in many ways indebted to Islamic sources, in relation to its Judeo-Christian sources. It did not historically emerge out of nowhere. Nevertheless, in its present form it marginalises these very sources.

Islamic philosophy, is fully excluded. To give a key example, Averroes' exact contemporary Suhrawardi (d.1191), much more influential than Averroes in the Islamic world (where he was known as the founder of Illuminationist thought), but not influential in Catholic Europe, is utterly obscure to us. He has no Latin name. While technically still living in the golden age, Suhrawardi already begins a dark age of Islamic thought that is of no interest to us. For the return of philosophy to Europe is its *end* (purpose and death). Islamic thought evidently has no validity of its own; philosophy was only temporarily outsourced to it. Its golden age exists by proxy, and is mentioned only in order to be explained away. Islamic thought serves as a 'babysitter' safekeeping Western rationalism while its Greco-European mother was in a midlife crisis of religious dogma; once the child safely back in Europe, what is left for the babysitter?

In this section, the entire babysitter narrative unfolds as follows. It is a kind of perfect dance between the separate intellectual worlds of the Greco-European and the Arabo-Persian. Classical Greek philosophy emerges and thrives while Arabic thought is shrouded in archaic obscurity. When the classical tradition falls into a mediaeval Christian dark age, the Islamic world arises as a safe haven in which classical Greek philosophy can survive. When the Christian world reclaims its classical legacy and rises into Enlightenment, Islamic thought falls back into obscurity. And when modern European philosophy arrives in the Islamic world to share the renewed universal light (as rationalism and democracy), Islamic thought arrives in modern Europe to threaten it internally (as mysticism and fanaticism). Hence it appears as the perfect Middle Eastern counterpoint of Western philosophy, its hostile companion. This intimate binary persists even through the Romantic Orientalist reversal of its value in the final step, giving a concrete illustration of its unity with Enlightenment-colonialism. This clarifies the specific way in which Islamic thought is marginalised from our established narrative of Western philosophy, and centralised for our narrative of Middle Eastern religious thought.

2.3.1 The Islamic Golden Age as Babysitter *of* a Classical Greek Golden Age

When we say that philosophy flourished in the Islamic golden age, we mean Greek philosophy;[115] *filosofia* flourished in the Arabic guise of *falsafa*. We speak of classical Islamic philosophy, but really it is a quasi-classical quasi-Greek philosophy. The golden age begins with translations of Greek sources, reaches its highpoint with Avicenna's and Averroes'

[115] And recall that per section 2.1.2, Greek here means proto-European.

interpretations of Aristotle, and ends with the sources and interpretations handed 'back' over to the Latin West. The 'non-Greek' currents of the period amount to an obscurantist foil for *falsafa*. Such is the role, if any, of the *kalam* (commonly rendered 'Islamic theology')[116] represented by al-Ghazali (d.1111) and the *tasawwuf* ('Islamic mysticism') of Ibn Arabi. This is why in 20th-century Orientalist scholarship, "the main question was that of the relation of Islamic philosophy to Greek and Hellenistic philosophy".[117] One answer was provided by Becker's claim that Islamic philosophy can better be called late antiquity,[118] an imitative Arabic continuation of Hellenism. This quasi-Greekness is already visualised in the beautifully anachronistic inclusion of Averroes in Raphael's iconic fresco of the *School of Athens*. He stands out behind Pythagoras (d.495 BC) with stylised 'Saracene' dress and countenance, simultaneously grouped with the great ancient polymaths and marked as different. The Islamic golden age is a second-order expression of the Greek tradition, not the first-order expression of anything specifically Islamic. It is only an echo of the original classical Greek golden age, heard bouncing back to Europe.

Golden age Islamic philosophy means the preservation of golden age Greek philosophy – and nothing else. Hence "Becker argued that although "Islam" inherited [it], it could neither grasp nor employ the Greek, humanistic tradition".[119] Centuries of intense intellectual debates in the golden age left Aristotelianism etc. essentially unchanged – to be delivered to 12th-century Toledo with the same character with which it arrived in 9th-century Baghdad. (Islam itself was also unchanged, to naturally revert to its barbaric religiosity.) Philosophy gained nothing from its Muslim foster parents except basic sustenance. It certainly was not impacted by the Quran. Any intellectual evolution whatsoever in the golden age was intrinsic to the Greek rationalist DNA of philosophy, without the slightest admixture of Muslim blood. We must be very grateful to Avicenna, Averroes, et.al. for their monumental dedication to Greek insight, the treasured child they carried safely through the barbaric mediaeval Orient. But their success precisely means that what they handed over was still Aristotelianism, not Avicennism or Averroism. (Perhaps our understanding of Aristotle was initially indebted to their interpretation, but the two have long since been disentangled, cleaning our pure Greek source of any Arabic residue.) To us they are not active thinkers, but passive safekeepers. Any original contributions they made, let alone their

[116] Although the term translates well to the Greek *logos*, 'word'.
[117] Mahdi, 'Orientalism', 80.
[118] Ibid., 80.
[119] Said, *Orientalism*, 103–4.

own context and consequence, need not concern us; all Muslim philosophical contributions are trivial by definition,[120] incapable of significant creative impact. The babysitter remained strictly separate from and unable to actually relate to the child it adopted.

