

Thoughts on the Concept of Islamic Philosophy: Associations and Content

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Abstract:

In this article, I aim to examine the associations concerning the term 'Islamic philosophy'. Islamic philosophy, as a discipline, encompasses significant discussions on philosophical matters. Our primary concern will be to investigate the feasibility and challenges involved in studying Islamic philosophy in contemporary times. Another objective of this article is to address the issue of broadening the scope of Islamic philosophy. Scholars in this field adopt diverse approaches. When tracing the trajectory of intellectual history, the domain of Islamic philosophy signifies a distinct formation wherein religion and philosophy intersect. By referring to Islamic philosophy, we specifically denote a discipline distinct from Kalam, Sufism and Fiqh. The differentiation of Islamic philosophy from other branches of Islamic scholarship is elucidated based on its epistemological framework and methodological foundations. However, this particular discipline is subject to various criticisms and reactions from both religious and philosophical perspectives. The mindset that upholds religious principles and values as its reference point may find discomfort in associating Islam with philosophy, as it accentuates the primacy of religion. Conversely, the philosophical standpoint, which exalts philosophy, opposes the designation of Islamic philosophy, viewing religion as incongruous and incompatible with philosophy.

Keywords: *Islamic Philosophy, Philosophical Issues, Methodology in Islamic Philosophy*

Introduction

The evolution of history and humanity unfolds through a broad perspective obtained from diverse interpretations. Portraits of philosophers, Sufis, theologians, and scientists characterize prominent figures within specific fields of knowledge. The emergence of these distinct nomenclatures is primarily determined by variations in interpretations regarding the sources and values of information. The position, role, and methodology of individuals who prioritize reason differ significantly from those who rely on intuition and experience as guiding principles. What we seek to underscore here is that the distinctions between a physicist, philosopher, theologian or Sufi, and between a Sufi, poet or theologian, are rooted in the sources, values, and functional aspects of knowledge. The philosopher embodies the fundamental role within the philosophical framework.²

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The history of Islamic philosophy constitutes a system of thought that intersects with various philosophical subjects, influenced by its foundational principles and shaping subsequent developments. In essence, the history of Islamic philosophy endeavors to elucidate the human experience, knowledge acquisition, understanding, and interpretation processes as part of a comprehensive system that traces the evolution of thought across cultures, languages, and religions. It is humanity that imparts value, significance, and validity to all forms of knowledge and pursuits. As individuals strive to comprehend and derive meaning from life, the cognitive and sensory attributes of human beings unveil interpretations and new perspectives.

The concept of Islamic philosophy juxtaposes two fundamental notions. Hence, this discourse, recognized as Islamic philosophy and deemed a specialized field of inquiry, underscores the convergence of religion and philosophy. The notion of Islamic philosophy carries diverse connotations and interpretations, symbolizing a fusion of religious and philosophical elements. Islamic philosophy may be construed as an endeavor to articulate the philosophical underpinnings of Islam. While the term "Islamic philosophy" suggests a juxtaposition of Islam, grounded in divine revelation, with philosophy, a human endeavor, it does not imply that Islam is synonymous with philosophy. A perspective devoid of belief in revelation may perceive Islam solely as a philosophical doctrine. Nevertheless, emphasis on the philosophy of Islam can delineate an interpretation emerging from the broader teachings of Islam. In this context, emphasis on philosophy connotes a shared meaning with comprehension and perspective.

The emphasis on Islam within the term "Islamic Philosophy" does not imply that Islam is itself a philosophy; rather, it signifies the cultural and geographical milieu within which philosophy emerges. A closer examination of the history of Islamic philosophy reveals the participation of mystical, ingenious, and deist philosophers who inhabit the spiritual landscape of Islam. Delving into the scope and fundamental characteristics of Islamic philosophy unveils its philosophical underpinnings. As dynamic beings, humans possess the capacity to continually reinterpret existing concepts and information, thereby generating new meanings and values. Investigating the nature of Islamic philosophy and its theoretical and practical dimensions necessitates a philosophical inquiry.

When referring to Islamic philosophy, we denote a discipline distinct from Kalam, Sufism, and Fiqh. The differentiation between Islamic philosophy and other branches of Islamic scholarship is elucidated based on its epistemological framework and methodological approach.

