

Philosophical Theology in Islam: Later Ash‘arism East and West, edited by Ayman Shihadeh and Jan Thiele (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), x+1-440 pp., ISBN: 9789004426603, €99.00, \$119.00 (hb)

Philosophical Theology in Islam, edited by Ayman Shihadeh and Jan Thiele, is a thirteen-chapter work of robust scholarship into post-classical Ash‘arī theology that boasts papers covering the four corners of the Muslim world. With a book of this scope and size, it is impossible for the reviewer to satisfactorily treat each chapter equally. Specifically, therefore, I attend more closely to chapters dealing with philosophical theory and its development in accordance to the limits of space and personal interests.

The first chapter, by Ulrich Rudolph, deals with al-Ghazālī’s view of theology and the legacy inherent in his approach to truth. Perhaps surprisingly, his theological work is announced at the outset as predominantly unoriginal, while al-Ghazālī’s critical remarks on kalām, and his being less than enthusiastic about it as a science, are also highlighted. Here, Rudolph concludes that the theologian’s goal was not to reform kalām but something greater. However, his inference that kalām was not “a major role in [al-Ghazālī’s] intellectual positioning” appears only plausible if taken to mean that while a pivotal factor in the direction of the latter’s thought, it was not the most fundamental. In any case, Rudolph endeavors to gather various “theoretical elements” in search of what al-Ghazālī’s larger aim was, and inquire about his influence in this regard. Here, he focuses, under separate headings, on logic, scepticism, and knowledge. His view that al-Ghazālī was a mere pragmatist regarding logic, anxious to prove his credentials in the discipline rather than apply it, will undoubtedly be contested. However, the stress on al-Ghazālī’s general “tendency to skepticism,” appears justified. Certainly, it is strengthened by Rudolph’s argument that the theologian criticizes peripatetic metaphysics for being principally based on the imaginative faculty. One of the most interesting claims of the chapter is that al-Ghazālī did not divorce mystical enlightenment from rational achievement,

meaning that he tied sound knowledge to purification of the soul. In this regard too is Rudolph's thought-provoking assertion that the theologian uses light as a metaphor not just for mystical illumination but also the sound operation of reason. All this is undoubtedly significant in determining the intended legacy of Ḥujjat al-Islām, yet, unfortunately, the chapter feels fleeting in its overall method, like being in audience to a teacher who has little time to share their knowledge and insight in detail. Here, Rudolph's brief explanation (and justification) of this type of "intermediate level" inquiry does not satisfy. Nevertheless, despite such drawbacks, it is an exciting chapter, admirably pointing to a large vista of inquiry with many unanswered questions.

Ayman Shihadeh's investigation into the authenticity of an early text newly attributed to al-Rāzī constitutes the book's second chapter. The study is led by the motivation to "provide precious new insight into [al-Rāzī's] study, early career, and wider milieu" and show that "the classical Ash'arism of al-Juwaynī survived in the east largely unaffected by al-Ghazālī's new style of kalām" (as stated in the introduction). The work in question is a theological summa of which only one manuscript is extant. The first sections of the chapter are mostly an attempt to demonstrate the text's authenticity, which is largely composed of passages, either paraphrased or taken verbatim, from the *Irshād*, with additions primarily drawn from other sources, especially the *Shāmil*. The book shows little free-thinking, and where there is a critical remark, does not inspire confidence. For example, one cited passage expresses a dubious claim that the Eternalists, Exponents of Antemundane Matter, Dualists, Exponents of the Theory of Natures, and Astrologers "are all in reality one and the same group." Apart from al-Rāzī, Shihadeh identifies Abū Naṣr al-Qushayrī and Abū l-Faṭḥ Nāṣir al-Anṣārī as possible authors. His applaudable investigative work following up on the writer's reference to his father, "the imām," is unfortunately inconclusive. The rest of the evidence summoned is textual, involving comparisons of the compendium to the respective authors' works, but this too elicits no conclusive proof. In all, it appears the writing on the title page of the manuscript, written in a later hand and giving al-Rāzī's name as the author, is the main evidence for attribution. Scholars of al-Rāzī will no doubt be pleased to be able to draw upon another source in their studies, even if the summa demonstrates little apart from an overwhelming reliance on al-Juwaynī.

