Introduction

In September 1683 a large army of soldiers from Germany, Austria, and Poland-Lithuania won a battle against an even larger Ottoman army that had laid siege to Vienna, the capital of the Holy Roman Empire. That same year, John Locke fled from England to the Netherlands and entered into circles that acquainted him with the work of Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza. In Holland, Locke also found time to work on the manuscript of what would become his most important philosophical work, *The Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published eventually in London in 1689.

The last two decades of the 17th century marked the beginning of two of the most important developments in modern European history: Enlightenment thought and the military defeat of the Ottoman Empire. This was the moment from which Europeans started to think of their own history in terms that we now call “modern.” They witnessed history as progress, understood as increasing rationalization, liberalization, as well as the creation of material wealth and the expansion of political power. When Europeans looked at the Muslim world, however, they saw nothing but decline.

From the early Middle Ages, central Europeans had become more and more used to thinking about Islam as Europe’s nemesis, the absolute opposite of all that Europe stood for. By the late 17th century, the threat that earlier armies of Muslims had posed to Europe had disappeared. The Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683—the second of its kind after an earlier Turkish attempt in 1526—led to a successful counter-attack of central and eastern European armies that conquered, within a few years, almost half of the Ottoman territories on the Balkan. By the end of the 17th century, the Habsburg Empire had taken lands from the Turks that are equivalent to the modern countries of Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, and parts of Romania. Never again would Islamic armies pose a threat to a central European country. Quite the opposite: Within only a century a European army stood at the gates of a major Muslim capital and routed its defenders. In July 1798, the French army fought a decisive victory over Egyptian forces during the Battle of the Pyramids. The defeat led to the first European colonial administration of a Muslim country. The Battle of the Pyramids was, however, only the first of many victories that were inflicted upon almost all Muslim countries in the period between 1798 and 1920. After the Battle of Maysalun before the gates of Damascus in 1920, every Muslim country with the exception of Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and several principalities on the Arabian peninsular was ruled by Europeans.

Triggered by an increasingly critical attitude toward Western writings on Islam, scholars in the 1990s began to see a connection between the early modern European experience of a
continuous progress in their societies and the Western narrative of Islam’s decline. Starting with
the 17th century, European history was considered a process of advancement and improvement.
“Europe’s history, despite all temporary setbacks,” wrote the Danish environmental historian
Peter Christensen in 1993, “was characterized by progress, understood as cumulative change for
the better in material as well as moral terms.” At the same time Europeans thought of Islam and
the Middle East as the opposite of Europe, its inverted reflection. “So it followed logically,”
Christensen continued, “that the opposite of progress, decline, must characterize the history of
Middle East. With such a premise, it was not difficult to find confirming evidence.”1

The material and moral decline of the region that Europeans diagnosed was ascribed,
ultimately, to defects inherent in Muslim society. “The Europeans had come to see progress as a
virtual natural process. If a society had not evolved in the same positive way as Europe did, there
had to be something wrong with it.”2 One of the postulates of European thinking about the
Middle East was that the religion of Islam is so heavily imprinted upon its societies that it can
ultimately explain everything that had occurred, or failed to occur. Enlightenment thought also
made a close connection between Europe’s rapid political and economic progress during the 18th
and early 19th centuries, and the rationalization it was proud to have achieved. The intellectual
source of this rationalization was sought in Europe’s tradition of philosophy. Born out of Greek
culture in antiquity, Enlightenment thinkers forged a narrative of the history of philosophy in
Europe that closely aligned with the cumulative progress that had manifested during their
lifetimes. Yet, historians of philosophy such as Edward Gibbon and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich
Hegel realized that the history of European philosophy was not one of continuous progress. The
dark Middle Ages stood in the way of an uninterrupted increase of rationality in European
thought. Since the re-emergence of philosophical thought in Europe during the 13th century
however, the story they told about European philosophy was one of uninterrupted progress. If
philosophy in Europe progressed, what did it under Islam?

Together with the narrative of a rise of European philosophy after the 13th century came
the story of a simultaneous decline of philosophy in Islam. Once, Islam had a great empire and an
advanced civilization with cities such as Baghdad and Cairo that had few rivals during their prime.
The Islamic Empire was seen as the last of the great civilizations of the Middle East and the
Abbasid caliphs worthy successors of the pharaohs of Egypt, the kings of Babylon, and the
khosrows of Persia. But Arabic high culture was only a very temporary phenomenon. In his

1 Christensen, The Decline of Iranshahr, 9.
2 Ibid.
Lectures on the History of Philosophy of 1817, G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) treats Arabic philosophy not as an independent tradition but merely as one that bridges the Greeks with the scholasticism of the Latin Middle Ages. Arabic philosophy, Hegel writes, “has no content of any interest [for us] and it does not merit to be spent time with; it is not philosophy, but mere manner.” For Hegel, Arabic philosophy is only the “formal preservation and propagation” of Greek philosophy, and has worth only in so far as it is connected to it. The Arabs created no progress in the history of philosophy and “there is not much no benefit from it” (aber es ist nicht viel daraus zu holen).

Hegel stands at the beginning of the Western academic study of Arabic and Islamic philosophy. He was closely followed by Ernest Renan (1823–92) and his 1852 study Averroes and Averroism, the first Western monograph on the history of philosophy in Islam. French Enlightenment thinking and its enmity toward the Catholic Church heavily influenced Renan’s perspective, leading him to apply categories to the history of philosophy in Islam that were established in the historiography of European thought. For Renan, philosophy in Islam suffered under the persecution of an “Islamic orthodoxy” that would eventual prevail and crush the free philosophical spirit in Islam. Renan wrote in 1861 that with the death of Averroes (Ibn Rushd) in 1198, “Arab philosophy had lost in him its last representative and the triumph of the Qur’an over

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4 Hegel, Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, 19:517: “Sie ist nicht durch ihren Inhalt interessant, bei diesem kann man nicht stehenbleiben; es ist keine Philosophie, sondern eigentliche Manier.” E. S. Haldane’s translation of 1892 (Hegel, Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 3:29) leaves out this particular sentence.