This strange alienation of *falsafa* from itself is accounted for and indeed necessitated by the aforedescribed binary of Western and Eastern natures. The golden age is their temporary intersection, a paradoxical 'event' in which dogmatic Afro-Asian religion serves as the passive incubator for progressive Greco-European philosophy to hibernate. We can then forever ponder over how exactly the two essences coexisted without mixing. Were Muslim Peripatetics genuinely rationalist 'infidels' whose philosophical work only pretended to pay homage to Semitic religion?[121] Or were they dogmatic religious minds who only blindly *copied* a Greek rationalism they themselves could not understand? As fundamentally late ancient, perhaps these "Orientals [only] grasped the deformed, superstitious Neoplatonism of late antiquity. [Theirs was] an endemic aversion to rationalism, tending rather to classify, write handbooks and introductions to Aristotle."[122] This neutralises the Islamic appropriation of classical Greek philosophy, reducing it precisely to an instrument modern Europe's absolute claim of that legacy.

A genuine relation is impossible not only because Islam is religious, but also because the Arab/ic is ethno-linguistically Semitic. Indeed, golden age Islamic philosophy used to be more commonly called Arab philosophy or Arabic philosophy.[123] A peculiar racialised 'Arab mind' or 'Arab character'[124] could explain why Muslim thinkers never produced original philosophy genuinely meaningful to us. For their thought was utterly distinct from the Greco-European not just in its religious contents, but in its very ethnic structure. Emphasis on the Arabic language, by contrast, with language taken to be a neutral system of empty signs, could explain the function of Islamic thought as an empty vessel. That is, Greek thought could be smoothly 'translated' to the Islamic world, maintained in Arabic, and then translated 'back' to the Latin world without any significant changes. (This idea also helps ignore later Islamic philosophy in Persian, Turkish,

---

[120] As all premodern non-European religious contributions are.

[121] Per Tolan, 'Forging New Paradigms', 65, already "thirteenth- and fourteenth-century European authors well-versed in Arabic philosophy (Ramon Martí, Roger Bacon, Ramon Llull, Riccoldo da Montecroce) affirmed that Arab philosophers were not in fact Muslims, that they rejected Muhammad's teaching in secret but professed it in public for fear of persecution. [Thus] …their religious difference, which potentially called into question the universality of Christian truth, was defused."

[122] Joel Kraemer, *Humanism in the Rennaisance of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), XXI.

[123] 'Arabic philosophy' still has its proponents, given that any designation for a rich philosophical tradition spanning multiple major languages and religions is inaccurate. 'Islamic' is obviously not without its own problems.

[124] Discussed at length by Said and Mahdi.

Urdu, and other languages that became intellectual competitors to Arabic.) Finally, Arabic language and Arab ethnicity tend to be equated (the equivalent of calling all Latin-language thought 'Italian'),[125] allowing us to sweep over such diverse facts as Avicenna being born in present-day Uzbekistan and Averroes in Spain. As Melvin-Koushki notes, "classicocentrism" (the exclusion of all sources that do not fall in the golden age era) and "arabocentrism" are twins, which "like eurocentrism, their parent, still plague the study of Islamicate civilization."[126]

2.3.2 The Islamic Golden Age as Babysitter *for* a Mediaeval Christian Dark Age

Greek philosophy had to survive in an alien Arab environment because it 'died' in its own 'native' European environment. This Eurocentric narrative ironically sacrifices a millennium of Latin intellectual history, presenting all Catholic voices at least between Augustine (still benefiting from classical learning in the 5th century) and Aquinas (re-appropriating Aristotelianism from the Arabs in the 13th century) as utterly drowned in Christian dogmatism. Such figures as Eriugena (d.877) or Anselm of Canterbury (d.1109) are just as marginal as their Muslim contemporaries, because blocked by religio-historical circumstance from their true classical sources. This is why "according to Renan, Greek philosophy and science in the hands of Muslims is an historical accident that has more to do with European failure to preserve and guard its own Hellenistic heritage than Muslim motivations to pursue knowledge". This supposed dark age of philosophy created a vacuum which the nearest East (contrary to its own equally religious nature) was drawn to fill, accidentally sparking in it a momentary golden age. Banished from its homeland into uncouth Muslim hands, philosophy went into exile. We would never speak of a golden age, were it not for this dark age.

The crux of this problem is that again, 'Christian philosophy' itself is a paradox on our narrative's premises. Catholicism is not a logical step in Western intellectual development, but a temporary mediaeval Semitic retardation in-between classical Greek and modern European thought. Thus, if the Islamic golden age is in fact 'a golden age of Greek-European philosophy in the Islamic world', its corresponding Christian dark age is 'a dark age of Semitic religion in Europe'. Recall that the idea of the Middle Ages was invented in Europe to assert its modern present horizon against its premodern tradition, and is always applied to other geographies by

[125] I owe this astute comparison to my colleague Zane Leach.
[126] Melvin-Koushki, 'Tahqiq vs. Taqlid', 229.

proxy or analogy.[127] The mediaeval chapter of our narrative is not an internal Islamic victory, but precisely an internal European problem.

This can be made yet clearer by foregrounding the hidden third party in this mediaeval intellectual dance between the Islamic and Catholic worlds: the Orthodox world, Byzantium. Since it categorically belongs to mediaeval Christian thought, it should share in the dark age of the Latin West. But this Greek East never ceased to study the classical corpus, and indeed shared it with the other two parties (in the Greco-Arabic translation movement and the Renaissance transfer respectively). It saw itself as a direct continuation of the classical, a Greek-speaking Roman tradition thriving in the Hellenic heartland. Yet its own centuries of philosophical contributions in the period under question are utterly excluded from our established narrative.[128] It seems to occupy a blindspot: too Eastern to be accepted as European, but not Eastern enough to fascinate us as Afro-Asian. Our stark ignorance of all Orthodox philosophy, just as of later Islamic philosophy,[129] marks our rationalist usurpation of the Greek legacy from every supposedly mystical tradition that in fact directly based itself on Greek philosophical sources.