The term "Islamic philosophy" encapsulates the manner in which philosophy was cultivated by Muslim scholars within Islamic civilization, regardless of their religious affiliation. Moreover, it conveys a connotation that highlights the wisdom and philosophical tenets of Islam. The delineation between Islamic philosophy and Islamic theology (*Kalam*) remains a subject of ongoing debate. *Kalam* serves as a foundational source for Islamic philosophy, intersecting with disciplines such as Sufism and Islamic law (*Fiqh*).³

Theoretical Framework:

What we aim to highlight is that Islamic Philosophy, in its technical sense, encompasses disciplines such as Logic, Psychology, Physics, Metaphysical Knowledge, Ontology, Ethics and Political philosophy, extending beyond the well-known figures in this field. Even if an individual who engages with the topics of Islamic Philosophy in their works primarily produces works and systems in the fields of *Kalam*, Sufism, and *Fiqh*, their perspectives may align with approaches and interpretations inherent to Islamic philosophy. Embracing such a perspective not only enriches the field and its originality but also imbues it with dynamism.⁴ Tracing the trajectory of intellectual history, the domain known as Islamic Philosophy represents a unique convergence of religion and philosophy. However, this particular discipline faces various criticisms and reactions from both religious and philosophical perspectives. Those who adhere to religious principles and values may feel uneasy about associating Islam with philosophy, fearing it may overshadow the sanctity of religion. Conversely, proponents of philosophy may resist labeling it as Islamic philosophy, perceiving religion and philosophy as inherently incompatible.

Al-Kindi (d. 870), as commonly recognized, is regarded as the inaugural Islamic philosopher by scholars of the history of Islamic philosophy. The designation of Al-Kindi as the "first Islamic philosopher" implies the assertion that no philosopher emerged in the Islamic world prior to him. Al-Kindi retains this title unless modern researchers unearth a work by a figure from the classical period known for its theological or Sufi dimensions, delving deeply into metaphysical issues akin to ancient philosophy. Without the preservation of his philosophical works, Al-Kindi might have been regarded solely as a Mutazila theologian.

³ Abd al-Halim, Mahmud, *al-Taḥkīm al-falsafī fi'l-Islām* (Cairo, 1968); M. Saed Sheikh, *Studies Muslim Philosophy* (Lahor, 1973), 20; Nasr, Hossein Seyyed, *Islamic Philosophy, from its Origin to the Present* (New York, 2006), 31; Walzer, Richard, *Essays on Islamic Philosophy*, (Oxford 1962); Adamson Peter, "Al-Kindi and the Reception of Greek Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. P. Adamson and R.C. Taylor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Jackson Ray, *What is Islamic Philosophy*. (Routledge, 2014); Druart Therrese Anne, "Philosophy in Islam," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by A.S. McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 97-120.

⁴ Gutas, Dimitri, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, (Routledge, 1998),

Before Al-Kindi, scholars in theological and mystical disciplines engaged in evaluations of knowledge, existence, and morality. Investigating why they were not termed philosophers leads us to an examination of the intertwined relations among kalam, Sufism, and philosophy. When comparing Al-Kindi with Mutakallim Maturidi (853-944) and Ash'ari (879-941) theologians and Sufi Harris al-Muhasibi (781-857), several distinctions become apparent: Al-Kindi extensively utilized the works of ancient philosophers, systematically articulating views along their trajectory. His intellectual framework drew from religious sources and values, reflecting a tendency towards reconciling philosophy with religion. It is worth considering whether it is accurate to characterize Al-Kindi as the former, who, guided by reason, remains tethered to tradition, or as the latter, a scholar whose intellect is the sole source and free from constraints. Given Al-Kindi's opposition to Aristotle on numerous occasions due to his allegiance to the Qur'an, should we revoke his title as a philosopher and relegate him to the role of a defensive theologian owing to his unwavering commitment to "*nass*" (scriptural text)?