5 äußere Erhaltung und Fortpflanzung; Hegel, Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, 19:514; Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 3:34.


7 In the decade before Renan, two important studies of philosophy in Islam had already appeared. Solomon Munk (1803–67) wrote several articles on Arabic philosophers, both Jews and Muslims, for the 6-volume Dictionnaire des sciences philosophique, published 1844–52. These articles were later incorporated into Munk, Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe (1857–59). In 1842, August Schmölders (1809–80) published his Essai sur les écoles philosophiques chez les Arabes, which is an edition and annotated French translation of al-Ghazālī’s al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl.
free-thinking was assured for at least six-hundred years.\(^8\) What relieved the Islamic world from the oppression of a Qur’anic orthodoxy was, in Renan’s mind, the French occupation of Egypt in 1798.

Enlightenment thought provided the legitimization for colonizing the Muslim world. Europeans convinced themselves that the decline they diagnosed in the Muslim world after their military successes in the 17th and 18th centuries had set in much earlier and that it was connected to an assumed absence of philosophy in Islamic societies. European historians of philosophy created the narrative that Arabic and Islamic philosophy ended with Averroes during the last years of the 12th century. The Dutch historian of philosophy Tjitze J. de Boer (1866–1942) was the first to write a textbook on the history of philosophy in Islam. It came out in German in 1901, with an English translation of 1903, and remained influential for many decades, up until the 1990s.\(^9\) De Boer’s presentation of Arabic and Islamic philosophy ends with Averroes, who is followed only by a brief appendix on Ibn Khaldūn. Averroes was the peak of the philosophical tradition under Islam. His commentaries on the works of Aristotle were regarded as the most profound philosophical works produced by that tradition. Yet with him ended philosophy in Islam and with him began also the rise of Aristotelian and thus scholastic philosophy in Europe. Averroes was the link that connected the progress of European philosophy with the decline of the philosophic tradition in Islam. Already in his book *Averroes and Averroïsm*, Renan had come up with the view that European philosophers valued the quality of Averroes’ scholarship, whereas Muslims neglected it at their own peril.\(^10\)

Historians like Renan or de Boer in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were, of course, working with far fewer sources than what we have available today. Their decision to exclude a host of philosophers who wrote after Averroes from the history of this discipline, however, is not based on ignorance about their existence. In the seventeenth and eighteenth

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\(^8\) Renan, *Averroës et l’averroïsme* (2nd augmented edition), 2. In the first edition of 1852 (p. 1) this sentence did not yet have its colonialist second half: “Quand Averroès mourut, en 1198, la philosophie arabe perdit en lui son dernier représentant.” In the second edition of 1861, Renan adds “… et le triomphe du Coran sur la libre pensée fut assuré pour au moins six cent ans.”

\(^9\) De Boer’s *Geschichte der Philosophie im Islam* was translated into English (1903), Persian (1927), Arabic (1938), and even into Chinese (1946). The English translation was reprinted in London 1933, 1961, and 1965, in New York 1967, in New Delhi 1983, and in Richmond (Surrey) 1994. The Chinese version was reprinted as late as 2012.

centuries, when Europeans started to explore the history of Arabic and Islamic philosophy, they knew otherwise. The books produced in this period had not yet adopted a colonialist perspective on Islam and the Middle East and are free from the idea that philosophy in Islam had ever ended. In 1743, for instance, the German scholar Johann Jacob Brucker (1696–1770) published a six-volume history of philosophy in Latin (*Historia critica philosophiae*), which includes more than two hundred pages on Arabic and Islamic authors. Here, readers could find relatively long articles on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274). Brucker mentions numerous authors of philosophy that fall into Islam’s post-classical period, and this despite the fact that unlike Renan and de Boer, he read no oriental languages. A similar picture emerges from the monumental four-volume work *Bibliothèque orientale*, published at the end of the seventeenth century in Paris. It generated under the leadership of the French orientalist Barthélemy d’Herbelot (1625–95) and is a forerunner to the large encyclopedias of the French Enlightenment. The *Bibliothèque orientale* is based on an Arabic encyclopedia of the sciences that had appeared fifty years earlier, namely Kātib Čelebī’s (d. 1067/1657) *Disclosure of Opinions About the Sciences and Their Books* (*Kashf al-zunūn ʿān asāmī l-kutub wa-l-funūn*). Kātib Čelebī was, of course, well acquainted with the major achievements of post-classical philosophy in Islam. Hence, the *Bibliothèque orientale* is full of information about philosophers such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, the Iranian Mullah Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640), or the Ottoman Turk Kamālpashazādeh (d. 940/1534), and their most important works.

In the nineteenth century, however, that information got lost in a narrative of decline. Tjitze de Boer saw the reason for the decline of philosophy in Islam in the works of al-Ghazālī. The most knowledgeable and influential Western authorities in Islamic studies, such as Ignác Goldziher (1850–1921), Hellmut Ritter (1892–1971), and Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926) taught that al-Ghazālī’s book *The Precipitance of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsīfa*)

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had ushered in the end of philosophy in Islam. Al-Ghazālī was, as Browne wrote in 1906, “the theologian who did more than any one else to bring to an end the reign of philosophy in Islam.”

After al-Ghazālī, and here I quote Tjitze de Boer’s textbook, there were only “epitomists” in the Eastern Islamic world. Philosophers they were, de Boer acknowledges, but of a philosophy that was in decline and, “in no department did they pass the mark which had been reached of old: Minds were now too weak to accomplish such a feat. (...) Ethical and religious doctrine had ended in Mysticism; and the same was the case with Philosophy (...).”