2.3.3 The Babysitter's End in a Modern European Golden Age and an Islamic Dark Age

How tragic that the Islamic world, which once gave the world great intellectual discoveries, now gives us only obscurantism and bigotry! Truly puzzling: until one realises that this primarily signals the triumph of modern European thought. The view arises retrospectively, from European modernity as that which classical Muslim thinkers helped bring about and therefore had to give way to. As historian Richard Bulliet makes clear, it is a tragedy written by 'us' for 'them': "It is a commonplace of modern Euro-American historical thinking that Europe surged ahead during these [last] centuries and left the Muslim world in the dust. Words like "decline," "stagnation," and "backwardness" are hurtful to Muslim ears".[130] As the Christian dark age in which we lost

---

[127] Fontainelle, 'Introducing Rome', divulges the fact that from the perspective of much of the Islamic and the Orthodox world, the ancient/classical era never ended. Cf. Kraemer, *Humanism*, XV: "'The Middle Ages' and 'The Mediaeval Period' make no sense for Islamic civilization; the periodization is totally European. Nor does 'Classical Islam' fit Islamic chronology."

[128] Maria Mavroudi. 'Translations from Greek into Latin and Arabic during the Middle Ages', *Speculum* 90/1 (January 2015): 29: "it is telling that some of the most recent publications on the later reception of the classical tradition largely ignore the Greek-speaking world."

[129] 'Esoteric' currents of Jewish and Catholic philosophy could also be added here.

[130] Bulliet, *Islamo-Christian Civilization*, 40.

philosophy necessitated an Islamic golden age, its return to us sparked a new post-Christian golden age which necessitates an ongoing Islamic dark age. The Sun of philosophy evidently moves westward to shine its golden rays over Europe forever more, leaving the Middle East in the dusk. The decline of Islamic thought signals the rise of modern European thought.

Since classical Greek rationality did not belong to the essence of Islamic thought, it returned by natural attraction back to its proper European homeland. The Middle Eastern golden age was a great moment in the history of human reason, but only as *instrumental* for the far superior Western golden age that it enabled to arise.[131] The "great philosophers among the Muslim people … should be thought of as mediums responsible for transmitting Hellenistic philosophy back to Europe."[132] The 12th-century Arabo-Latin translations which revived Latin Aristotelianism necessarily simultaneously killed Islamic philosophy. Its usefulness was exhausted. Thus, what Melvin-Koushki describes as "the narrative of Islamic decline vs. European fluorescence in the early modern period … was weaponized under colonialism and continues to structure both popular and scholarly discourse in the Euro-American present".[133] For by making Islam ultimately mediaeval, it fully annexes classical Greek philosophy for the purposes of European modernity. 'We' got it back from 'them', leaving the Muslims this message: even the legacy of your very own golden age belongs to us. Only Westernised minds can recognise and benefit from what was genuinely great in Islamic philosophy, because it was Greek in nature and so belonged to Europe all along. Muslims are utterly incapable of continuing their own rational tradition.[134]

Ingeniously, this concedes the impact of classical Islamic philosophy on later (post-)Christian philosophy in a way that marginalises all of it. For what made the impact was nothing properly Islamic, but our own Greek essence preserved within. Thus, the recognition that "Latin versions of the philosophical writings of Avicenna and Averroes had no less influence on the great scholastics than the works of their Christian predecessors"[135] is rendered insignificant. For the premise that these Muslim writings added nothing to the classical legacy that need concern us

[131] For an Enlightenment narrative, indeed every historical era is purely instrumental for the perfection of human reason that is to come – finally even the modern.
[132] Gibb cited in Bdaiwi, 'Philosophical Orientalism', sec.II.
[133] Melvin-Koushki, 'Tahqiq vs. Taqlid', 195.
[134] One could see this 'philosophical gaslighting' as a kind of revenge. After all, Avicenna and Averroes did not cite the Latin Church Fathers, but were themselves cited by later Catholic authors. As a competitor for the Greek legacy, Arabic thought never needed any impulse from Latin thought, while Latin did need an Arabic impulse. Is it surprising that modern Europe would compensate for this mediaeval inferiority complex by claiming that the Islamic continuation of Greek philosophy has no intrinsic value and belongs entirely to us?
[135] Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy*, XIV.

today – and indeed neither did the scholastic Christian writings. If our rationalism was being preserved rather than transformed in the Islamic golden age, the same goes for the golden age of high scholasticism, and perhaps even that of the Renaissance. Insofar as their thought remains religious, they are all but foreplay to the ongoing golden age of the Enlightenment. The great Aquinas or Marsilio Ficino (d.1499) are only a little closer to us than any great Muslim thinker. Indeed with their Latinised names, Avicenna and Averroes appear as honorary brown scholastics, more distant from us on account of their Arab minds, but playing essentially the same supporting role of benevolent preservers of Aristotelianism in a backward religious era. And it an accident that this anti-mediaevalist "leapfrog [of] the medieval millennium" marginalises precisely those embarrassing centuries when Christian thought unfolds through intercultural dialogue with Islamic thought?[136] The only merit of mediaeval Muslim *and* Christian thinkers lies in helping undermine their own Semitic religious foundation, so as to set up the arrival of a genuinely European philosophical modernity.

