Review of ethical theories in Islam, by Majid Fakhry

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This book is an important supplement to the author’s widely used *History of Islamic Philosophy*, following a similar approach and focusing on the ethical theories of key Islamic philosophers and a few religious authors—including al-Ghazali, Ibn Hazm, and Fakhr al-Razi—who were especially influenced by the philosophical tradition. The writings discussed in detail here—almost all in Arabic—are entirely drawn from premodern thinkers, ranging from al-Kindi (d. 866) to al-Dawwani (d. 1501). As explained in the introduction, the focus of this work on abstract ethical theory required leaving out many influential forms of more "applied" ethical teaching in Islamic cultures, including such vast fields as Islamic law, learned and vernacular Islamic literatures (*adabiyat*), and the many forms of spiritual teaching associated with Sufism. Although some of those broader Islamic ethical traditions are briefly touched on in the treatment of religious writers, interested readers eventually will have to turn to more detailed individual studies in order to discover the actual political and social contexts and intentions, and the wider influences, of each of the ethical theories summarized here.

The discussion of philosophic ethical theories, beginning with al-Kindi, is preceded by two shorter sections summarizing major ethical issues in the religious traditions that so strongly influenced the expression (if less often the underlying problematic) of these Islamic thinkers. These traditions include the scriptural sources of the Quran and prophetic *hadith*, and the ethical positions of the Mutazilite and Asharite theological schools. The broader ethical issues highlighted in these opening chapters raise fundamental questions of metaphysics, psychology, and political philosophy, and nonspecialist students unfamiliar with these complex traditions may need to refer to more specialized studies to fill in that wider philosophic context for each thinker. Fortunately, the author has provided a helpful selective bibliography for this purpose, including available translations of primary sources. A fifth background chapter surveys the "Greek Sources of Philosophical Ethics," stressing the importance of popular Stoic and nomological materials, as well as the translations of actual Platonic and Aristotelean texts available to these writers.

The central section on philosophic ethics covers the ethical writings of ten Islamicate philosophers, briefly summarizing the ethical teachings of major thinkers (such as al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes), while providing detailed paraphrases of ethical works by lesser-known figures such as Yahya ibn Adi, Miskawayh, Tusi, and al-Dawwani. Here the problematic linkages between ethics and political philosophy and psychology provide the major connecting themes. The final section on religious ethics, after an introductory

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1 New York: Columbia University Press, 1983 (2nd ed.).
chapter on the "traditionalism" and ascetic ethics of early Islam, summarizes the ethical writings of five religious thinkers from the 11th and 12th centuries. In these discussions the author alludes more directly to the broader legal (with al-Mawardi) and spiritual (with al-Ghazali) dimensions of Islamic ethical teaching. The textual summaries are generally accurate and reliable, although the narrow focus on ethical writings means that inquiring readers must turn to more comprehensive studies for deeper interpretation.

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