Those who work in Islamic studies know that the view of al-Ghazālī as the destroyer of philosophy in Islam is still very much alive, particularly in more popular publications of our field. Today seemingly respectable publications still present him as the final point of any discussion of philosophy in Islam, not to mention the many polemical voices on the Internet that fuel and are fueled by sentiments of Islamophobia. Among those who work actively in the field of the

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14 Browne, A Literary History of Persia, 2:293.

15 de Boer, Geschichte der Philosophie im Islam, 151; Engl. trans. 169–70. This opinion is, for instance, echoed by F. E. Peters, who wrote in 1968 that, “Ibn Sinā’s disciples descended (...) into a faceless mediocrity (...). Both Abū al-Barakāt (d. A.D. 1165) andʿAbd al-Lāṭif al-Baghdādī (d. A.D. 1231) are still worthy of the name of faylasuf, but the rest, if it is not silence, is not much more than a whisper” (Aristotle and the Arabs, 230–31).

16 A recent example from 2014 is, for instance, the presentation of al-Ghazālī in Starr, Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia’s Golden Age From the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane, 406–22. According to Starr, al-Ghazālī was “the dark genius” (p. 532), who taught that “Aristotle’s logic is totally irrelevant to revealed religion,” regarded any talk of causality as “quackery and fraud”, and who thus “gave his students an excuse for ignoring (...) the difficult studies” connected with the rational sciences (414, 417).

“Convinced that he was in possession of divine truth, [al-Ghazālī] proceeded to pass judgment on all those who, in his view, were not” (419) and branded all philosophers and free-thinkers as apostates. “In doing so, Ghazali administered the coup de grâce” to philosophy and the sciences (419). A hundred years later his “denunciation of science and philosophy had long (...) become a best-seller” and “never again would open-ended scientific enquiry and unconstrained philosophizing take place in the Muslim world without the suspicion of heresy and apostasy lurking in the air” (422).

17 An example are lectures by Neil deGrasse Tyson on the history of science in Islam that are widely available on sites such as http://www.YouTube.com.
history of philosophy in Islam, however, al-Ghazālī’s assessment has drastically changed in the past thirty years. He is no longer regarded as the destroyer of philosophy in Islam. We now understand that his major response to the philosophical movement in Islam, *The Precipitance of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*) is a complex work of refutation, and that it is not aimed at rejecting philosophy or Aristotelianism throughout. It is concerned with twenty teachings developed by Aristotelian philosophers in Islam and it vigorously rejects at least three of them, to the extent that it declares those philosophers who uphold these three teachings apostates from Islam and threatens capital punishment. The book, however, does not reject philosophy as a whole. In fact, it can be read—and it was read—as an endorsement of studying Aristotelianism to find out what is correct and what is wrong among the teachings of Muslim Aristotelians. In that sense, the book is a demarcation between those teachings of Arabic Aristotelianism that al-Ghazālī deemed fit to be integrated into Muslim thought from those he thought are unfit.

The reevaluation of al-Ghazālī’s *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* as a work that is not directed against philosophy but aims to create and promote a different kind of philosophy from what it criticizes is seconded by an earlier development in the field of Ghazālī-studies. Two important articles were published more than thirty years ago in 1987, Richard M. Frank’s (1927–2009) “Al-Ghazālī’s Use of Avicenna’s Philosophy” and Abdelhamid I. Sabra’s (1924–2013) “The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Sciences in Medieval Islam.” Frank’s article of 1987 launched a whole new direction of research on al-Ghazālī. Earlier Western contributions on him highlighted his critical attitude toward the teachings of al-Fārābī (d. 339/950–51) and Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 428/1037). After Frank’s article of 1987 and a more thorough monograph published in 1992, books and articles appeared that investigate what al-Ghazālī had adopted from falsafa. This has become the dominant direction of Ghazali-studies in the past twenty years. Important books and articles made the case that many of his most original teachings are adaptations of earlier ones by Avicenna. By adaptation we do not mean that they are therefore no longer original to al-Ghazālī. Rarely did he adapt something from Avicenna without making changes. Often

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18 I follow Alexander Treiger (*Inspired Knowledge*, 108–15) in his argument that the commonly accepted translation of *tahāfut* as “incoherence” is wrong. The verb “*tahāfata*” means something like “to rush headlong into a seemingly beneficial but ultimately dangerous situation,” almost like a moth that rushes toward the fire. Already in 1888, Beer, *Al-Ġazzālī’s Maḳāsid al-Falāsifat*, 6, translated *tahāfut* as: “blindly running after someone or a group who runs fast and recklessly ahead,” “run into error.”

19 For more on al-Ghazālī’s strategy see pp. XX–XX in this book.

20 Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*. *Al-Ghazālī & Avicenna*. 
these changes were small in wording that amounted nevertheless to significant philosophical and theological permutations. In his autobiography al-Ghazālī points out that the skilled expert produces the anti-dote to a snake’s venom from the venom itself. 21

Sabra’s article of 1987 offer context for Frank’s discoveries, showing that al-Ghazālī’s adaptation of teachings from Avicenna and al-Fārābī was part of a much larger phenomenon in Islam. Sabra observed that by the eighth/fourteenth century, sciences that were earlier called Greek and regarded as foreign had, in fact, become Muslim sciences. For Sabra this happened in a two-step development of first appropriating Greek sciences in a process of translation and adaptation to a new cultural context, characterized by the use of the Arabic language and a Muslim majority culture, and secondly naturalizing them so that the Greek origins of these sciences were no longer visible. Although he did not work with Sabra’s categories, Frank’s contributions of 1987 and 1992 can easily be corresponded to Sabra’s suggestions. Whereas Avicenna’s philosophy is an expression of the process of appropriation in which the Greek origins of many of his teachings are clearly visible and even stressed, al-Ghazālī, who adopts and adapts many of Avicenna’s teachings, obscures their origins and thus contributes to—or maybe even initiates—the process of naturalization. Sabra himself never applied his suggestion to the fate of philosophy in Islam. It is, however, a very fitting description of what had happened during the sixth/twelfth century and after. The movement of falsafa can thus be regarded as the continuation of Greek philosophy in Arabic. As Sabra’s foregrounds, falsafa represents the appropriation of a Greek science in Islam. Subsequently, the appropriated Greek science of philosophy becomes naturalized as Islamic. The work of al-Ghazālī is, in fact, the beginning of the naturalization process of Greek philosophy in Islam.

