

***Fī Uṣūl al-Ḥiwār wa Tajdīd ‘Ilm al-Kalām***, by Ṭāhā ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, (Beirut: Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, 2007), 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 75 pp., ISBN: 9953-68-156-2

The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed several attempts by Muslim scholars to renew Islamic theology in the face of ideological challenges posed by the West. Contributing to a new *kalām*, prominent scholars like Shiblī Nu‘mānī (d. 1914) in the Indian Subcontinent, Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) in Egypt and İzmīrlī İsmail Hakkı (d. 1946) in Ottoman Turkey believed that the theological heritage of Islam would no longer suffice for demands of a Muslim mind living in the modern world. Bearing such a significant title, contemporary Moroccan scholar Ṭāhā ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s important book offers remarkable observations on the meaning of Islamic theology today. Moreover, he questions the misinterpretations of Islamic philosophy by several modern writers whose works remain quite popular in the field.

Early in the book, the author offers a general idea about his stand on the critical view of Islamic heritage. He is strongly against those who reduce Islamic thought to Greek philosophy. For ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, the discipline of logic that Muslims have constructed is in essence “a Qur’anic disputation theory”, even if it drew substantially from Greek thought. Therefore, the main source of Islamic disputation theory is the Qur’ān itself (p. 21).

Another introductory point of the book, which I think has the crucial importance in the area of the Islamic studies is his appropriate emphasis when he says that a topic must be dealt with in its own context without striving to view it in terms of its “foreign” roots. At first glance, it is quite predictable who the author has in mind when he offers this judgment, and a quick overview of recent Islamic studies can prove it right. Such studies deal with any topic (in this case, Islamic thought) through a historical or political lens. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān would uncover the names of such authors in the last chapter of his book.

The book consists of four main chapters. In the first chapter, the author divides the concept of conversation (*ḥiwār*) into three parts. As for the conversation in general, one can talk about three levels,

each of which represents a step in a gradual process toward the best form of conversation: *ḥiwār*, *muḥāwara* and *taḥāwur*. Among these, simple conversation (*ḥiwār*) has the lowest degree since it only presents the ideas of two sides. However, in *muḥāwara*, objections arise in the conversation. Both sides try to establish a theory together, and thus the simple conversation acquires a state of debate (*munāzara*) in its classical sense. Therefore debate differs from *ḥiwār* because of its scientific and philosophical nature.

For ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, it is the term *munāzara* that accords precisely with the theological (*kalāmī*) method in Islamic thought. Thus, the second chapter of the book focuses on defining the nature of the theological method and its prominence among Islamic disciplines. According to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, Muslim philosophers from Kindī (d. 866) to Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) tended to see their own philosophical method as the only way of certainty for demonstration. Nevertheless, the main characteristic of demonstration is its potential to be formed in accordance with pure mathematical functions. Meanwhile, philosophical demonstration does not share this calculability (*ḥisābiyya*) (p. 63). As a direct consequence of the lack of this characteristic in the classical philosophical method of demonstration, philosophical discourse does not have the sufficient condition for gaining practical conviction. This is because the demonstration of an argument may be obtained without convincing the addressee (p. 65). There occurs the distinctive attribute of the kalāmī discourse: the pragmatic aspect and the author’s Arabic equivalent choice for this word is *tadāwulī*. In fact, in terms of their reasoning and inference, kalāmī and philosophical discourse are not different from each other. Nonetheless, *kalām* has pragmatic aspects that “*burhānī*” philosophy does not share. In summary, pragmatic argumentation is the unique form of achieving the desired results from a conversation, and we can find this form in *munāzara*, a method used effectively by Muslim theologians.

It seems that Ṭāhā ‘Abd al-Raḥmān wants *kalām* to take the role of defending Islamic doctrine in the contemporary world, and he is arguably right in his position. Because *kalām* is based on debate, it can defend Islamic principles against the challenges of the opposite (currently, the dominant Western) side. The author calls readers’ attention to the fact that *kalām*’s dialectical method does not make itself weak in its demonstrative aspect, as claimed. In this regard, we can talk about the renewal (*tajdīd*) of respect for *kalām*, rather than the re-

newal of *kalām* itself. *Kalām* surely has had the adequate dynamics for maintaining its prominent role in the Islamic sciences because the theological heritage of Islam represents the true nature of debate. The methods of dialectical debate (*munāẓara jadali*) cover all areas of Islamic thought (p. 69). Moreover, the fact that Muslim theologians used Aristotelian logic does not change this situation because Muslims did not import it blindly. They adjusted it according to their principles (p. 69). Muslims' way of acceptance of Aristotelian logic is also distinctive in that it views logic as a branch of the discipline of debate. Therefore, 'Abd al-Raḥmān's main purpose is to reaffirm *kalām*'s location among the Islamic sciences against those who criticize its method. Afterward, he gives a brief outline of the structure of debate in Islamic writings, including the duties of both sides.

Entitled "Theological Inference: *Qiyās* and *Mumāthala*", the third chapter aims to prove *kalām*'s ability to accommodate modern logical developments. For example, 'Abd al-Raḥmān discusses the nature of God's attributes in length and comes to the conclusion that although the Ash'arī *kalām*'s position on the attributes of God seems at first to conflict with logic (they are neither identical with God nor distinct from His essence), it actually employs multi-valued logic (p. 133, 140).

In the fourth and final chapter entitled "The Theological Rationalism: *Mu'āqala*", the author responds to those who defend anthropological approaches to Arabic thought. Scholars like Muḥammad 'Abid al-Jābirī and Muḥammad Arkoun, who only address the philosophical aspects of Islamic civilization on the grounds that these are the only aspects suitable for modernity, in fact remove the Arabic component (in the text: *multaqā* = a meeting platform) from the community of Islam (*umma*) and attach it to the West. Those scholars are not aware that what makes theologians' hands strong is the fact that they relied on Arabic texts while Muslim philosophers adopted a logic constructed under the rules of Greek language. Therefore, *kalām* argumentation is not only more likely to achieve logical success (p. 148) but it also has the ability to defend Islamic principles against modern ideologies as did in the past (p. 158).

Because the modest-sized work deals with an enormous topic, it has some weaknesses. Its bibliography, which includes most of the classical Islamic texts in theology and philosophy, gives the impression that the author intended to use only primary sources. Nonethe-

less, while it develops key concepts gradually, the book fails to base the ideas on the theological sources. An exception is the last chapter, which considers *kalām*'s position on the attributes of God. Thus, Jābirī's *The Structure of the Arabic Mind (Binyat al-ʿaql al-ʿArabī; 1986)*, for instance, whose outlook is severely criticized by our author, can be viewed as much more sufficient in terms of using the classical sources properly in this regard. Moreover, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān makes several general and stereotypical judgments, including that "the metaphysics of Aristotle is based on paganism (*shirk*) while the Islamic doctrine on monotheism (*tawḥīd*)" (p. 62), that may detract from the academic character of the work.

In conclusion, after all, this book can be considered as a good read for anyone interested in the logical value of the classical Islamic theology.

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