The third chapter is by Meryem Sebtî and, like the Shihadeh chapter, sets out to demonstrate al-Rāzî's authorship, this time of a text previously (mis)attributed to Ibn Sînā. Sebtî demonstrates that the contents of a Qur'ānic commentary, *Tafsîr Sûrat al-a'lá*, conform with segments of al-Rāzî's later work, *al-Maṭâlib al-'āliyah*. Her analysis proceeds, with lengthy quotations, into the topics of embryogenesis, the concept of nature, prophecy, and the doctrine of virtue. In each case, correspondence with al-Rāzî's views and contrasts with Ibn Sînā's accounts in other works make for an irrefutable case in favor of reattribution. Indeed, the evidence is, in fact, so compelling, one wonders why the text was ever attributed to Ibn Sînā in the first place. Nevertheless, Sebtî's effort here is a solid example of that needed for the larger project of reconsidering works hitherto included in the Avicennian corpus.

Peter Adamson and Andreas Lammer contribute with another chapter focusing on al-Rāzî, though here on his eventual adoption of a conception of time inspired by Plato. The authors concentrate mainly on al-Rāzî's *al-Maṭâlib al-'Āliya*, but substantial reference is also made to his *Mabâḥith* and *Mulakkhaḥ* in order to follow al-Rāzî's theoretical advances and preceding criticism of the Avicennian-Aristotelian position. The authors make clear that al-Rāzî's perception of Ibn Sînā's account of time is characterized by suspicion from the start. The former's extended discussion of time's metaphysical aspect is studied in detail, along with its implications for concepts such as everlastingness, eternity, and measure. Whatever might be said of al-Rāzî's final theory, which is arguably circular, his journey toward the conclusion that time is a metaphysically independent substance from motion constitutes an intricate dialectical labyrinth that the chapter navigates with finesse.

Fedor Benevich's chapter follows developments surrounding the concept of the Necessary Existent, and al-Rāzî's reaction to the Avicennian system. Like the chapter before, this displays great erudition, as Benevich surveys al-Rāzî's corpus to discern the latter's theory on the essence-existence relationship, tracing the history of the debate before al-Rāzî to aid his explanations. The discussion is structured around two main problems: univocity and composition regarding existence and the divine essence. However, Benevich's decision to omit an exposition of Ibn Sînā's position means that he fails to explain how it is possible for al-Rāzî to be criticizing Ibn Sînā while arguing for an Avicennian position. Additionally, more could have

been said on Ibn Sīnā's own hesitation of assigning an essence to the Necessary Existent. It is Ibn Sīnā's considered view that God's *essence* consists in necessary existence. This means that the philosophical progress covered by the chapter occurs not in response to Ibn Sīnā *per se*, but al-Rāzī's understanding of the former's position. Indeed, Benevise discusses whether al-Rāzī's position is not actually Avicennian in his concluding remarks. Nevertheless, the chapter offers an extensive discussion of what is a central article of debate within Islamic philosophy and theology, showing al-Rāzī to make pioneering advancements.

Bilal Ibrahim's study addresses views regarding the causing of essence (*ja'ʿ al-mābiyyah*), which encompasses issues ranging from mereology to the status of divine knowledge. This is another chapter dealing with al-Rāzī, though the debates on the topic extend well beyond him, as Ibrahim shows. Perhaps one of the most technically complex and fascinating of all the articles in the book, it will reward careful study. However, the discussion is too much presented in the style of detailed research notes, and though the author subheads his chapter accordingly, some working thesis would have benefitted the presentation. It is likely for this reason that the reader will find there appears insufficient comment on how it was deemed possible for one to think that an essence can be caused. As the central subject of exposition, the state of knowledge regarding the matter's philosophical and historical foundations, as well as al-Rāzī's theory of essence, deserved greater discussion and elucidation.