In some of my earlier works, particularly the book published in 2000, on the development of the judgment of apostasy in early Islam, I tried to make the case that al-Ghazālī cannot be made responsible for the disappearance of philosophy in Islam. In this book I advance on closer inspection a different argument: philosophy did not disappear after al-Ghazālī. Instead, the period after al-Ghazālī is full of philosophical works, even if adhering to most narrow standards of what counts as philosophy. The existence of philosophy after al-Ghazālī is so obvious that we must ask how it could it be that it was overlooked for so long. Did earlier generations of intellectual historians—including myself before this—not see that there was a thriving philosophy after al-Ghazālī? Some, of course, did. The German scholar Max Horten (1874–1945), who after 1913

held various professorial positions at universities in Bonn and in Breslau, understood the importance of several Arabic works of post-classical philosophy which were printed in Cairo at the beginning of the 20th century. He started to paraphrase and analyze them and thus became the first European expert on this kind of literature. Horten, however, insisted on translating the Arabic technical terminology of these books into words that he thought his readers could relate to. He chose terms from Latin medieval philosophy and hence obscured the teachings and the originality of post-classical philosophy in Islam. Horten also failed to connect the texts to their context. This and the fact that his German paraphrases did not reach the philological standards that recent works by Ignác Goldziher and others had, confirmed an earlier impression—voice by Tjitze de Boer and others—that post-classical philosophy in Islam is repetitive and infertile.

The breakthrough in this field is only happening now. It is the result of several factors, some of which I will discuss in this book. A proper understanding of the continuity of philosophy in Islam will not be achieved unless one realizes the crucial error that many intellectual historians of Islam have committed—and that not a small number of them still commit today: For the period after the mid-sixth/twelfth century, the Arabic word “falsafa” no longer represents the full range of what in English is referred to as “philosophy,” in German as “Philosophie,” or in French as “la philosophie.” All these words have, of course, their origin in the Greek word φιλοσοφία. Identical etymology, however, does not guarantee identical meaning.

At the beginning of this book project stands the realization, shared by almost everybody who works in this field, that al-Ghazâlî’s Tahâfut al-falâsifa is a work of philosophy. This may sound like a trivial insight that even earlier researchers such as Tjitze de Boer indeed shared. The full implications for the history of philosophy in Islam, however, have yet to be be drawn. Even very recent contributions to the history of Arabic and Islamic philosophy contain statements saying that al-Ghazâlî launched attacks “against philosophy in general, and metaphysics in particular.” This however gives the wrong impression that al-Ghazâlî’s attacks had come from outside of philosophy. The quoted sentence excludes al-Ghazâlî from the history of philosophy and suggests that he was hostile to rational inquiry and the advancement of knowledge through reasonable and convincing arguments. That was Ernest Renan’s view of al-Ghazâlî. He taught

22 On Horten’s work see below, pp. xxx–xx.

that philosophy in Islam was attacked by outsiders like him who aimed at squashing it in the name of Islamic orthodoxy. In reality, what we see happening at the turn of the sixth/twelfth century is the development of a philosophical dispute between those who defended Avicenna’s teaching on God and His relation to this world (the *falāsifa*) and the likes of al-Ghazālī who criticized this position.\(^{25}\)

Thinkers who followed al-Ghazālī in his criticism of *falsafa* were also engaged in philosophy and should be regarded as part and parcel of the history of philosophy in Islam.\(^{26}\) They must count as active contributors to the history of philosophy in Islam, as philosophers, albeit not *falāsifa*. This leads to the next important realization: after al-Ghazālī, philosophy in Islam was not the same as Arab Aristotelianism. In his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, al-Ghazālī uses the word “*falsafa*” to describe the kind of Aristotelianism that is taught in the books of Avicenna. Almost all philosophers writing in Arabic and Persian—Muslims, Christian, as well as Jews—who followed after al-Ghazālī adapted this choice of language.\(^{27}\) Beginning with the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, which was published in 488/1095,\(^{28}\) the word *falsafa* was understood in Arabic and Persian as a label for the philosophical system of Avicenna as well as for the teachings of al-Fārābī and other earlier philosophers wherever they are congruent with those of Avicenna. Or, to say it in simpler terms: Starting with al-Ghazālī’s *Tahāfut*, the Arabic (and Persian) word *falsafa* meant Avicennism. Yet Avicenna’s philosophy was—as has just been pointed out—not the only philosophy that was practiced during the sixth/twelfth century and after. Tjitze de Boer’s mistake—and that of many other Western historian of philosophy who followed after him—was to identify philosophy in Islam with *falsafa*. This however would be—to use a drastic example—like equating Western philosophy in the 20th century with Marxism. It may be true that in some corners of the 20th century world, such as the Soviet Union for instance, all the philosophy that was practiced was Marxist. But that would still not allow historians to limit the history of

\(^{25}\) This study does not close its eyes to the fact that one of these two philosophical parties tries to use institutional power in the form of a religious authority to defeat the other. The point is discussed in chapter 3 of the first part of this book.

\(^{26}\) See below pp. *XXX*.

\(^{27}\) Ibn Rushd is one of the few Arabic authors who did not adopt al-Ghazālī’s choice of language in his *Tahāfut* and who argued that by focusing on Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī misrepresented the movement of *falsafa* and neglected its various non-Avicennan elements. Ibn Rushd was also one of the very few philosophers after al-Ghazālī who claimed for himself the label of being a *faylasūf*.