Among all these marginal mediaeval forerunners of modern European thought, Averroes is especially interesting. He plays a central role in philosophy 'departing' from the Islamic world towards Europe. "Given Averroes' forte in understanding Aristotelianism, it unsurprising that he was appropriated as the 'father of rationalism' in Europe, with some marking his death in the late twelfth century as the end of philosophical enquiry in Islam."[137] Impacting Latin philosophy "first in the thirteenth century and then in the sixteenth century",[138] he was seminal to both scholasticism and the Renaissance. Recently it even became in some circles "a widely held claim that Averroes advocated and believed in enlightenment before the Enlightenment" due to his defence of reason in relation to religion.[139] As the archetypal master of the Islamic golden age, Averroes is paradox embodied. He denies and transcends his own ethno-religious tradition, to defend classical Greek philosophy and prepare for modern European secularism.

After Averroes safely sees rationalism off towards its great European future, Islamic philosophy dies with him. Later Islamic thought is so irrelevant as to require no account in our narrative of Western philosophy, but the morbidly curious can satisfy themselves with the following. Averroes' last stand for *falsafa* is drowned by a dark wave of *kalam* and *tasawwuf*. His refutation

[136] Tolan, 'Forging New Paradigms', 62.
[137] Bdaiwi, 'Philosophical Orientalism', sec.I. Averroes appears as an enduring point of focus in 19th–20th century Orientalist work, carefully studied by German, US, and Spanish scholars alike.
[138] Wolfson, 'The Twice-Revealed Averroes', *Speculum* 36/3 (July 1961), 373.
[139] Saud Al Tamamy, *Averroes, Kant, and the Origins of the Enlightenment* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2014), 2–3.

of the theologian al-Ghazali's *Incoherence of the Philosophers* with his own *Incoherence of the Incoherence* falls on deaf ears. And at his very funeral, the Sufi master Ibn Arabi revels in the victory of mysticism over rational philosophy.[140] Soon after further East, Hulagu's barbaric Mongol hordes sack Baghdad and burn its libraries, razing any remaining ground for intellectual culture. Ever after, the Islamic tradition remains stuck in the darkest Middle Ages, a backdrop for the rise of our own bright modernity. Decisively, it cannot move towards something approximating its own modernity. The Muslim mind's only hope of illumination to receive modern European thought – a gift delivered by intellectual colonialism as abundant repayment for our minor debt to classical Islamic philosophy. Can the Islamic world now accept our improved universal philosophy, to step into a greater global golden age promised by Europe?

No: as a fundamentally religious tradition, Islamic thought can never seem to learn to be Western. Insofar as it remains Islamic, its relation to modern European thought will remain a 'clash of traditions'. Any Arab Spring promising a new Islamic golden age (in which the Arab mind would once again become a generous vessel for Western thought) is doomed to crash back into an Arab Winter. Locked in a war with rationalism, it will instead terrorise it from within, threatening to corrupt the humanistic achievements of Europe by its nefarious presence. And in its Romantic Orientalist margin, the modern European mind may even welcome this invasion, fascinated by the perfect Middle Eastern image of the lost depth of its own religious past. Indeed a modern European thinker such as Corbin (or his Iranian friend Nasr) may 'reverse' this very babysitter narrative, casting each of its golden ages a dark age and vice-versa. Perhaps what remained after the departure of Averroes' narrow Aristotelian rationalism is a *superior* mystical tradition, most at home in distant anti-Western Persia where it revives archaic Zoroastrian light. The Islamic preservation of the classical Greek legacy may even be deemed superior to the modern European transformation thereof, which is recast as a corruption. The Orientals we colonised may yet redeem us from our own faux Enlightenment, if 'we' now turn to 'them' to welcome their still-living religion as the true philosophy. Perhaps Islamic thought should *not* learn how to be Western, but teach us how to be Middle Eastern.

This Romantic Orientalist reversal, which effectively says that we ourselves again need to be babysitted by Islam, perpetuates the binary of Islamic thought (Middle Eastern) and modern

[140] See: Salman Bashier, *Ibn al-Arabi's Barzakh* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), ch.4; Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 38–46.

European thought (Western). Nevertheless, this can lead to the interesting conclusion that ancient Greek philosophy is more akin to the former than to the latter – resisting the Westernisation of Greece. Instead, a Greco-Arabo-Persian religio-philosophical tradition appears as intellectually preserving the mystical eternity of archaic Afro-Asian wisdom. This is still cast as essentially opposed to the Western humanistic rationalism of our modern European horizon. In this opposition the narrative structure survives. But it reveals its own internal instability, through displacing the classical Greek foundation stone, the single historical source valued by Enlightenment-colonialism. This shift may serve a starting point for unfolding this structure, rather than simply reversing it. While the Islamic golden age narrative fixes the relation between Semitic and Greek philosophy as one of opposition, its necessary concession of that relation leaves the door open, even if by a mere crack, for a fundamental revision of the binary. If the role of classical Greece and mediaeval Islam is indeed geo-historically fundamental to Western philosophy, then freeing them from their reduction to a blueprint and babysitter (respectively) of modern Europe can make a decisive difference. A full narrative rupture would need to push to the core of the binary: our ideas of the West and the (Middle) East.

3 Conclusion

3.1 Findings: Islamic Philosophy as the Answer to Western Philosophy

Why, then, is it difficult to fully embrace our Islamic philosophical sources? Why is Avicenna less familiar than Epicurus (d.270 BC) or Locke (d.1704)? Because of a fundamental opposition between Western philosophy and Eastern religious thought. Around this binary revolves an entire narrative structure in which European rationality is the essence of the Western, while everything Islamic is Easternised. This is the ground of the *Eurocentric view* of 'our own' thought which this dissertation began with. In fact, when its marginalisation is closely examined, the image of Islam as the ultimate Middle Eastern intellectual threat is found maintaining the coherence of the entire structure. Since Muslims must be othered, their actual relation to Greco-European rationalism is delimited to a temporary one-way service in the Islamic golden age. At best, Islamic thought is to us a curious intersection of the incommensurable essences of West and East.

