Ишрак

إشراق

Ежегодник исламской философии

№ 10

2022

Озарение • Illumination •

Ишрак • إشراق • Озарение • Illumination

Ишрак • إشراق • Озарение • Illumination

Ishraq

إشراق

Islamic philosophy yearbook

№ 10

2022

Ишрак

إشراق

Ежегодник
исламской философии

№ 10
2022

Издание подготовлено при поддержке
Фонда исследований исламской культуры имени Ибн Сины

Десятый выпуск ежегодника исламской философии «Ишрак («Озаре-
ние») содержит 24 статьи на русском, английском и французском языках,
посвященных широкому спектру актуальных проблем исламской фило-
софской мысли и принадлежащих перу ведущих российских и зарубежных
специалистов.

Для специалистов в области исламской философии и религиоведения.

The tenth issue of the Islamic Philosophy Yearbook "Ishraq" contains 24
articles in Russian, English and French, dealing with a wide range of topics
current in the Islamic philosophical thought and authored by the leading Russian
and foreign experts.

СОДЕРЖАНИЕ * CONTENTS

II
ЛОГИКА
*
Logic

III
К ИСТОРИИ «ИСФАХАНСКОЙ ФИЛОСОФСКОЙ ШКОЛЫ»
*
Towards the History of Isfahan Philosophical School

IV
ФЕНОМЕНОЛОГИЯ И СРАВНИТЕЛЬНАЯ ФИЛОСОФИЯ
*
Phenomenology and Comparative Philosophy

V
ПАМЯТИ ГЛАВНОГО РЕДАКТОРА
*
In Memory of Chief Editor

In memoriam

II
ЛОГИКА
*
LOGIC

Andrey V. Smirnov
(*Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences*)*

BEING AND PROCESS:
HOW TO 'EDIFY' THE 'ARAB REASON'
(AND ANY REASON AT ALL)**

In this paper I will try to explain what is meant by its heading, traveling from the subtitle to the title. My text will be developing, that is, unfolding, what is already there enfolded as its heading.

So, we start with the subtitle: 'How to edify the Arab reason'. This phrase bears reference to the two outstanding contemporary philosophers.

The first of the two is Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī (1936–2010). He is generally recognized as one of the most prominent Arab philosophers of our time. He published extensively in Arabic, and some of his writings were translated into English. He is the author of many books, but the most important of his publications is the four-volume "Critique of Arab Reason" (*Naqd al-ʿaql al-ʿarabī*). Initially al-Jābirī intended to publish only the two volumes of his

----

* 12/1 Goncharnaya Street, Moscow 109240, Russian Federation. E-mail: public@avsmirnov.info

Critique, namely, 'Formation of Arab Reason' and 'Structure of Arab Reason', but later he added to those another two: 'Arab Political Reason' and 'Arab Ethical Reason'. Al-Jābirī's books were reprinted almost every year and won wide appreciation. They also met with severe critique among the Arab philosophers and intellectuals generally (e.g., *al-Ṭarābīshī*, 4-volume series 'Naqd Naqd al-ʿaql al-ʿarabī').

The basic idea that al-Jābirī elaborates in his 'Critique' is the following. The humankind developed the two (not the only one, but the two), but only the two, distinct reasons (*ʿaql*). The first he calls the Greek-European, the other one — the Arab reason. They are not simply different, but mutually irreducible. Yet both are full-fledged kinds of reason, for each of them produces a certain type of knowledge, provides means for establishing the truth and discriminating between true and false, serves as a basis for a certain type of culture and civilization, etc. Al-Jābirī elaborates in detail on the concept of Arab reason, which he understands as a certain episteme, that is, a set of means which the Arab culture provides for the one who belongs to it for acquiring and processing knowledge. Basing himself on the French philosopher André Lalande, al-Jābirī holds that each of the Greek-European and the Arab reason is the 'constituted reason' (*ʿaql mukawwan*), and the fact the they are 'constituted' accounts for their difference and irreducibility, while there is a universal 'constituting' reason (*ʿaql mukawwin*), which acts as a 'constitutor' of each of those two diverse kinds of reason.