Western philosophy in the 20th century to within that particular direction. Reducing the history of philosophy in Islam to falsafa contributed to the diagnosis of its demise soon after al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-falāsifa. This reduction led with equal consequence to the neglect of those philosophical traditions that depart from falsafa. Only once we realize that philosophy in Islam was something much bigger than falsafa—just as 20th century Western philosophy was much bigger than Marxism—can we attempt to write a true history of philosophy in Islam.

This book wishes to make a step into that direction. It will try to answer the question of what philosophy was in the eastern parts of the Islamic world during the sixth/twelfth century. It makes the case that in addition to what was then called falsafa, there existed in the sixth/twelfth century other important traditions of philosophy. One was the tradition that was founded by al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-falāsifa, another one was the philosophical project of Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. c. 560/1165), and a third and fourth are represented by the œuvres of Yahyā al-Suhrawardī (d. c. 587/1191) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). All of these four traditions—or better: directions—of philosophy situated themselves vis-à-vis the competing and at the same time complementing philosophies of Avicenna and al-Ghazālī.

One of the most important philosophical differences between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī were their opposing teachings on God and His attributes. Influenced by Neoplatonic arguments about God’s unity, Avicenna developed a philosophical theology—meaning a theology that is wholly based on rational arguments without any recourse to revelation—where God acts out of the necessity of His being, which must be wholly one. This implies that, firstly, Avicenna’s God cannot change and, secondly, that He acts without exercising a free choice between alternative actions. The first point implies that God cannot change from being a non-creator to becoming a creator. This results in Avicenna’s teaching of a pre-eternal world. In his Tahāfut al-falāsifa, al-Ghazālī attacks this set of teachings by Avicenna and argues that a pre-eternal world is impossible. This, in turn, leads to the conclusion that God must be able to change from being a non-creator to becoming a creator and that he must have a free will and does exercise a choice between alternatives.

This major difference between the thoughts of Avicenna and al-Ghazālī forms the backbone of any understanding of philosophy in the Islamic east during the sixth/twelfth century. Avicenna’s Creator-God is what in the context of the Western Enlightenment has been called the “God of the philosophers.” The phrase is ill-placed in Islam, as it refers to a group of mostly French public intellectuals of the eighteenth century, who had chosen the label “les philosophes.”

29 I pointed this first out in the commentary to my German translation of Ibn Rushd’s Faṣl al-maḳāl, 61–65.
to distinguish themselves as thinkers who were independent of any commitment to Christianity and its church. Still, their thoughts about God can help us illustrate and understand Avicenna’s ideas about God. Many Enlightenment thinkers, and among them many of the French philosophes, were committed to a deist understanding of God that developed in Europe in the wake of Baruch Spinoza’s (1632–77) philosophy. The connections between Avicenna’s thought and that of Spinoza are highly interesting but they go beyond the scope of this book. Suffice to say, Spinoza had access to Hebrew philosophical texts—such as that of Maimonides’, for instance—that were deeply influenced by falsafa.30 According to a simplified deist understanding, God is the creator of the world but He cannot interfere in it. God creates the rules that govern causal connections—what we today might call the “laws of nature” or “laws of science”—through which He governs over His creation. Hence, God creates through the intermediation of long chains of secondary causes where each creation becomes the intermediary for the next creation that it causes. God, however, does not choose these “laws of nature” that govern this process of creation by secondary causes. Rather, God Himself is governed by the necessity that these “laws” express.

Avicenna developed a highly impersonal understanding of God where the deity—who in his œuvre is most often referred to as “the First Principle” or “the First Starting-Point” (al-mabda’ al-awwal)—never exercises a decision or a choice about what to create. In Avicenna’s understanding, God is the origin of all necessity that exists in this world, most importantly the necessity that governs causal connections and hence determine this world. A simplified but not inaccurate expression of Avicenna’s understanding of the deity would be to say that God is the laws of nature that govern His creation. He does not choose them but He is them. Avicenna, of course, would have never chosen such language since he didn’t think in our modern terms of “laws of nature.”31 Rather, for Avicenna, God is pure necessity—He is the being necessary by virtue of itself (wājib al-wujūb bi-dhātihi)—meaning He is the way all other things must be. These “other things” are the beings which are necessary by virtue of something else (wājib al-wujūb bi-ghayrihi), namely by virtue of God. Once modern European philosophy understands necessary as being expressed by laws of nature it is only a small step from Avicenna’s understanding of God as the necessary laws of nature to Spinoza’s deus sive natura.

30 See, for instance, Fraenkel, Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza, or Harvey, “A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean.”

31 For Ibn Sinā, what we call “laws of nature” are enshrined in the “concomitants” (lawāhiq) of the quiddity (māhiyya) of a certain species. “Combustible if touched by fire,” for instance, is one of the passive concomitant of the species cotton and “igniting” an active concomitant of fire. Once fire and cotton come together these concomitants lead to a necessary causal reaction.
If creation is an expression of the necessity that God is, then creation must last as long as God lasts, which is from past eternity. This latter implication offered al-Ghazālī the philosophical angle to criticize Avicenna’s conceptualization of God. For al-Ghazālī, the God of Avicenna was not the God that is described in the Muslim revelation. Motivated by his commitment to Ash’arite Muslim theology, al-Ghazālī found in revelation an active God who chooses to create this world among an almost infinite number of alternative ones. God’s will (irāda) and his choice (ikhtiyār) are the two cornerstones of al-Ghazālī’s understanding of the divine. He faced the problem, however, that Avicenna did not deny that God has a will and a choice, even if he meant different things with these words than al-Ghazālī. Rather than quibbling with Avicenna over the meaning of divine attributes, al-Ghazālī chose to attack the falsafa’s understanding of the divine via the implication of a pre-eternal world. If he could show that a world without a beginning in time is impossible and that, for instance, an infinite number of moments could never have existed in the past, then al-Ghazālī would have refuted Avicenna’s understanding of God. Without the possibility of a pre-eternal world, there would need to be a decision on the side of God to start creating. If there was that first decision about creation, many other decisions and many other choices could follow.