When we find references to Aristotle, Plato and ancient philosophers in the works of theologians or sufis, Maturidi, Ash'ari and Muhasibi, what prevents us from counting these names as philosophers? When we frame philosophy and its boundaries with its appearance shaped in early and medieval philosophies, of course Maturidi, Ash'ari and Muhasibi will stand far from the traditional philosopher type. Mā'turidi and Ash'ari, the "word commentators "*Mutakallim*" who undertook the task of defending religion, do not deserve to study the name of the philosopher as they bring a new interpretation, a new opening, a reminder, a connotation and movement to the human horizon? Its counterpart must have earned the name of the philosopher by having revealed the psychological aspects of the philosophy of freedom in Islamic philosophy. The inclusion of the names of Christian theologians in medieval, new and modern philosophical history books is another aspect of the subject. In our opinion, as a result of the criticism of philosophers and philosophers led by sociological and epistemological reasons in the Islamic world, the theologian and the Sufi opted to benefit from philosophy in a closed way. When philosophy was excluded in these circles, the bright minds of the theological and Sufi tradition must have been excluded from the philosophical system, in an axiom sense.

The theologian and the Sufi, as structured in the philosophy of antiquity, even if they do not benefit from the history of philosophy, can reach general conclusions with a discreet and clear mind free of prejudices, and with an intuition based on reasoning, observation and experience in matters such as knowledge, wealth and morality. It is useful to remind once

again that this is the goal of Ibn Tufayl's (d.1185) fiction. What is clear is that the activity called Islamic Philosophy is, in one aspect, the general name of a process that takes up and evaluates philosophical accumulation and tries to reconcile it with religious principles. It is known that various dynamics are involved in the formation of this system. In the history of Islamic Philosophy books, internal, external, domestic, foreign, philosophical, religious, sources are presented in terms of names and ideas in order to emphasize these sources when discussing the sources of Islamic philosophy.

When references to Aristotle, Plato and other ancient philosophers appear in the works of the theologians or Sufis like Maturidi, Ash'ari, and Muhasibi, what prevents us from regarding these figures as philosophers? When framing philosophy and delineating its boundaries through the lens of early and medieval philosophical traditions, it is evident that Maturidi, Ash'ari, and Muhasibi diverge from the conventional image of a philosopher. Maturidi and Ash'ari, known as "word commentators" (*Mutakallim*), who undertook the task of defending religion, deserve recognition as philosophers for their contributions in introducing new interpretations, insights, and movements to the intellectual landscape. Their counterparts, on the other hand, must earn the designation of philosopher by illuminating the psychological dimensions of freedom within Islamic philosophy.

The inclusion of Christian theologians' names in medieval, modern, and contemporary philosophical history books presents another aspect of this discussion. Due to sociological and epistemological critiques of philosophers and philosophical thought in the Islamic world, theologians and Sufis may have chosen to engage with philosophy in a limited manner. Consequently, when philosophy was marginalized within these circles, the brilliant minds within the theological and Sufi traditions were seemingly excluded from the philosophical discourse in principle. However, theologians and Sufis, while not necessarily drawing from the history of philosophy, can still arrive at overarching conclusions with a discerning and unprejudiced mind, grounded in reasoning, observation and experiential knowledge, particularly in areas such as epistemology, ethics and metaphysics. It is worth recalling that this is the objective of Ibn Tufayl's fictional narrative (d. 1185).

Research Objectives:

It is evident that Islamic Philosophy represents a multifaceted process that assimilates and evaluates philosophical heritage while seeking to harmonize it with religious principles. Various dynamics contribute to the formation of this system. In books on the history of Islamic philosophy, both internal and external sources, indigenous and foreign influences,

philosophical and religious perspectives are presented, emphasizing the diverse sources that inform Islamic philosophical discourse.

This process endeavored to draw from past experiences and transmit philosophical insights to subsequent generations by rearticulating and comprehending them within the context of their own culture and beliefs. Just as every thought is informed by preceding intellectual accumulations, each subsequent thought serves as a source for those that follow. The History of Islamic Philosophy, which encompasses various issues related to world philosophies and philosophers such as knowledge, existence, morality, logic and politics, has drawn from and contributed to numerous ideas throughout its formation and development.