This is a rough outline of al-Jābirī's ideas relevant for the topic of this paper. His books are very deep, important and convincing, but the weakest point of his theory is, to my mind, the lack of answer to the question: how is the Arab (or, for that case, Greek-European) reason constituted, and what is the constituting (universal) reason? Let me leave this question open (I will address it later) and move on to the second great figure whom the subtitle of my talk refers to, namely, the French philosopher and sinologist François Jullien.

He is the author of many fascinating books. I will pay special attention to the one called 'Le détour et l'accès: Stratégies du sens en Chine, en Grèce'[1]. Here François Jullien explains why at all he became a sinologist. When I started studying Greek philosophy, he says, I could not appreciate its originality, because it is too familiar to the Europeans. Of course, Europe of today is not ancient Greece, and yet too many things in European culture and thought go back to the Greeks and are grounded in their philosophy and their

---

[1] *Jullien F.* Detour and access: strategies of meaning in China and Greece / Transl. by S. Hawkes. New York: Zone Books, 2000.

worldview. This is why, whenever we study the Greeks, François Jullien says, we encounter ourselves. So to appreciate the Greek thought and to understand its significance and magnitude, one has to establish a "theoretical distance" (*écart theorique*) separating him/herself from it. We have to distance ourselves from the Greeks to understand what they really mean in history of thought. We have a good word in Russian for it: *ostranit'*, coined by Shklovsky: it means 'to move something away in order to make it look strange instead of familiar', as if you have noticed it for the first time. This is exactly what is meant by François Jullien. But now the question is: how? How can we distance ourselves — from ourselves? If the Greeks are the very basis of European thought, then if a European philosopher wants to distance him/herself from the Greeks, it sounds like demolishing one's own foundation of thinking, depriving oneself of the basis of rationality.

This sounds like a paradox, and François Jullien is well aware of it. Europe has never known China, he says, and vice versa. This is so because this task of distancing oneself from one's own foundations of thought had never been carried out, moreover, such a task had never been thought of. And yet without it you will never get an idea of China, François Jullien claims. And not only of China. Following his line of argument, we discover that this holds for Greeks as well, and, ergo, for Europe. If it is true that European philosophy had never succeeded in establishing a 'theoretical distance' from itself (from its Greek foundations), then it means it has never been ultimately reflective: it had never disclosed the ultimate foundations of itself.

It is only now that the true meaning of François Jullien's question becomes clear. For philosophy to be philosophy, that is, to carry out the task of critically exploring and questioning its own foundations, it has to do what François Jullien is speaking about: it has to move away from itself, as if totally forgetting itself, and look critically at its own foundation, its own premises and its own beginnings, its starting point, — look at it from the outside. And doing so, philosophy has to keep out of sight its own starting point, the foundation of its own reasoning, it has to refrain from building itself upon it — otherwise it will not carry out the task of disclosing its ultimate foundations. If the basis of European philosophy and European reason is not completely deconstructed, then it will be guiding the ultimate reflective analysis and inevitably distort it. No matter how powerful your binocular is, you cannot see your binocular with your binocular. The mirror is of no help either: you can see anything in the mirror except the mirror itself; your eye is capable of discerning anything around you but not the eye itself. You have to have 'an other point of view', as François Jullien puts it, in order to notice, appreciate and analyze the ultimate foundations of your own thought. And

this 'other point of view' has to be completely independent of 'your own' — that is, for François Jullien, of the Greeks.

Here comes the task of constructing, edifying (*édifier*, as François Jullien says) 'China' as the 'other point of view' that we need, independent of the Greeks. I will call this 'Jullien's criterion': basic independence of the Greek-European rationality. François Jullien puts 'China' in quotation marks: 'China' is a 'point of view' to be constructed, independently of our own point of view. We do not possess it; it is an aim yet to achieve. This is why François Jullien says Europeans never knew China: yes, this 'other point of view' has never been constructed starting from the relevant basis. Jullien is very critical of the existing methodologies of comparative studies, and with good reason. Let me call the task of constructing 'an other point of view' 'Jullien's task'. It has to be carried out, let me remind, according to Jullien's criterion, that is, it has to be constructed as if from nothing. We have to carry it out distancing ourselves from ourselves — from the basis of our own rationality.