While arguments about the eternity of the world were one of the philosophical battlegrounds of the conflict between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī, the conflict itself was about two different understandings of God. It would, however, be wrong to say that one party in this conflict stood on the side of revelation—or worse: religion—and the other on the side of philosophy. Given that the conflict was about our human understanding of God, it should be clear that both parties were engaged in a process of religious thinking or, if one wants, in thinking about religion. Producing his arguments against Avicenna, al-Ghazālī may well have been motivated by his Ash’arite reading of Muslim revelation. Avicenna, however, had also developed an understanding of the text that was perfectly in line with his conceptualization of God. In several of his works Avicenna writes commentaries on verses and short suras of the Qur’an. Although he never expressed it explicitly, we have good reason to assume that Avicenna thought his understanding of revelation and his conceptualization of God were a sound expression of Islam and just as Islamic as many others that were put forward during his day, among them the Ash’arite view on these things. What’s more, we should believe that Avicenna thought of his interpretation of Islam and its revelation as truth. For him, other Muslim groups, such as the Mu’tazilites or Ash’arites

had failed to reach that truth. The clash was not between “revelation” and “philosophy” but rather between different readings of revelation and between different ways of arguing philosophically.

During the sixth/twelfth century, meaning during the century after al-Ghazālī’s philosophical intervention, there were philosophers who followed Avicenna just as there were those who followed al-Ghazālī. What is most curious, however, and what prompted me to write this book, is the observation that less than a hundred years after al-Ghazālī, in the last quarter of the sixth/twelfth century, we find authors who write one set of books that defend Avicenna’s understanding of God and another set where they defend al-Ghazālī’s. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was the first author, as far as I can see, who composed works in kalām (“rational theology”) where he followed in al-Ghazālī footsteps to criticize Avicenna and others in hikma (“philosophy”), where he aims at improving the philosophical system of Avicenna. To be clear: the former set of books argues for different conclusions from the latter ones. This study will trace the emergence of books in hikma from al-Ghazālī, where we find the first seeds of this genre, to its fully developed form in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.

The main thesis of this book is that authors of post-classical philosophy such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wrote books in the discipline of philosophy (hikma) that are conscious in their continuation of the discourse of philosophy in Islam while also writing books in the discipline of rational theology (kalām) that are part of a different genre of texts and follow different discursive rules. Al-Rāzī was the first of a line of thinkers who in their works of hikma defended some of the teachings of Avicenna whereas in their books of kalām they defended Ashʿarite teachings on the same subjects. While there are some areas of thought where Avicennism and Ashʿarism are quite compatible with one another—cosmology, for instance, or ethics—they stand at loggerheads against each other when it comes to the conceptualization of God and His attributes. Here, there is no middle ground between Avicennism and Ashʿarism, and by extension the results of hikma and kalām. Indeed, we see that works in these two genres argue for directly opposing conclusions on such subjects as the world’s pre-eternity and the closely related subject of divine essence and divine attributes, particularly God’s will and His choice. And yet, these two different sets of books were written by the same authors! Fakhr al-Dīn’s younger contemporary Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233) wrote books in hikma (al-Nūr al-bāhir, and Kashf al-tamwiḥāt) and books in kalām (Abkār al-afkār and Ghayāt al-marām) where the same phenomenon of an opposition of conclusions can be observed. In the next generation, Ṣayf Allah al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. 663/1265) wrote with his Guide to Philosophy (Hidāyat al-hikma) one of most successful textbooks of hikma, which attracted many commentaries and was adopted in many madrasa curricula, yet he also left us a book on kalām (Risāla fī ʿilm al-kalām). Another illustration is Shams al-Dīn al-
Samarqandi’s (d. 722/1322) highly successful textbook of techniques and strategies in disputations (al-Risāla fī ādāb al-baḥth wa-l-munaẓẓara), which assumes that there were different ways of arguing in ḥikma and in kalām and which provides different sets of examples for these two genres.33

The distinction between works of ḥikma and those of kalām becomes well established in the seventh/thirteenth century and while this question lies outside of the focus of this monograph, it seems to have existed continuously until the nineteenth century, when the curricula of madrasa education in Islamic countries were replaced by those of newly founded European-style polytechnics and universities. If anything, these new institutions destroyed post-classical philosophy in Islam. Its home was the madrasa which financed its activities out of the revenues of pious endowments (sing. waqf or hubus) of land and real estate. No uprising of nomadic Turkmen nor the devastations of the Mongol conquest could cause as much damage to this educational system and to the continuity of an indigenous philosophical tradition in Islam, as a single law that abolished the endowments of the madrasas or that simply privileged personal private property over waqf and hubus land ownership. Yet these laws were passed in countless Muslim countries during the period of Western colonization. Rather than any single Muslim opponent of falsafa, it seems that colonial domination and a Muslim eagerness to catch up with the economic and intellectual developments of the West caused the end of the kind of philosophical discourse explored in this book.

