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Arabic Philosophy of Religion
in the 20th century

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Philosophy of religion aims at clarifying the phenomena of religion, which is traditionally the specific historically determined religion of the philosopher herself, and based on that to give guidance in today's increasing interreligious encounters. For this purpose, philosophers of religion consult existing positions of philosophy of religion such as the classics Kant or Hegel. My research project is located within the field of philosophy of religion, although, I criticise its traditionally perceived task and go beyond it. So, I wish to add yet another task to philosophy of religion, namely the dialog with philosophical thoughts on religion made by proponents of other religions and the critical assessment of their content. In my research project, I devote myself to this task and explore positions within Arabic philosophy of religion that developed mostly within the frame of the historically determined religion of Islam.

In the Arab World, philosophy of religion (*falsafat al-dîn*) is a relatively recent philosophical discipline with its first monograph appearing 1964. If and how Arabic philosophers of religion refer to earlier theories of philosophy of religion and thus this discipline is older than presumed needs to be examined. Arabic philosophers of religion form a heterogeneous group, only linked to each other by the vaguely determined religious topics and philosophical methods. In my research project, I approach Arabic philosophy of religion systematically in order to classify it. Hypothetically, I act on the assumption of three types that result from the perspective and attitude of the respective philosophers: (1) The apologetic type conceives the religion of Islam as given and searches to uncontestedly reinforce religious sources, principles, and beliefs by means of rational inquiry. Abdul Jabbar Al Rifai (Iraq) is for example an exponent of this type. (2) The type critical to religion sees religion as an obstacle of the absolute sovereignty of reason and aims at limiting its significance. Sadiq Jalal al-Azm (Syria/Lebanon) holds this position for example. (3) The critical philosophical type conceives the religion of Islam as given just as the apologetic type does, although, she examines its various aspects rationally and according to philosophical criteria. Mohamed Osman Elkhosht (Egypt) is for example an exponent of this type. In my research project, I aim at verifying this preliminary typology, or, in case it proves wrong, at developing a more concise and differentiated typology of Arabic philosophy of religion in the 20th century. For this, I use Arabic texts that deal straightforwardly with philosophy of religion (*falsafat al-dîn*).

But, given the fact that philosophers of religion usually work on their own respective religion and often argue for the crucial importance of this personal tie for the act of understanding, how is it possible to understand Arabic philosophy of religion? In order to answer this question and to find a guideline for my own understanding, I draw on the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and on its modifications by proponents of intercultural hermeneutics namely Hamid Reza Yousefi.

From the methodological perspective, Gadamer's hermeneutic circle and Yousefi's encyclical hermeneutics in dialogue form necessitate to detect the preconception of the object of research. In this regard, I discuss views on Arabic philosophy of religion and on Islam from within "western" philosophy of religion as well as the self-conception of Arabic philosophers of religion. As for studying the texts of Arabic philosophy of religion itself, I draw on the methods of reconstruction, historical criticism, and philosophical inquiry.