This is a rough outline of the problem that I will be addressing. I argue that Jullien's task can be accomplished, that is, that the 'Arab reason' can be constructed ('edified') as 'an other point of view', meeting Jullien's criterion: it will be independent of the Greek-European rationality, resting on the basis of its own. — It is not a 'resource' to draw upon by the European reason; it is a full-fledged *alternative* to the European reason.

Now, how can Jullien's task be carried out? At first glance, it looks like a paradox. If we abandon our own point of view, we are left — with what? Seemingly with nothing. We are permitted to take nothing from the abode of Greek-European thought, exactly as Jullien requires. Then how at all can we construct the new point of view?

Suppose we deconstruct completely, to the last element, our rationality. What are we left with? Is it nothing or something? If nothing, then how do we proceed, without any starting point? We are sort of suspended in the void. And if something, then the deconstruction had not been completed. This looks like a dilemma.

My answer is that we are left neither with nothing constructed nor with something constructed; we are left with an ability to construct. Pure ability, taken as if unpracticed.

'Ability to construct' is a metaphor, of course. Let me decipher it: it is an ability of subject-predicate linking-together. The English word 'linking' is perhaps too shallow to express what I mean; I use the Russian *svyaznost'* which is only partially covered by 'linking' or 'linkage'. Yet I can think of no better counterpart for *svyaznost'* in English.

So, when we deconstruct the rationality that we are accustomed to, we are left with the ability of producing the subject-predicate linkage. This is the starting point to construct any specific reason, be it Greek-European or Arab. (Or whatever; I am speaking about those two, but this is by far not an exhaustive list.) This pure, unspecified ability to produce the subject-predicate linkage is universal for human beings. I think it is worth while to propose a hypothesis saying that this ability serves as a dividing line between human and non-human consciousness (or intellect), be it the intellect of animals or artificial intelligence.

Since this ability is universal, we may call it, according to al-Jābirī, and after Andre Laland, 'the constituting reason'. But this is only *pure* ability, that is, ability not put into practice. This is a very important thing. It shows the limits of universal, when the word 'universal' is applied to human mind. Only pure ability, that it, only 'zero reason', reason not yet constructed but ready to be constructed, may be called universal. And any constructed reason is that or this reason, always *some specific* reason — be it Greek-European or Arab reason (to use al-Jābirī's terms), or 'China', as Jullien put it, and not the universal reason. This places the issue of universal rationality (or anything presumably universal, be it universal ethics or universal principles) into a completely new perspective.

The reason constructed by virtue of practicing the subject-predicate linking ability is the 'constituted reason' of al-Jābirī – Lalande, or 'an other point of view' of Jullien distanced from any other and resting on the basis of its own. This is always a specific, and not a universal, reason.

Now, why subject-predicate linking ability? Because it is the intersection and the starting point for (at least) three lines which may be called constituting for human mind and human reason. Again, this is not an exhaustive list, but I confine myself to those as the most important ones. I think, though, that any line of constructing the human rationality starts exactly at that point of subject-predicate linking.

Those three lines are:
• the line of language; or, to be exact, the line of speech, that is, of practicing the language (and not language understood as a system of formal means);
• the line of theoretical discourse, including logic and logical proof;
• the line of the basic philosophical problem of unity and multiplicity.
Let me comment shortly on those three lines.

The unit of speech is a sentence. We speak using sentences, not using words. A sentence in its basic, nuclear form is a subject-predicate link. We say *The sky is blue*: *blue* is the predicate, *sky* is the subject, and *is* acts as a copula linking

the first to the second. This is a very simple example, and we encounter such examples many times a day, every day. But what really happens when we say *The sky is blue*, intending to say it (that is, expressing our thought in the form of language), or when we hear *The sky is blue*, and understand it? What happens? A miracle, no less: the one (thought) becomes two (subject + predicate); or, rather, three, if we consider the copula to be the third element; and, vice versa, the three become one, as we hear the three words (subject + predicate), and deduce the one thought. For *The sky is blue* is a unit, it is one and indivisible thought; and at the same time it is three, for each of the three stays separate and independent of others, for each can participate individually in other sentences. The three is one, and the one is three. They are one and three at the same time: not ceasing to be three, they are one, and vice versa.