Another way of presenting the goal of this study is to say that it tries to explain Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s two early philosophical compendia The Eastern Investigations (al-Mabāḥit al-mashriqiyya) and The Compendium on Philosophy and Logic (al-Mulakhkhas fī l-ḥikma wa-l-manṭiq). These are puzzling works that present a philosophical system, which on the one hand follows Avicenna and on the other hand tries to alter and improve it. Why, however, would the Muslim theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, author of a massive Qur’an commentary and many successful books on Ashʿarite kalām, aim to improve the system of Avicenna’s philosophy, a philosophy that al-Ghazālī in his Tahāfut al-falāṣīfa had condemned as unbelief and apostasy from Islam? Earlier literature on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī has mostly avoided dealing with the problem that these two books pose. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Zarkān (1936–2013), the author of a very impressive early monograph study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, published in 1971, dismissed his Eastern Investigations as an “early work, where al-Rāzī got carried away over and above the

33 al-Samarqandī, al-Risāla fī ādāb al-baḥth, 88–91. For the centrality of this work and its content see Belhaj, “Ādāb albaḥth wa-al-munaẓẓara: the Neglected Art of Disputation in Later Medieval Islam.”
“falāsifa.” Given that in all of the other works of Fakhr al-Dīn that al-Zarkān closely looked at, he wrote like an Ash‘ārite mutakallim, this one book could be dismissed as a youthful folly. Later, so al-Zarkān, al-Rāzī’s positions developed into those put forward in his books on kalām. That line of argument was taken either explicitly or implicitly by many scholars who tried to establish a consistent set of teachings in Fakhr al-Dīn’s œuvre. This line, however, is closed to us at least since Eşref Altaş’s 2013-study on the chronology of al-Rāzī’s corpus. Altaş shows that Fakhr al-Dīn started his career with a short book in kalām, wrote then his Eastern Investigations still at a youthful age in his late twenties. This was followed by his most influential book in kalām, The Pinnacle of Rational Inquiry in Theology (Nihāyat al-‘uqūl fī dirāyat al-usūl). All these works precede al-Rāzī’s Compendium on Philosophy and Logic—his second major book in ḥikma—which was completed in 579/1184 when he was 33 years old. Should we assume that Fakhr al-Dīn started his career as an Ash‘ārite mutakallim, then drifted away toward defending Avicenna’s philosophy only to return to being an Ash‘ārite and then once again falling for the temptations of Avicenna? Such drastic reversals of opinion are implausible even for a flamboyant and self-confident thinker as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was.

We must therefore accept that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and with him the tradition of post-classical philosophy in Islam that he lays the foundations of was in one way or another committed to both the teachings of ḥikma and those of Ash‘ārite kalām. Which way exactly, will be one of the questions this study must answer. What prompted Fakhr al-Dīn—and with him al-Āmirī, al-Abhařī, al-Samarqandī and many others—to not only present the Avicennan philosophical system in over 1,500 pages, but also to alter and improve upon it? What were those improvements and how should we think about them? Finally, what does this mean for our view of the history of philosophy in Islam? Was Fakhr al-Dīn’s engagement with philosophy merely an academic exercise, and was Tjitze de Boer correct after all when he suggested more than a hundred years ago that books such as al-Rāzī’s Eastern Investigations were the idle avocation (Zeitvertreib) of an intellectual elite at a time when “no one felt called upon to come forward with independent views [and] the time had come for abridgements, commentaries, glosses, and glosses upon glosses”?

34 al-Zarkān, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa-ārāʾuhā al-kalāmiyya wa-l-falsafīyya, 299–300, 301. The book represents a master thesis at Cairo University that was completed in 1963 and published, apparently without much revision, in 1971.


36 de Boer, Geschichte der Philosophie im Islam, 151; Engl. transl. 170.
This book deals with the period right after al-Ghazālī and it studies developments that happened in the hundred years after his death in 505/1111. It tells the story of how the philosophical tradition founded by Avicenna and criticized by al-Ghazālī found a new expression in the works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. With this book comes also the claim that the development from al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī can be studied as a unit and to some degree separated from what will happen in the seventh/thirteenth century and later. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s œuvre marks a watershed in the history of post-classical Islamic philosophy. He wrote the philosophical books that influence later generations of scholars in post-classical Islamic thought. Still, this book is no comprehensive survey of philosophy in Islam during the sixth/twelfth century. First, I leave out the philosophical tradition of al-Andalus and Morocco by authors such as Ibn Bājja (d. 533/1139), Ibn Ṭūfayl (d. 581/1185–86) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd, d. 595/1198).\(^{37}\) Due to the influence they had on European philosophy, the philosophers of al-Andalus have always attracted much attention among Western researchers. Their story does not need to be retold. It is also significantly different from the developments in the Islamic east, to the extent that the latter can be studied separately. As of yet, there is no sign, for instance, that any philosopher active in Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia during the sixth/twelfth century ever read the works of these three. The second philosophical tradition of the sixth/twelfth century that I cannot do full justice to in this study is that of Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī. It forms the nucleus of what will later, in the second half of the seventh/thirteenth century, develop into the tradition of so-called Illuminatist (ishrāqī) Philosophy. Al-Suhrawardī was a highly original philosopher with an extremely rich body of work. He is included in this study, however, only to the extent in which it is necessary to explain the development from al-Ghazālī to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.

The period that I am dealing with and that I refer to as “post-classical” has recently also been referred to as “post-Avicennan.”\(^{38}\) It would be foolish to deny the very significant influence of Avicenna’s philosophical systems—or of elements thereof—on a long list of Arabic and Islamic philosophers who followed after him. By focusing on Avicenna as the sole center of the history of philosophy in Islam, however, the label “post-Avicennan” diminishes the role of other

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\(^{37}\) I describe these authors’ reactions to al-Ghazālī in a previous work, *Apostasie und Toleranz*, 388–461.

\(^{38}\) This development began with Dimitri Gutas’ article “The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century,” of 2002. For examples of the use of “post-Avicennan” see e. g. Adamson and Taylor in the introduction to their edited volume *Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, 6–8; Wisnovsky, “Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition,” 133; Eichner, *The Post-Avicennian Philosophical Tradition and Islamic Orthodoxy*; Bertolacci, “Arabic and Islamic Metaphysics,” with a chapter on the “post-Avicennian period” covering, among others, al-Ghazālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.
very important actors—most importantly that of al-Ghazālī—and prevents us from understanding developments in that history as being driven by significant philosophical differences. Post-classical philosophy in Islam, I argue in this book, generates out of the interplay between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī. In its formation at least two traditions come together which in the parlance of that time are described as falsafa and kalām. In this book I will attempt to offset the comparative neglect of al-Ghazālī in our current understanding of the formation of a new way of discussing and studying philosophy in Islam.