Ancient philosophers played a crucial role as external influences in shaping the trajectory of Islamic philosophy. Consider for a moment an environment in which Muslim thinkers were not exposed to ancient philosophy. In such a scenario, scholars like Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, or others would have directly contemplated the Qur'an and Hadiths, potentially offering more open-minded perspectives on topics such as knowledge, morality, politics and mortality, guided by the Quranic principles activating the mind. However, Islamic philosophers encountered the philosophical legacies of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, ancient Iran, Egypt, the Mesopotamian basin and Indian thought due to the rapid dissemination and cultural interaction.

Thanks to diligent and conscious efforts to translate a significant portion of this intellectual heritage into Arabic, Islamic thinkers were exposed to diverse premises, interpretations, and perspectives. This imported knowledge significantly influenced Islamic thought, compelling scholars to seek associations and parallels with their own religious teachings and resources. Philosophical ideas from external sources could exhibit both similarities and differences with the internal dynamics of Islamic thought. In response to this, Islamic thinkers reached a pivotal juncture. The first possibility entails the Islamic thinker regarding philosophical heritage as an external source, continuing to draw from it, and endeavoring to reconcile it with the Quran and religious teachings as internal sources.

The Islamic thinker who engages with philosophy has the potential to evolve into an Islamic philosopher through their research and evaluations. On the other hand, the thinker who is aware of philosophy but deems philosophical knowledge unnecessary or inconsistent with religious principles may choose to continue their inquiries as a religious scholar without delving into philosophy. Despite their indifference to philosophy, some Islamic thinkers may still encounter significant insights and perspectives. This highlights an important emphasis we are trying to convey from historical precedents, as indicated by Ibn Tufayl. The portraits

of Hayy, Salaman, and Absal seem to underscore the ultimate convergence and partnership of truth between individuals nurtured by formal education and those shaped by experiential and observational learning processes.

The Quran serves as the most fundamental source of internal dynamics within Islamic Philosophy. It contains numerous elements that prompt human minds to engage in philosophical inquiry. Despite prejudiced approaches by Orientalists such as De Boer and Leon Gauthier throughout history, and contrary assertions by some, researchers like Henry Corbin regard the Quran as a source that nurtures and stimulates the intellect of Islamic philosophers.

Islamic philosophers have utilized sources from the Quran, especially hadith and religious literature, in two primary ways. Firstly, they directly reference Quranic verses in their works and quote them in support of their arguments. Secondly, Islamic philosophers draw inspiration from the Quran in general terms, addressing issues closely related to the philosophy of knowledge, existence, morality, politics, spirituality and the afterlife. They then make evaluations based on these inspirations, facilitating reconciliations between philosophy and religion.

The Challenges of Working in the History of Islamic Philosophy

The introduction of classical works of Islamic philosophers into Turkish has sparked interest among researchers who lack proficiency in Arabic but possess a background in philosophy. However, reliance solely on translations of these works may lead to a superficial understanding. Researchers often focus on classical problems of Islamic philosophy, heavily influenced by their knowledge of ancient philosophy, particularly Plato and Aristotle. Given our assumption that the originality of Islamic philosophy lies in details rooted in language philosophy, studying Islamic philosophy through translation without delving into etymological analysis complicates the endeavor of reaching comprehensive studies.⁵

A Call for In-Depth Studies: Beyond Superficial Engagement with Renowned Figures

The field of Islamic philosophy warrants a reassessment of its scope and purpose, particularly in distinguishing itself from Kalam and Sufism. Despite the contributions of scholars like al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd, studies on Islamic philosophers and their works remain limited. To broaden the field, it is imperative to have numerous researchers dedicated to each philosopher. It is essential to acknowledge that Islamic philosophers cannot be adequately understood and explored with just one or two studies. While studies on Plato and

⁵ Saruhan Müfit Selim, "İslâm Felsefesi ve Problemleri Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme." *Din Bilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 9, no. 3 (2009): 71-87.(some part of this article reevaluated for this article)

Aristotle continue to proliferate, Islamic philosophers are often left with insufficient attention, leading to repetition rather than innovation.