How does it happen and how is it possible? The answer was provided more than two centuries ago by the famous Leonard Euler. His diagrams are known to every schoolchild (this is the case in Russia and, I think, everywhere), because they are used to illustrate the basic notions and basic laws of the set theory: intersection, inclusion, etc. In that capacity Euler diagrams were further developed by Venn, and they are generally known as Euler-Venn diagrams.

This is how they are used today, but it is not to this end that they were introduced by Euler himself. He intended to demonstrate to the arrogant professors of Aristotelian logic of his time that their sophisticated science was good for nothing, for it could be easily substituted by very simple drawings which every person understands at a glance, without any training. So he used simple closed curves to illustrate exactly what I am talking about: the possible types of relations between the subject and the predicate of a sentence. So if you draw two simple closed curves, say, circles, and place the smaller one totally inside the bigger, and denote the smaller by *A* and the bigger by *B*, then this drawing speaks for itself: *A is B*. And if *A* stand for the *sky*, and *B* for *blue*, then the figure reads: *The sky is blue*. Negation and quantification are signified by other types of the simple closed curves' configurations. For example, if *A* is totally outside *B*, it reads: *The sky is not blue*.

Now suppose we have three circles of different size, so that circle *B* is completely contained by circle *C*, and circle *A* is completely contained by *B*. Looking at that figure, one would say immediately: yes, this is a *Barbara* syllogism: *Every B is C, A is B, ergo, A is C*. How do we know it? The illustration is only a drawing, and it is comprehended (so to say, absorbed by our mind) at a glance, immediately, not step by step. And there are no 'ergo' and no 'is' on that drawing. And yet we know, and without doubt — we know absolutely — that '*A is C*' is a true conclusion. Why and how?

The answer to the 'why' question is: we know it by intuition. This is the limit of our rational explanation; and at the same time — the basis for any rational explanation, and not only rational explanation, but for the usage of Indo-European languages that depend upon the 'to be' copula as a subject-predicate linking device. This is the cornerstone for the Greek rationality that Jullien is talking about, and this is the basis for Greek-European reason of al-Jābirī. But what is intuition? It is not a divine inspiration or an inborn capacity. Rather, it is personal and collective experience, trained through numerous cultural practices, packed and compressed 'in one's head', so to say, so that it unfolds as if automatically. We read the drawing with the three concentric circles as a *Barbara* syllogism because we are trained to do it automatically.

The answer to the 'how' question is: our reading of this diagram depends exclusively on the intuition of the space, to be more exact, on the intuition of the closed sections of the space. This intuition has spatial character — this is primarily important.

Let us elaborate a bit on this. Imagine you have a box, divided into two parts, or two sections. Let us call the box *B*, and call its two inside sections 'section *A*' and 'section *non-A*'. Now imagine you keep buttons in the box *B*, and the rule is that all the round buttons, and only the round buttons, go into section *A*, and buttons of all the other shapes are placed into *non-A* section. The box *B* is full. Now suppose you take a button from the box *B*, but you do not know from which section exactly, and yet you know for sure that it will be either round or not-round: only one of the two, and necessarily one of the two, which means *B* is either *A* or *non-A*, *B* cannot be both and it cannot be neither of the two. Then, if you take a button from the *A* section, you know for sure that it will be round, and not any other shape: *A* is *A*, and *A* is not *non-A*. The three laws of Aristotelian logic are here, at our fingertips, substantiated by the properties of the closed space sections.

The foundation for laws of logic is the same as the foundation for usage of Indo-European languages with the 'to be' copula, and this foundation is the spatial intuition of the subject-predicate linkage.

If the subject follows this rule of predication (*A* is *B*, *The sky is blue*) substantiated by the spatial intuition and illustrated by Euler diagrams, such a subject is called 'substance' in the language of philosophy, and you can develop further the metaphysics of being and the genus-species logic and ontology proceeding from the same spatial intuition of the subject-predicate linkage.