Interrogating this Islamic margin of the East-West philosophy-religion binary yields many striking findings. Western philosophy itself appears as a universal abstraction of human reason from its particular modern European context. The only relevant ancient Western sources are reduced to classical Greek philosophy, itself nothing but a blueprint. The 'rest' of our intellectual world is effectively rendered Eastern and religious. This treatment is simultaneous for everything historically premodern *and* geographically non-European. Perhaps, the stigma on archaic and mediaeval thought has perhaps more to do with its backward religiosity, the stigma on Afro-Asian and Semitic thought more with its foreign Easternness. But the two operate in perfect unity. Starkly, the ultimate meaning of Western philosophy is not a concrete tradition or canon. Rather, it is an abstract rational ideal that precisely reduces all concrete traditions to its encyclopaedic objects. Thus these various 'Easts' are blocked from functioning as legitimate starting points for our method of thinking. The West sublimates into a perfect centre from which everything else is mapped out on the margin and the periphery. Even Jewish and Christian philosophy are thus pushed Eastward, so that Islamic philosophy perhaps only succeeds and intensifies their role of mediaeval Semitic irrationality. Both the Latin West and the Greek East are finally marginal to Western philosophy, insofar as they are religious and nonmodern. And at its most extreme, the narrative direction leads to seeing even the most seminal modern European

thinkers (such as Kant) as nothing but tokens of a more recently antiquated past, while only the very newest rationality arising from the Western centre should be ‘canonical’. As the ultimate representation of arbitrary religion, the Islamic tradition is simply a stark reminder of the fundamental way in which our narrative suppresses its own sources.

But this also means that foregrounding Islamic thought could challenge the entire structure. Many apparently fixed implicit tensions within it have become explicit here. If given release through narrative reframing, these tensions could unravel the entire structure from its own premises. Islam may provide, as it were, the perfect spot at which to cut the Gordian knot of Enlightenment-colonialism. Looking at this most painful intellectual relation of ours seriously can change all relations. Could there then be a *deeper narrative of Western philosophy*, predicated on the radical inclusion of Islamic philosophy, grounding the full acceptance of the *intercultural view* of our own tradition?

3.2 Directions Towards an Intercultural Narrative

Yes, Western philosophy can be narratively reconstructed as a genuinely global intellectual tradition. It can be narrated as the development not of only one rational tendency, but precisely the profound relations between radically different rationalities: from the Judaic and the Greek, through the Islamic and the Christian, to *multiple* modern horizons. This would entail the full inclusion of what has hitherto been rendered Middle Eastern into a broader concept of the Western. While a full account of such a positive alternative would require a far greater project than this one, the most preliminary directions can be sketched. These follow directly from the concluded analysis, as well as some of the thinkers cited. Decisively, Melvin-Koushki’s playful philological redefinition of the West and the ‘Far West’ is appropriated and transformed, also through the introduction of the new term ‘Middle West’. These are brief propositions for further research, open questions aiming to provoke further critical and creative reflection.

3.2.1 Goals and Principles: Relationality

Re-narrating Western philosophy should have two consecutive goals. First, to envision all thought in languages such as Arabic, Persian, and Turkish as decisively related to thought in Latin or German, following directly from their shared philosophical Hebrew and Greek legacy. As such, our proper intellectual context is a continuum of interreligious exchange in roughly the

Western half of Afro-Eurasia: an *intercultural Western philosophy*. Second, to have this serve the establishment of a *global history of philosophy*, catching up philosophy to the insights of global history and other fields. The basic premise being: no tradition can be understood in isolation from 'others'. No matter where, we are born into an already interconnected world of different philosophies. 'We' are the people who learn to think from this same geo-historical continuity of sources, as diverse as those sources themselves. It is absurd to deny ourselves our rich birthright, our proper intellectual community. All this makes the first goal of re-narrating Western philosophy intermediary, enabling the second goal of re-establishing global philosophy. It offers a middlestep, between thinking from a separate philosophical centre, to thinking from a decentered continuity of philosophical horizons. The entire path is driven by reflecting on the irreducible relation between modern European and Islamic thought as central to the West.

Despite the obvious danger that any meta-narrative of Western philosophy will continue to be exclusionary, its positive reconstruction can be methodologically justified. We need, and will always have, some narrative of our intellectual community. The established narrative is not untrue or useless, only limited. Our thinking does need a set of guides, tools, methods – a canon, such as the established one. The real choice facing us is whether such a canon will be critically explicit and creatively open, or insidiously implicit (as Enlightenment-colonialism has been) and self-destructively enclosed (as its Romantic Orientalist reversal has been). A narrative structure with so much genuine power should not be simply rejected or replaced, which would only again entrench it. Rather, we can allow it to complete and resolve itself, decentring it directly from *within* itself. The privilege of Western philosophy need not be resisted, but contextualised, subverted, reappropriated. It remains identified with 'us', but now as the sign of our much deeper community. Critically unfolding the established narrative is our best shot at fully relating to our shared intellectual sources, while doing the least epistemic violence possible to us and to them.

This calls for some preliminary theoretical principles, which make the deeper narrative necessary, but not possible for it to become a fixed structure. Such a framework should empower all-inclusive imagination in intellectual history, while keeping the dangers of grand narratives in check. The first is already clear, namely that the intercultural view is 'established' not through negating but through fulfilling the Eurocentric view. Clearly, the goal is not to devalue classical Greek and modern European philosophy, but precisely to restore their meaning in full context – in a way that their established privilege is itself incapable of. This requires accepting and

releasing the endless chain of suppression and othering that is our history. All these belong to us: the ancient Greek idea of incomprehensible barbaric thought; the Judeo-Christian idea of evil pagan thought; the Islamic idea of the superceded thought of the People of the Book; the Enlightenment-colonialist idea of dogmatic religious thought; and indeed the Romantic Orientalist idea of alienating hyper-rationalist thought. An inclusive narrative cannot be the next step in this series, rejecting all the above as 'hegemonic exclusionary thought'. Rather, it must radically include and recover all of them, even with their irreconcilability. Only thus can a narrative avoid perpetuating the same violence and *establish itself as open to change*.