Exploring New Avenues and Innovations from Fresh Perspectives

In examining the metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological dimensions of politics, ethics and the philosophy of science within Islamic philosophy, there are ample opportunities for development, change and interpretation. These areas, which reflect the evolving nature of human attitudes and behaviors, serve as fertile grounds for exploration. While it may be challenging to break new ground in metaphysical and ontological realms, there is room for innovation, particularly with the addition of new characterizations. Emphasizing the philosophy of Islam expands the discourse to encompass the philosophical aspects of religion. This approach invites detailed analyses of the relationship between religion and philosophy, fostering multidimensional thought rooted in epistemology, phenomenology and ethical political science. Researchers in Islamic philosophy will uncover unique approaches to ontology, epistemology, morality, language and other themes within the Quran. Delving into topics such as the source and value of life, death and the relationship between soul and body from a philosophical perspective grounded in Quranic text adds depth to the discourse, challenging researchers to move beyond the role of mere commentators and theologians.

Islamic philosophers approach the concept of knowledge from a comprehensive perspective, examining its possibility, source and value. They employ a diverse range of terminology to delve into the nature and attributes of knowledge. According to Islamic philosophers, knowledge is the product of the mind's abstraction, obtained through understanding and recognition of things as they truly are, as succinctly expressed by Ghazali.

When addressing knowledge, Islamic philosophers adopt a broad perspective, considering its relationship with the knower. They explore the inner and outer cognitive faculties of individuals by delving into the psychological infrastructure of the "knowing" person, which includes discussions on the existence, definition, and distinctions of the soul. Islamic philosophers elucidate the characteristics and capacities of the vegetative, animal and human soul to elucidate the genesis of knowledge. After delineating the psychological and physiological infrastructure of knowledge, they gradually interpret the relationship between the mind and senses in the process of acquiring information, focusing on faculties such as power, action, benefactor and active mind. Additionally, the issue of prophethood is examined within the framework of knowledge, encompassing both its psycho-social value and its epistemological aspect.

Islamic philosophers assert that knowledge is attainable, with the senses and intellect serving as primary sources. They predominantly employ deductive reasoning in acquiring knowledge, aiming to derive particulars from universal information. Burhan, a rational proof expressing certainty on the path to knowledge, is crucial in this pursuit. These philosophers emphasize that precise knowledge entails believing in the existence or non-existence of something and the human soul, equipped with innate knowledge, facilitates the acquisition of initial information.

When considering the sources of knowledge, Islamic philosophy showcases its versatility and richness by distinguishing rational, experiential, and intuitive knowledge, evaluating them holistically in terms of validity. Sensory perception plays a pivotal role in leading individuals to knowledge, as humans perceive natural events and objects through their senses. Islamic philosophers, particularly al-Farabi, contend that knowledge is obtained through practical arts via intellectual power, reasoning, observation, moral principles, confirmation, imagination, and the utilization of moral guidelines.

In the epistemological framework of Islamic philosophy, al-Farabi emphasizes the distinct roles of logic, perception, and senses in knowledge formation, with consciousness being indispensable. Real knowledge, according to al-Farabi, is theoretical and mental, primarily concerning possible entities and intuitionism.

In terms of epistemological perspectives, Islamic philosophers can be categorized as metaphysicists, rationalists, empiricists, dogmatists (theologians) and intuitive thinkers (*Sufis*), reflecting the diverse approaches within the tradition.

Ontology

From the viewpoint of Islamic philosophers, ontology delves into the concept of existence, which is understood as being in the broadest sense within metaphysics. At the forefront of existence is God, recognized as the ultimate source of all being and the only entity deserving the title of "being among beings." Islamic philosophers assert that existence cannot be defined as it cannot be described by anything other than itself. They endeavor to evaluate existence by examining its fundamental elements, including substance, accident, material, potential, action and motion, from logical, physical and metaphysical perspectives.

Islamic philosophers differentiate between essence and quiddity in every being other than Allah. Beings are perceived as categories and concepts in the human mind while also existing individually in God's knowledge and in the external world. Essence is not merely considered a mental construct but is acknowledged to have a reality in terms of being. However, essence

and quiddity are not distinguished in God, leading philosophers to argue for God's simplicity and non-causal nature.

