

Book Review

Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani

By Michael E. Marmura (ed.). Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984.

Michael Marmura, the editor of this volume, has brought to his readers a valuable collection of highly respected authors, from van Ess and Frank to Anawati in part one, and from Makarem, Nasr, and Mahdi to Shehadi in part two. Each contributor to this seventeen-essay volume is an authority on his/her topic. Indeed, what we have here is a collection of essays in which by some of today's most competent and respected Islamicists inform the readers of the results of their scholarly research into various aspects of their discipline and thereby producing a resounding tribute worthy of a scholar of the stature of George Hourani, to whom the volume is dedicated.

To be sure, not only is this work written by experts, but it is also meant for the experts. The essays are thus quite naturally extremely narrow in scope and perspective and are also self-contained and therefore independent of each other. As a result, each essay is tightly packed, and reviewing this book would mean reviewing each essay separately. Alternatively, and this would be much more desirable, the reviewer can present a general account of the problematics of Islamic theology and philosophy in which each contribution coheres to form some kind of an overall picture. But, in fairness, this is the task of the editor, not of the reviewer. Thus one wonders why Marmura, given his standing in and familiarity with the field, did not write general introductory articles for each of the volume's two sections: "Islamic Theology" and "Islamic Philosophy." For example, it is not clear to the reader as to how and in what way van Ess's powerful analysis of a *kalām* anecdote is related to Frank's penetrating study of the *kalām* doctrine of bodies and atoms. For the reader, unless he/she possesses the same degree of expertise as the two authors, the only thing in common between them is that they both talk about the *mutakallimūn*. Similarly, in more general terms, the reader legitimately wonders if there are any broad concerns, or if there are any shared methodological approaches, which bind all of those different Islamic philosophers whose thought forms the subject matter of the book's second part. These questions could have been dealt with in an editorial panorama. Indeed, one may argue that a general account is possible only after the basic data have been collected, and since much of the classical literature of Islam still lies unstudied, a survey article would be premature. But a survey need not be definitive — it can always be tentative.

Notwithstanding this lacuna, all individual essays in this collection are models of first-rate scholarship. In his “Abu l-Hudhayl in Contact,” for instance, van Ess gives his readers a new methodological model for the analysis of *kalām* literature, which in itself is no small task and represents a valuable addition to this field. Richard Frank, to take another example, is the first modern scholar who, in his “Bodies and Atoms,” analyzes two of the most complex and fundamental notions of the *kalām* cosmology: the concepts, namely, of bodies and atoms. Frank’s discerning eye discovers a conceptual distinction between those various terms found in the Ash‘arite literature, all of which are generally rendered “body” – *jasad*, *jirm*, *juththa*, and *jism*. “*Jirm* and *juththa*, which are commonly rendered by ‘body’ are,” he tells us, “not equivalent to *jism* but to *jawhar* (an atom), while *jism*, which is normally rendered by ‘body’ is not taken to describe or name the corporeal objects we ordinarily call ‘bodies’. . .” (p. 53). As for *jasad*, it is observed to be a standard term designating the *human* body. Evidently, Frank’s painstaking conceptual analysis constitutes a major advance in our understanding of *kalām* and, like van Ess, he is to be commended for his pioneering attempts to study the *mutakallimūn* in their own terms.

A refreshing essay, entitled “Afdal al-Din Kashani and the Philosophical World of Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi,” comes from Seyyed Hossein Nasr. In this enlightening essay, Nasr not only gives a highly comprehensive account of an unstudied Muslim intellectual of the seventh-/thirteenth-century, but also expresses at the conclusion certain guiding thoughts concerning the study of the Islamic world in general. “To an eminent degree,” he writes, “Afdal al-Din represents a marriage between intelligence and piety, between submission to the Divine Will and knowledge ranging from the logical to the unitive. It is such a wedding within a unified vision that is so clearly needed for the Islamic world and it is the study of such a harmonious perspective within the Islamic tradition that can aid Western students of Islam most in gaining a better understanding of this tradition in its inward and integrating aspect” (p. 264).

It is a happy coincidence that Shehadi, in his study of Ibn Khaldūn, has in effect heeded Nasr’s advice. “How can [Ibn Khaldūn] accept the mystical theory of knowledge with all its assumptions while he is committed to the scientific study of man?” asks Shehadi in his “Theism, Mysticism and Scientific History in Ibn Khaldun” (p. 265). In answering this question, he provides a highly integrated picture of Ibn Khaldūn, a picture in which the scientific is “wedded” to the mystical – precisely the kind of integration Nasr teaches.

But these are only some of the learned writings with which this rich volume is packed. This volume contains, for example, three illuminating studies of different aspects of Ibn Sīnā’s thought, one of them by the editor Marmura himself. Then there is Muhsin Mahdi’s insightful essay entitled “Remarks on Averroes’ *Decisive Treatise*.” Mahdi’s study will certainly please George Hourani as much as it enlightens other readers, for it is Hourani to whom we owe a critical

and definitive edition of the *Treatise*. The older scholar must take delight in seeing a younger contemporary analyze and explain this text in such a competent fashion.

While reading this volume one gets the uneasy feeling that at some stage it must have run into financial difficulties, for how else can one explain the total lack of diacritical marks in the transliteration of Arabic words and the absence of quotations in Arabic? This situation is all the more serious in view of the numerous proof errors and inconsistencies in the transliteration systems followed by its contributors (for example, Frank seems to transliterate initial *hamzas* while others do not). Much worse, a whole footnote (no. 5, p. 326) is missing from Shehadi's essay, and the copy which was sent to me does not contain pages 57-83! The book, it seems, was hurriedly put together.

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