The central principle is that every binary, such as Greek-Semitic or modern-archaic, in fact masks a hidden relation. Their mutual separation rests upon their deeper continuity, the self-identity of one upon its deeper self-difference. The core task is to foreground this dependence. This brings out the plurality of relations that actually underlie the grand generalisation of separate monolithic traditions. Thus, a narrative that presents a simply self-identical Western philosophical tradition – but in fact depends upon its separation from all Eastern religious thought – implodes into a narrative in which the Western tradition foregrounds its nature as "an extremely non-homogenous set of ideas and methodologies."[141] Western philosophy is revealed to be internally different (diverse) from itself, and externally continuous (permeable) with whatever remains geographically East of it. This redefines the West not as a single intellectual centre abstracted from modern European thought, but in fact a plurality of horizons. It contains multiple modernities, multiple Wests.[142] The secular ideal which pretends to be the centre of our thought in fact coexists with many others, including various Islamic ones.[143] What makes them all Western is that they arise from the Greco-Judaic and Islamo-Christian relation,[144] the central drama of the intellectual history of the Western part of Eurasia in the last 3 millennia. But these relations are themselves embedded in the broader context of the whole of Afro-Eurasia. This is how the Western can be decentred directly from within itself.

Further, re-framing Western philosophy as a plurality of different horizons also requires the principle of constant negotiation. Making the Islamo-Christian context central to it makes this

---

[141] Allais, 'Problematising Western philosophy', 543.
[142] A view popularised by Eisenstadt's *Multiple Modernities* and central to Melvin-Koushki's project. We could also speak of multiple Europes, multiple philosophies, multiple rationalities.
[143] Cf. Derrida cited in Chérif, Mustafa. Islam and the West, 39: ""the Arabo-Muslim culture of [the] Maghreb is also a Western culture. There are many Islams, there are many Wests."
[144] Terms borrowed from Melvin-Koushki (who prefers 'Hellenic-Abrahamic') and Bulliet, respectively.

clear, for these two traditions unfold precisely through their competing claims. In the same way, our present thought is formed and continues to change through the negotiation between radically different rational possibilities. Indeed, past sources *and* living thinkers can only be taken seriously when they are approached as worthy opponents for intellectual contest, for 'friendly clashes'. This contest amounts to a hermeneutic process of mutual transformation among all parties involved, even with their fundamental way of thinking. Only in this play of resistances do intellectual relations become genuinely meaningful – as irreducibly difficult and unstable. This echoes from the previous call to retain and account for all the intellectual violence in our history. To be truly inclusive, our narrative must remain with the discomforts, tensions, and ambiguities of its own inner differences, and unfold precisely from this awareness. This requires its tone to be highly critical, but also joyfully affirmative of the most challenging and dangerous possibilities. There is a reason why the established narrative is full of xenophobic anxiety, including Islamophobia: our intellectual world is not a comfortable place. Foregrounding this closed fear and remaining with it can yet directly transform it into open strength. This kind of open courage is prerequisite to a genuine xenophilia, a love of radical philosophical difference.

3.2.2 Middle Western and Far Western Philosophy

We can now envision concrete steps, predicated on these very general principles, for unfolding the established narrative of Western philosophy. The core terminological shift enabling the first four steps is from Middle Eastern religious thought to 'Middle Western philosophy'. This subverts the marginalisation of the Semitic, mediaeval, etc. from our narrative into an inclusion. The Middle Western signifies thought that has a positive simultaneous relation to ancient Afro-Asian religion and to modern European philosophy. The Greco-Judaic and the Islamo-Christian are its central axes. The first step is reframing Judeo-Christian philosophy as Middle Western. This stresses the significance of Judeo-European, Catholic and Protestant philosophy as the obvious immediate religio-historical root of modern European philosophy.[145] We can resist skipping over it because of its religious nature, by rendering even ancient Hebrew thought philosophical. Second, reframing ancient Greek (and Roman) philosophy as Middle

[145] Arguments for modern European thought's direct dependence on Protestant thought's rise from Catholic thought echo into philosophy from Max Weber's classic 1905 sociological study *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2001). Further, Oswald Spengler's infamous but equally seminal narrative of 'Faustian' culture and civilisation in *the Decline of the West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926) is interesting in its foregrounding of the significance of Germanic and Celtic influences in this rise.