Existence, for Islamic philosophers, is a concrete concept that signifies what exists. They categorize existence into three concepts: necessary (*wājib*), possible and impossible (*mumtani*). The concept of the impossible is used to denote notions such as "a circle with three sides," which cannot exist within the realm of actuality.

According to Islamic philosophers, the unique necessary existence is God, devoid of any reason for existence and inherently simple. God's existence is inseparable from His nature and serves as the cause of all possible beings. Possible beings, on the other hand, are entities whose existence and non-existence are equally feasible, without leading to logical contradictions.

Islamic philosophers explore the causality of being, drawing inspiration from both ontological and physical causality. Influenced by Aristotle, they contemplate material, formal, efficient, and final causes of existence. While some philosophers argue for the necessary connection between cause and effect in physical causality, others, such as Ghazali and certain Sufi and Ishraqi thinkers, challenge this notion.

In addition to the examination of existence, Islamic philosophers also delve into the subjects of time and space. They consider time and space as categories of existence, engaging in rigorous debates on issues such as creation ex nihilo and the eternity of the universe. These discussions underscore the comprehensive nature of their ontological inquiries.⁶

Ethics/Morality

Islamic ethics, known as *akhlāq*, is closely tied to the concepts of character, nature, and disposition. The term *akhlāq* has strong associations with *khaliq* (the Creator) and *makhluq* (the creature), implying a harmonious relationship between the Creator and the created, as well as among individuals themselves. Character, or *khuluq*, is considered the state of the soul. Similar to the role of grammar which sets forth and imposes rules for language, ethics forms the ideal boundaries and conditions for human behaviors.

Ethical virtues are considered here as the sources of deduction and ways of dealing with ethical issues. Islamic ethics presents knowledge of values to us. It justifies the existence of these values and identifies the epistemological foundation for these values. Ethics in Islam utilizes knowledge to produce wisdom and responsibility. Knowledge becomes the

⁶. Alusi, Husameddin. *The Problem of Creation in Islamic Thought*. Cambridge, 1965; Izutsu, T. *God and Man in The Qur'an*, Islamic Book Trust, 2002; Lenn E. Goodman. *Ībn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*. Los Angeles, 1996; Boer, T.J. *The History of Philosophy in Islām*. London, 1933.

foundation for making correct decisions, which produces correct actions that determines human actions and can be acquired through training and practice.

Islamic philosophers define akhlaq as the science of the human soul, focusing on the characteristics and qualities of the soul, as well as methods to control and moderate them. It is described as the inward cause of actions, while actions themselves are the outward manifestation. Good character leads to virtuous actions, while bad character results in negative actions.

The Muslim philosophers, including Farabi, Miskawayh, Tusi, Dawwani and others, explored the concept of goodness, akin to Greek ethics, and analyzed moral virtues based on faculties of the soul: rational, irascible, and appetitive. Virtues such as wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice were categorized under these faculties.

Islamic philosophers approach ethics and morality from various perspectives, defining it as duty, profession, character, and temperament. Morality is seen as promoting good and discouraging evil, exploring the nature of good and evil and examining how virtue and happiness should be pursued.

Happiness holds a significant place in Islamic moral philosophy, referred to as "as Saâdah." It is viewed as the highest goal achievable through increasing knowledge, moral evolution, closeness to God and living a life based on dissolution and virtue.

In summary, Islamic ethics encompasses a comprehensive understanding of human nature, character and virtues, aiming to guide individuals towards virtuous actions and ultimate happiness.⁷

⁷ Abd al Rahim "Understanding Islamic Ethics and Its Significance on the Character Building" International Journal of Social Science and Humanity, Vol. 3, No. 6, November. , (2013); Attas, Muhammed Naquib. *Prolegomena to Metaphysics of Islam*. Kuala Lumpur 1995; Donaldson, Dwight M., *Studies in Muslim Ethics*. London. 1953; Dar, B.A, "Ethical Teaching of Quran" edited by M.M Sharif, A History of Muslim Philosophy, 155-178. 1963. Muhsin Mahdi, *Attainment of Happiness in Al-Al Fârâbî's Philosophy*, Ithaca, Cornell University. 1969. Draz, K.A. *La Morale Du Koran*, translated by Emrullah Yüksel and Ünver Günay. İstanbul, 1993.

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