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An Interview with Nicholas Rescher

 Ahmet KAYACIK*

Dergimiz baş editörü Prof. Dr. Ahmet Kayacık'ın Misafir Arařtırmacı olarak bulunduđu Pittsburgh Üniversitesi emekli öğretim üyelerinden, Arapça yazan mantıkçılar üzerine değerli arařtırmaları olan Prof. Dr. Nicholas Rescher ile yapmış olduđu söyleşiyi okuyucularımızın istifadesine sunuyoruz.

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Ahmet KAYACIK: Dear Professor, first of all, I would like to thank you on behalf of our journal readers for accepting this interview. There are some question which our colleagues like to ask to you. I would like to direct them to you, if you don't mind?

Could you please give us a brief account if your interest in logic in general and Arabic Logic in special? How did you start or what was the reason to study this field?

Nicholas RESCHER: My interest in logic arose from an interest in mathematics, combined with a concern for philosophical and foundational issues. Galen said logic cannot be separated from medicine, I think it cannot be separated from philosophy. I started to study logic in Flushing High School, 1944-45, at the age of sixteen. At Queens College (starting 1946) my main teacher was the German logician Carl G. Hempel. In graduate school at Princeton (starting 1949) my teacher and mentor was Alonzo Church. All these people are in Wikipedia.

Ahmet KAYACIK: Did you do, at that time, what do you want in context of Arabic Logic?

SÖYLEŞİ

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Nicholas RESCHER: I did not study Arabic until 1957. My teacher was the important scholar S. D. Goitein. (Also in Wikipedia.) I soon discovered there was much Arabic work in logic (based on Aristotle and the Greeks) that had not been studied by modern scholars. I decided to make some studies in this area. But after a time (by the end of the 1960s) I concluded that I had to choose between being an Arabists or a philosopher. I resolved for the latter and pretty much gave up in Arabic studies. (Also, Oskar Rescher died around that time (in 1973).)

Ahmet KAYACIK: After your studies on this field AL, it was not studied just you did. What can it be its reason?

Nicholas RESCHER: Only very few people study Arabic/Islamic logic, because it requires a lot of preparation in logic itself, in languages, in historical scholarship (Greek and Arabic), and in philosophy (Greek thought). And for scholars who know Arabic there are also very many other things of interest. Also the Greek connection is perhaps a cultural obstacle for Muslims.

Ahmet KAYACIK: What do you think about Tony Street's reading/evaluating the History of Arabic logic? Also Al-Rouayheb's...

Nicholas RESCHER: I think Tony Street is doing excellent work in the history of Arabic logic. He has the opportunity to find students in Cambridge. (This is not possible here in Pittsburgh.) And perhaps the same goes for Al-Rouayheb's work at Harvard.

Ahmet KAYACIK: Do you still accept that there is an opponent or discussion between schools of logic?

Nicholas RESCHER: Yes. I do think that there are distinct traditions (I don't know if "schools" is the best word) in the development of logic in the Islamic world. But the detail of this requires much further study of surviving texts.

Ahmet KAYACIK: If we want to study comparatively Arabic and Latin logic, what can you say for us?

Nicholas RESCHER: The Medieval Latin schoolmen and the Arab logician went in different direction in their work on logic. Before comparative work can justifiably be done, the necessary text must be justified in good scholarly editions and their content carefully analyzing in segmentation. Editions, translations, and commentaries are needed.

Ahmet KAYACIK: Is it possible to read Arabic modal logic with the comments or read the contemporary modal logic?

Nicholas RESCHER: We need careful scholarly analysis of exactly what was going on in Islamic logic: how it relates to earlier (especially Greek) work, what controversies were in play, what problems addressed, and what solutions proposed.

Ahmet KAYACIK: Do you have any plans after that to write on Arabic logic?

Nicholas RESCHER: I myself have, at this time, no plans for work in Arabic/Islamic logic. My work nowadays focuses on issues of contemporary epistemology.

Ahmet KAYACIK: How do you evaluate logic in Islamic thought in comparison to logic in western thought?

Nicholas RESCHER: I think the most significant logical work in Arabic was done in the era 900-1400. It was developed with a view to having a medicine, theology, and philosophy. But the backlash against the West in the wake of the crusades brought original work in logic to a stop.

In the West moderns found logic research in the wake of interest in mathematical and calculation theory. The revival of logic in the Islamic world will likely follow the same path, spearheaded by a concern for contemporary issue in applied mathematics.

Ahmet KAYACIK: What is the importance of logic in developing premises and conclusions for truth values?

Nicholas RESCHER: The effective pursuit of truth requires operating within the boundaries of logic, and semantics, and "scientific method." These avenue of learning, also to growth with mathematics making up the "finite sciences" provide the methodological basis of all serious investigations.

Ahmet KAYACIK: What is the relation of Symbolic logic in front of classical logic? In classical and modern discussions.

Nicholas RESCHER: Symbolic logic provides the concept-machinery for giving precise expression to logical ideas. In interpreting traditional (re-modern) logic is invariably useful to try to be as precise as possible regarding what is being affirmed (or could with appropriate

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interpretation be a plausible possibility for affirmation). In coming to understand what is at issue in those classical discussions examining the possibilities for precise interpretation is insoluble. And symbolic logic provides the means for realizing this objective.

Ahmet KAYACIK: What do you think about usage of concepts of logic as in Arabic, Greek, Latin and English?

Nicholas RESCHER: In explaining concepts (in logic and philosophy) their formulation in different languages always brings interactive insight into their meanings to light. The imprecisions and ambiguities of one language come to view when we reformulate its formulations in another language. And this holds for logic as well. It is always useful (but not always possible) to see how comparable terms are explained in the dictionaries and encyclopedias of different languages and cultures.

Ahmet KAYACIK: In context of *The Development of Arabic Logic* book, in Islamic world Ghazali has an important place, he was accepted as someone who gave an impact to rising of logical studies, there is not much information about this issue, why?

Nicholas RESCHER: Until the relevant texts are edited, studied, annotated, and translated we shall not fully appreciate the contributions even of so important thinkers as Ghazali and Avicenna. And the reason why so much remains undone is that few scholars have the necessary knowledge, time, and motivation for the work.

Ahmet KAYACIK: Finally, there are many young logicians in Turkey, what do you say to them?

Nicholas RESCHER: To young scholars I say two things: (1) never let the fact that you cannot do *everything* stand in the way of doing *something*. And (2) Whenever possible work with the original texts. And then, explain them, translate them, compare them. A great structure can be built up by laying one brick at a time.

Ahmet KAYACIK: Dear Professor, thank you so much again.

Nicholas RESCHER: It is my pleasure.