Western. This in turn resists its being reduced to a mere classical blueprint for secular rationality. Instead, its archaic dimensions are allowed equal relevance, highlighting also its direct continuity with later Islamic and Christian philosophy.[146] Third, reframing Islamic philosophy as Middle Western. The image of a temporary golden age intersection of incommensurable essences is subverted into precisely the most productive and significant relation. Thus the most intense other of the established West is made meaningfully Western, which signals the fundamental transformation of the entire narrative structure. Fourth, reframing all Mediterranean philosophy as Middle Western.[147] Its first paradigmatic dynamic is the Greco-Judaic, itself situated in wider Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Indian relations. Later, this becomes a Islamo-Judeo-Christian[148] dynamic. Linguistically, as Melvin-Koushki says, "its six great vehicles [are] Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew, Arabic, Persian and Latin".[149] It is from this context that modern European thought (in German, French, or English) also emerges. Thus the established idea of Western philosophy itself is revealed to have emerged not against an opposed Middle Eastern religious thought, but from an age-old intercultural Middle Western religio-philosophical context.[150]

This Enlightenment-colonialist version of Western philosophy is then reframed as 'Far Western philosophy'. This fifth step decentres that Euro-American standard of all rationality into but one, extreme, 'North Atlantic'[151] extension of the Mediterranean dynamic.[152] Secularism, universalism, etc., are not unique to modern European philosophy, but ironically arise within the entire Middle Western context.[153] Sixth, reframing 'our Western philosophy' as the Far

---

[146] For instructive work on early Christian philosophy, see van Nuffelen, *Rethinking the Gods: Philosophical Readings of Religion in the Post-Hellenistic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[147] 'Mediterranean' is here used as a broad geographical designation extending roughly to the combined areas controlled by the Roman Empire and the Umayyad Caliphate at the height of their territorial extent, hence including both Europe and the MENA region.

[148] A term which Melvin-Koushki appropriates from Bulliet. Also used by Chérif, *Islam and the West*, 37.

[149] Melvin-Koushki, 'Tahqiq vs. Taqlid', 226–5.

[150] As Mustafa Chérif laments in *Islam and the West*, 3: "Whereas the Classical West was Judeo-Islamo-Christian and Greco-Arab, we have been led to believe that it was only Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian." His wording also hints at the possibility of doing away with our problematic idea of the mediaeval and simply rendering the whole Middle West historically classical. This could mean the direct continuity of the 'late ancient' and the 'early modern'.

[151] A term used by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* (London: University of Harvard Press, 2007).

[152] This intensifies the significance of Bryan van Norden's provocative suggestion that philosophical faculties teaching our established canon "should call themselves 'Departments of European and American Philosophy'." Cited in Kirloskar-Steinbach and Kalmanson, 'Views from Everywhere'.
The North Atlantic-Mediterranean geographical distinction could also be cast as one of 'North Western' and 'South Western' philosophy. This would also collapse the current South-North iteration of the East-West dichotomy.

[153] On this point, consider Patočka's reflection on the rise of technological rationality from Platonic and Christian spirituality (itself a crystallisation of similar reflections already in Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger) in the fifth *Heretical Essay*, 'Is Technological Civilization Decadent, and Why?'

Western-Middle Western relation. The exact way in which modern European philosophy depends on its entire webbed context becomes the central historical question. Seventh, reframing South Asian and East Asian thought as a fully significant Eastern philosophy. This continuum of Sino-Indian relations is not a Far East separate from the continuum of Greco-Judaic, Islamo-Christian, and Middle-Far Western relations. Rather, the intercultural West and the intercultural East are themselves continuous, and the Far West especially cannot be understood absent its colonial interaction therewith. This also applies to other African, American, and Oceanic philosophies, which leads into the next step. Eighth and last, reframing all intellectual traditions of our world as philosophy. None of them need to be treated as radically separate, for they are also already related to the polycentral Afro-Eurasian complex of Western-and-Eastern philosophy. Thus, reflecting on the dynamic between (post-)Christian and Islamic philosophy leads us towards fully situating our own thought in its proper global context.[154]

Having seen this entire thought experiment unfold, you the thinker and citizen of today may yet ask: so what? What tangible difference does our philosophical narrative make to the way I live and work, even as a researcher, an educator, a manager? Will it change anything about the way we go on with our daily tasks? Yes: for we all inevitably participate in what is deemed Western and rational, and it matters plenty whether we do so naively, critically, or creatively. It matters for responding seriously to debates about racism; for speaking to a child raised in another tradition; for planning international projects. The challenging agenda of recovering the significance of so-called non-European sources for the emergence of ‘our’ modern thought, should be of direct interest to the widespread ambition of today’s social sciences and humanities to responsibly contextualise the construction of knowledge. In particular, a genuine intercultural philosophical narrative could help empower those of us hailing from more or less marginalised countries – which, after all, is most of us today! – to bring to global intellectual conversations a strong voice that is neither simply ‘Westernised’ nor naively ‘anti-Western’, ‘nativist’, ‘Islamist’, etc. In sum, this direction for re-thinking Western philosophy is salient not only for academic philosophers and historians. The task is relevant for anyone who takes the scientific, political, and indeed everyday cultural challenges of today seriously.

---

[154] Per Bulliet, *Islamo-Christian Civilization*, 45: “Islamo-Christian civilization as an organizing principle of contemporary thought is rooted in the historical reality of [fourteen] centuries”.

Bibliography

Abdel Haleem, M.A.S. *The Qur'an: A New Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Akbari, Suzanne Conklin and Karla Mallette, eds. *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013.

Al Tamamy, Saud M.S. *Averroes, Kant, and the Origins of the Enlightenment*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2014.

Akhtar, Shabbir. *Islam as Political Religion: The Future of an Imperial Faith*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011.

Allais, Lucy. 'Problematising Western Philosophy as One Part of Africanising the Curriculum'. *South African Journal of Philosophy* 35, no.4 (2016): 537–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2016.1247247.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. 'Re-thinking the Post-colonial: Post-colonialism in the Twenty First Century'. In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, 193–219. London: Routledge, 2002.

Bashier, Salman H. *Ibn al-Arabi's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2004.

Bdaiwi, Ahab. 'From Philosophical Orientalism to Philosophy as a Way of Life: Paradigmatic Shifts in the Study of Islamic Philosophy in the West'. Conference paper. Columbia University, 2013.