Those are the basic milestones on the way to 'edify' (using Jullien's expression) the Greek, or the Greek-European, reason. And this is the path of being, followed by and large, by the Greek and, later, European thought.

This explains the first word of the title of my paper: being. In the remaining part of it I will try to make my way to the second word: process, and thus to 'edify the Arab reason' taking the same steps that led us on the way to the Greek-European reason, but taking them differently.

The basic thing is the intuition of the subject-predicate linkage. And if the 'Arab reason' meets Jullien's criterion, that is, if it stays at a 'theoretical distance' from the Greek-European reason, then it has to be based on an intuition different from the spatial intuition of subject-predicate linking practiced by the Indo-European languages and lying at the basis of the logical and theoretical discourse of the substance-based metaphysics. But then, if this is so, and if we do not belong to the Arab culture, which means we are not native Arabic speakers and were not socialized in the milieu of Arab culture practices, we do not possess this intuition. So our path to it will be difficult, not like it was in the case of the Greek reason, and this intuition will not easily disclose itself. Yet it is possible to get an idea of it. I will take three step towards it.

The first step: the *cogito ergo sum* formula. After Descartes, this formula guides, this way or the other, European philosophical discourse. But let me ask a simple question: why *ergo sum*? *Cogito* is any activity of my mind: I think, therefore, I am; I doubt my existence, therefore, I am. Etc., etc. *Ergo sum* has to be taken for granted, for I have to exist in order to think, doubt, etc. This can hardly be disputed. But why not *ergo ago*, why not 'therefore, I act'? To think, to doubt, etc. (take any example of the human mind activity given by Descartes) means to act. Isn't it so? Imagine we live in a sort of the universe of Parmenides, where no movement is possible: the universe of total being. Will *cogito* be possible in such a universe? No, of course not. It means that we have to add to the *cogito ergo sum* formula: *et ergo ago*. Then the formula of human consciousness reads *cogito ergo sum et ergo ago*: I think, therefore, I am and I act. And it means that action, and not only being, has to be taken as an ultimate foundation, grounded in nothing but itself, and serving as a basis for everything else. Had this path been followed by European philosophy, and Greek-European reason in general? The answer is negative. But the way of *ergo ago*, I argue, is exactly the way followed by the Arab thinking and lying at the foundation of the 'Arab reason'.

The second step. Henry Bergson, "An Introduction to Metaphysics":

> Pure duration… excludes all idea of juxtaposition, reciprocal externality, and extension.

Properly speaking, everything is already said. Bergson unfolds his thought further, though:

> Let us… imagine an infinitely small elastic body, contracted, if it were possible, to a mathematical point. Let this be drawn out gradually in such

a manner that from the point comes a constantly lengthening line. Let us fix our attention not on the line as a line, but on the action by which it is traced.

Thus Bergson passes from the "line", understood in terms of space, to the "action".

> Let us bear in mind that this action, in spite of its duration, is indivisible…

Here comes the important point: the indivisibility of action. There is one condition, though:

> …indivisible if accomplished without stopping, that if a stopping-point is inserted, we have two actions instead of one, that each of these separate actions is then the indivisible operation of which we speak, and that it is not the moving action itself which is divisible, but, rather, the stationary line it leaves behind it as its track in space.

This "track in space" is a tribute to the habit of European thought which conceptualizes both time and action in terms of space. But Bergson takes the last step, getting rid even of that:

> Finally, let us *free ourselves from the space* which underlies the movement in order to consider *only the movement itself*, the act of tension or extension; in short, *pure mobility*[2].

This is exactly what we need to get an idea of the intuition of pure action, or pure process. Firstly, the action does not 'take place': it has no place and is not basically dependant on space. Secondly, it is not measured by anything except itself: no action, though it is a duration, can be measured, because it cannot be divided, that is, it cannot be split into lesser units. Each action (or each process) is an irreducible unit, and cannot be reduced to anything else. This is exactly what explains the nature of the Arab-Islamic metaphysics elaborated by the Muʿtazila, the first Islamic philosophers, independently of any Greek influence.