The questions that this book tries to answer touch on many aspects of the practice of philosophy during the sixth/twelfth century in the Islamic east. While the main focus lies on the development that led to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s two philosophical compendia The Eastern Investigations and The Compendium on Philosophy and Logic, the book also asks about the material conditions of practicing philosophy, about the patronage that philosophers received, and about those patrons and their motives. Another important set of questions is connected to the relationship between philosophy and religious law. Did religious scholars stigmatize or even persecute those who practiced philosophy? To answer all these questions, this book is divided into three main parts. The first part examines the context of post-classical philosophy in Islam during the sixth/twelfth century and the conditions of its practice. It starts out with a brief chapter on the century’s political and economic history that touches on a subject that has always loomed large in every Western discussion of post-classical philosophy in Islam, namely of political, economic, and cultural decline. Was the sixth/twelfth century a period of decline in the Islamic east? Recently, Deborah G. Tor has argued that during the mid-sixth/twelfth century the eastern Islamic world, and here particularly the key province of Khorasan, experienced a “catastrophic cultural and political eclipse.”

Given that Khorasan did, according to Tor, “very well until the 1150s”, that downfall was rather sudden and abrupt. It also preceded by fifty to sixty years the destruction caused by the arrival of the Mongols. The Mongol armies under Chinggis Khan crossed the border of the Islamic world in the spring of 616/1219, about a decade after the death of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in 606/1210, a date that marks the end of the period that this study analyzes. The Mongol conquest of the Islamic east has always been identified as the cause of steep economic and cultural decline. Tor, however, pre-dates Khorasan’s cultural downturn to an event in 548/1153. If true, this would mean that the major steps of development toward post-classical philosophy in Islam happened in a context of economic and cultural crisis. This should give us pause to reconsider about how a culture or society was in decline. The first chapter of this

book looks at the evidence for decline in the eastern Islamic world during the sixth/twelfth century and tries to problematize that category.

The other two chapters of the first part are each devoted to important questions related to the practice of philosophy. Chapter two looks at the terminological move from falsafa toward ḥikma. Following al-Ghazālī’s critique in his Tahāfut al-falāsifa, the word “falāsifa” acquired a distinctly denominational meaning in the sense of a religious group with identifiable religious tenets. It hence became similar to “Muʿtazilites” or “Ashʿarites.” This move shaped the subsequent understanding of “falsafa” as “Avicennism.” The third chapter deals with a subject that has always played an important role in every Western analysis of philosophy in Islam: the relationship between philosophy and the religious law (sharʿa). In his Tahāfut al-falāsifa, al-Ghazālī had condemned three teachings of Avicenna as unbelief and apostasy from Islam, potentially punishable by death. These three teachings were the falāsifa’s view that (1) the world has no beginning in time and exists from past eternity, that (2) God’s knowledge only includes concepts and classes of beings and no individuals, and that (3) there will be no resurrection of bodies in the afterlife. Elsewhere, I have dealt with the development in legal and theological thinking that led to al-Ghazālī’s judgment of apostasy and with the conditions under which it was passed.40 Here in this book, I will look into the effects that this and other condemnations had on the practice of philosophy during the sixth/twelfth century.

The second part of the book looks into the lives of philosophers in the Islamic east during the sixth/twelfth century. It first presents the textual sources and then discusses their biographies. In the historiography of philosophers during this period there is a change from falsafa to ḥikma that happens around 540/1145. Philosophical authors before that date are generally described as falāsifa, while most authors after that date as hukamāʾ. Falsafa and ḥikma should both be translated as “philosophy,” even if they have a slightly meaning in Arabic. The chapter explains the change and clarifies in what way falsafa is different from ḥikma, at least in the eyes of those authors who promote this difference. The bulk of this chapter, however, consists of a contextualized study of the philosophers’ lives, establishes a corpus of their writing, and—wherever it is able to do so—gives an overview on the chronology of their writings.

The third part of this book deals with the philosophical books themselves. This part starts with the question: What are the “philosophical books” (kutub ḥikmiyya) that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī refers to in several of his writings? This will bring us quickly to a corpus of three major works and several shorter epistles in which al-Rāzī presents his own ideas in the discipline of ḥikma.

40 Griffel, Apostasie und Toleranz, 17–335.
Most important are his early *Eastern Investigations* and *Compendium on Philosophy and Logic*. My analysis is divided into three chapters, one dealing with the teachings in these two books, the second with the development of the genre of ḥikma, and the third with the method that books of ḥikma use. While the goal in each of the three chapters will be to explain the teachings, genre, and methods of al-Rāzī’s *al-Mabāḥīth* and *al-Mulakhk̄has*, they will also look at the developments that lead toward them, focusing here particularly on works by al-Ghazālī—his *Doctrines of the Philosophers* (*Maqāṣid al-falāṣifā*)—and on Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī as well as Sharaf al-Dīn al-Masʿūdī.

Given that this book looks at the conditions of practicing philosophy, the lives of the philosophers and their teachings, readers may choose to read parts of the book without reading others. Those interested in the argumentative moves that post-classical philosophy makes and in its intellectual value, for instance, might jump to the third part without even looking at the earlier two. They will, of course, miss important insights about the context of these arguments, but still be able to follow their analysis without missing out on philosophical insights. Readers keen in knowing if philosophers in Islam suffered from persecution, on the other hand, might jump to the third chapter of the first part. Each part was written in a way that it can stand on its own, while there is also no overlap between the different elements of the book and no repetition.