The next chapter, by Jon Hoover, explores Mamlūk Ashʿarism via the reactions to Ibn Taymiyyah's opposition to Ashʿarī theological hermeneutics. This has the benefit of shedding more light on Ibn Taymiyyah's contemporaries rather than the famous Shaykh al-Islām, who has already been the subject of substantial recent scholarship, not least by Hoover himself. However, the reader must forgive the impression that Ibn Taymiyyah's more literalist approach, though unique, was not closely aligned with usual conservative Ḥanbalī theology, and that Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī had not already skillfully responded to such hermeneutic austerity centuries earlier. In other words, the topic is a direct continuation (and, in some ways, mere repetition) of an older debate that goes significantly unrecognized. In any event, the chapter otherwise represents a fine contribution to understanding the history of exegetical methods, such as *tafwīd* and *taʾwīl*, in relation to Ibn Taymiyyah's "double perspective" of denying

knowledge of the modality (*kayfiyyab*) of God's attributes while affirming it for their meaning (*ma'na*).

The eighth chapter, written by Aaron Spevack, is more historical in tone. Though he starts by introducing the matter of salvific religious belief, the study is an effort in the wider and vaguely specified exploration to find "evidence of robust and innovative continued conversations" that demonstrate "vibrancy of later theological traditions." The first mentioned topic is, in fact, just one of three that the author tackles to achieve his aim – the others being the nature of existence and developments in logic. Spevack focuses mainly on al-Sanūsī and al-Bājūrī, but aptly notes numerous other figures involved in important theological work, showing the geographical and chronological width of deliberation. His account of the first topic, however, proves little engagement with philosophy or development of thought, only continued debate. And notwithstanding the intriguing nature of the second topic, which overlaps with the discussions of previous chapters, the mere fact that thinkers were "free to determine their own positions" does again not represent much by way of philosophical development. As for the third topic, it receives barely two pages of explication. In all, it seems arguable that even the modest aim of proving intellectual innovation was not achieved here.

The last five contributions are also more historical in approach, and we have not the space to comment except briefly. Like Spevack's, these all add to the geographical comprehensiveness of the book's character and make an important contribution to relatively neglected areas. Xavier Casassas Canals and Delfina Serrano-Ruano demonstrate in detail that not all scholars shared the critical stance versus al-Ghazālī in Almoravid and Almohad al-Andalus, and that figures such as Ibn Rushd al-Jadd and al-Qurṭubī made persuasive arguments against the negative and ill-informed judgements against him. Jan Thiele similarly explores the Islamic West, this time Ifrīqiyah under the Ḥafsid's, going through evidence to show high activity in kalām in the Maghrib. The aim is relatively modest (and Thiele notes only the decades-old work of R. Brunschvig as a target for rebutting the idea that theological work was limited in the region). This contribution reflects the historical approach adopted in some of the other chapters and presents an excellent overview.

The twelfth chapter shifts attention to the east, specifically the lands of the Ilkhanate. Reza Pourjavady's account of al-Ījī's work does a commendable job of surveying the historical context, major works, and

impact of this key scholar vis-à-vis leading students to shed light on Ash‘arī kalām in the fourteenth century. In the next paper, Harith Ramli discusses the fascinating connection between Ash‘arism and Sufism via Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī’s two types of *taḥqīq*, representing intellectual and spiritual disciplines. Finally, Asad Ahmed looks southeast at Ash‘arism in India through the reception of al-Ījī’s *Mawāqif*, admirably exploring the scholarly networks of the region and key figures, such as Mīr Zāhid al-Harawī.

Again, some of these chapters give the impression of extensive research notes that merely set the foundation for more decisive gains in knowledge. What is more, the book displays a formal disbalance between chapters that go into the theoretical minutia of sophisticated debates and those that are more akin to historical overviews. However, this is a minor complaint and readers may appreciate the variety of approaches respectively adopted in the book. Indeed, where chapters delve in less depth, it is generally on areas that have been understudied. Clearly, this volume will be a key resource for those interested in the complex theological legacy bestowed by al-Rāzī to later generations of thinkers and developments in post-classical Ash‘arī kalam right across the Muslim world.

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