The third step. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1149–1209):

> Time is an imaginary duration coming out of the dark depths of the world of *'azal* (Beginninglessness) and flowing towards the darkness of the world of *'abad* (Endlessness). As if it were a river, flowing out of the womb of the mountain of Begininglessness and running until it enters the womb of the mountain of Endlessness: we do not know where it comes from and where it goes to[3].

---

[2] *Bergson H*. An Introduction to Metaphysics, New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912, pp. 13–14 (the italics are mine. — *A.S.*).

[3] *Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn*. Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr (The Great Commentary on the Qur'ān). Bayrūt: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2000. Vol. 1. P. 224.

This metaphor of a river flowing between the initiating end (the moun-
tain of Beginninglessness) and the receiving end (mountain of Endlessness)
perfectly completes what H.Bergson told us about pure action. Now we
have the full paradigm: the Initiator (the Agent), the Action (the Flux), and
the Recipient (the Patient). All the three are indispensable, for if you remove
any of them, the whole construction corrupts: you dismantle everything totally
by deconstructing any part of it.

So, the Action, or the Process, is the basic reality (it is a thing), irreducible
to anything else, and grounding everything else — in fact, the thingness itself.
This worldview is embedded in Arab pre-Islamic thinking, and it is there in
Islamic autochthonic metaphysics.

Suppose we got an idea of this intuition of a flux, or of an action, or
of a process: now, how does it display itself in Arabic language?

Speaking of the Arabic literary language, we mean language of the Qur'ān
codified in every detail by Arabic Linguistic Tradition and unchanged, by and
large, during the last 14 centuries. The fact is that this language does not use,
and, moreover, cannot use, the copula 'to be'. — But it is only natural, and
expected, in the light of what was said: we deal here with a different intuition
and a different device of subject-predicate linking. Independent of the spa-
tial intuition, and therefore independent of the substance-based metaphysics,
genus-species logic. (You cannot say '*A* is *B*' in Arabic, strictly speaking.)

What is the intuition of the subject-predicate linking? Arabic Linguistic
Tradition calls it *isnād* — lit. 'leaning-upon'. It had not yet been appreciated
in Western scholarship as a full-fledged linking device and a full alternative to
the 'to be' copula — exactly because it cannot be reduced to the spatial intui-
tion underlying the usage of the copula 'to be' as a subject-predicate linking
device in Indo-European languages and Greek-European thinking[4], although
it had been pointed out that Arabic lacks any counterpart for the 'to be' copula
and does not need it[5].

Isnād is a process — it is an action flowing between the subject and the
predicate of a sentence that glues them together. They remain two distinct enti-
ties — and yet they are one unit, when viewed as a phrase (*jumla*).

Last but not the least, the logic. The apodictic argument is based not on the
intuition of the closed space units containing one another. It based on the intui-

---

[4] For more detail, see *Smirnov A.V.* "To Be" and Arabic Grammar: The Case of *kāna*
and *wujida* // Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook: 2016. No. 7. Moscow: Sadra, 2016.
P. 174–201.

[5] *Badawi E.-S., Carter M.G., Gully A.* Modern written Arabic: a comprehensive gram-
mar. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. P. 307, 400.

tion of a process, and therefore does not need to use the general premises. Here is the most simple abstract presentation of an apodictic, process-based argument:

> **A** *acts* (is linked by P^1) upon **B**,
> because (exactly because) **B** *acts* (is linked by P^2) on **C**,
> while **D** acts (is linked by P^2) on **C**,
> then inevitably **A** acts (is linked by P^1) on **D**

Or, in terms of human language:

> **A**rthur *likes* **B**eatrice
> because (exactly because) **B**eatrice *adores* **C**ats
> while **D**iana *adores* **C**ats,
> then inevitably **A**rthur *likes* **D**iana

More detail on that type of argument and the historical circumstances of its elaboration in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is provided in one of my articles[6].

Thus the 'Arab reason' is 'edified' — distanced from the European, meeting the Jullien's criterion.

Plurality of reasons opens completely new perspectives for philosophy. We need a new philosophy — philosophy capable of dealing with new realities: with the irreducible multiplicity of theoretical reasons.

---

[6] *Smirnov A.V.* Is a process-based logic possible? // Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook: 2019. № 9. Moscow: Sadra, 2019. P. 287–297.