———. 'Brief Remarks on Islam, History, Philosophy, and European Triumphalism'. *The Muslim 500*, 2019. https://themuslim500.com/guest-contributions-2019/brief-remarks-on-islam/.

Bulliet, Richard W. *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Burkert, Walter 'Prehistory of Presocratic Philosophy in an Orientalizing Context'. In *Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*, edited by Patricia Curd and Daniel W. Graham, 55–87. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000.

Chérif, Mustafa. *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. Translated byTeresa Lavender Fagan. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Chittick, William. ‘Ibn ‘Arabî’. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/ibn-arabi/.

Cohen, Arthur A. *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition: And Other Dissenting Essays*. New York: Schocken Books, 1971.

Connolly, William E. ‘Europe: A Minor Tradition’. In *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*, edited by David Scott and Charles Hirschkind, 75–92. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Conrad, Sebastian. *What Is Global History?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Corbin, Henry. *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*. Translated by Ralph Manheim. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

———. ‘Biographical Post-Scriptum to a Philosophical Interview’. Paris, 1978. http://www.imagomundi.com.br/espiritualidade/corbin_heid_suhr.pdf.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*. Translated by Pascale Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

Fontainelle, Earl. ‘Matthew Melvin-Koushki on 'The West'.’ The Secret History of Western Esotericism Podcast (SHWEP). Accessed December 4, 2022. https://shwep.net/podcast/matthew-melvin-koushki-on-the-west/.

———. ‘Julian Strube on the Debate over Dropping the 'Western' in 'Western Esotericism''. SHWEP. Accessed December 4, 2022. https://shwep.net/2019/08/24/julian-strube-on-the-debate-over-dropping-the-western-in-western-esotericism/.

———. ‘Introducing Rome’. SHWEP, ep.59. Accessed December 4, 2022. https://shwep.net/podcast/roman-history-for-esotericists/.

Fowden, Garth. *Before and after Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Hadot, Pierre. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Edited by Arnold I. Davidson, translated by Michael Chase. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Hall, Stuart. ‘The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power’ In *Formations of Modernity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Bram Geiben. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

Hanegraaff, Wouter. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Hourani, Albert. 'Islam and the Philosophers of History'. In *Europe and the Middle East*, 19–73. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.

Huntington, Samuel P. 'The Clash of Civilizations?' *Foreign Affairs* 72, no.3 (Summer 1993), 22–49. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20045621.

Guénon, René. *East and West*. Translated by Martin Lings. Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001.

Gutas, Dimitri. 'Ibn Sina [Avicenna]'. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition). https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/ibn-sina/.

Kenny, Anthony. *A New History of Western Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

———. *Medieval Philosophy*. A New History of Western Philosophy, Volume II. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

King, Richard. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'the Mystic East'*. London: Routledge, 1999.

———. 'Philosophy of Religion as Border Control: Globalization and the Decolonization of the 'Love of Wisdom' (*Philosophia*)'. In *Postcolonial Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Purushottama Bilimoria and Andrew B. Irvine, 35–54. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2009.

Kirloskar-Steinbach, Monika, and Leah Kalmanson. 'Views from Everywhere: How Academic Philosophy Can Become Truly Diverse and Global'. *Aeon Essays*, March 7, 2022. https://aeon.co/essays/how-academic-philosophy-can-become-truly-diverse-and-global.

Kraemer, Joel L. *Humanism in the Rennaisance of Islam: The Cultural Revival During the Buyid Age*. Leiden: Brill, 1993.

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Lewis, Bernard. *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Mahdi, Muhsin. 'Orientalism and the Study of Islamic Philosophy'. *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 (1990), 73–98.

Masuzawa, Tomoko. ‘Islam, a Semitic Religion’. In *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, 179–206. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Mavroudi, Maria. ‘Translations from Greek into Latin and Arabic during the Middle Ages: Searching for the Classical Tradition’. *Speculum* 90/1 (January 2015). Doi:10.1017/S0038713414002450.

Melvin-Koushki, Matthew. ‘*Taḥqīq* vs. *Taqlīd* in the Renaissances of Western Early Modernity’. *Philological Encounters* 3, no. 1–2 (2018): 193–249. https://doi.org/10.1163/24519197-12340041.

Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2013.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present; Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2006.

Park, Peter K. J. *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780–1830*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2013.

Patočka, Jan. *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. Translated by Erazim Kohák. Chicago: Open Court, 1996.

Revel, Ariane. ‘How the History of Philosophy Was Born’. Translated by Arianne Dorval. Review of *La colonie philosophique*, by Catherine König-Pralong. *Books & Ideas*, April 30, 2020. https://booksandideas.net/How-the-History-of-Philosophy-Was-Born.html.

Rizvi, Sajjad. ‘Mulla Sadra’. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition). https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/mulla-sadra/.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Penguin Books, 1978.

Schuringa, Christoph. ‘On the Very Idea of 'Western' Philosophy’. *Medium*, June 10, 2020. https://medium.com/science-and-philosophy/on-the-very-idea-of-western-philosophy-668c27b3677.

Spengler, Oswald. *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*. Translated by Charles Francis Atkinson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. London: University of Harvard Press, 2007.

Tolan, John. ‘Forging New Paradigms: Towards a History of Islamo-Christian Civilization’. In *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, edited by Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Karla Mallette, 62–70. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013.

Van De Mieroop, Marc. *Philosophy before the Greeks: The Pursuit of Truth in Ancient Babylonia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Van Nuffelen, Peter. *Rethinking the Gods: Philosophical Readings of Religion in the Post-Hellenistic Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Wolfson, Harry Austryn. ‘The Twice-Revealed Averroes’. *Speculum* 36/3 (July 1961), 373–92.