

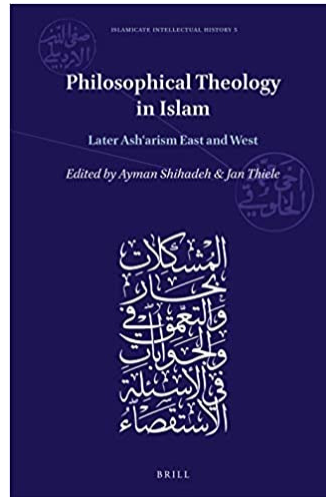
importance of the political and social environment for the development of intellectual and mystical trends.

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Ayman Shihadeh and Jan Thiele, eds. *Philosophical Theology in Islam: Later Ash'arism East and West*. Leiden: Brill, 2020. Pp. x+440. E-book. ISBN: 9789004426610. Price: \$119.

Fifth in the series of Islamicate Intellectual History, *Philosophical Theology in Islam* is an attempt to understand philosophy, theology, sources, and scholarly networks of Ash'arism, a dominant *kalāmī* school of Sunni Islam. This work is an outcome of a conference arranged in September 2014 by the Department of the Languages and Cultures of the Near and Middle East, SOAS University of London. Containing 440 pages, this volume begins with an introduction by the editors and is further divided into thirteen chapters written by fifteen eminent scholars in the field. In several ways, these chapters are more like separate articles on similar topics. The editors Ayman Shihadeh and Jan Thiele did remarkably well to keep them in line, but the nature of the work makes the reviewer's task challenging. The third chapter (pp. 71–94) written in French by Meryem Sebti, whose works on Avicennian philosophy are well known and who has many English works to her credit, could be considered an exception to the rule and a disappointment to the English reader. The editors did not state any reason as to why they had included an article in French in an English volume.



Rather than giving an overview of philosophical theology in Islam, the book focuses on the later Ash'arī theology. Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ismā'īl

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al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/936) is considered the founder of Ash‘arī school of thought. According to his account in *al-Ibānah*, he embraced a number of doctrines during his theological journey before his final settlement on Sunnī Islam.¹ He accomplished at least fifty-five works including his magnum opus *al-Mukhtazan*, an encompassing *tafsīr* that spans over 500 volumes.² Shiblī Nu‘mānī (d. 1914) noted that during Ash‘arī’s time, *fuqahā* (Muslim jurists) and *muḥaddithūn* (traditionists) were not conversant with philosophy and logic. The *kalām* which most of the Islamic sects were using to falsify the doctrines of each other was almost free from the philosophical interpretations.³ Therefore, Ash‘arī’s *kalām* is not considered philosophical theology in its true spirit.

It was Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) who suggested that except for a few problems, most of the philosophy was aligned with religion. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) pointed out that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and others who followed al-Ghazālī combined *kalām* and philosophy to the extent that it was no longer possible to differentiate between both disciplines (p. 298). Nu‘mānī argued that due to al-Ghazālī, philosophy found acceptance among Islamic circles and intellectuals such as al-Rāzī, Shaykh al-Ishrāq Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 586/1191), and ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) emerged in the epistemic sphere.⁴

Al-Ghazālī, like various other Muslim theologians, found theology insufficient to quench his religious thirst and resorted to *taṣawwuf* (Islamic mysticism). Thus, a comprehensive understanding of his account demands discussing his Sufi works. This is exactly what the first chapter of this work does. It explains his *kalāmī* thought in conjunction with Sufi works. However, it ignores considering the Qur‘ān and *sunnah* the supreme sources of his *kalāmī* and Sufi thought. The remaining chapters of the book follow the same pattern and mostly isolate Islamic theology from *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*. This raises questions about its methodology and leads to the conclusion, “According to al-Ghazālī, and in contrast to the teachings of al-Fārābī and Avicenna, God is not part of the system which He has created” (p. 27).

The next five chapters, which can also be considered a separate section, focus on the works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, the Persian polymath who remained attuned to most of his contemporaneous intellectual

¹ See Alī b. Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘arī, *al-Ibānah ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyānah* (Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār, 1977), 20.

² Al-Ash‘arī, *Musalmānōn kē ‘Aqā‘id-o Afkār Ya‘nī Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, trans. Muḥammad Hanīf Nadvī (Lahore: Idārah-i Thaqāfat-i Islamiyyah, 1968), 1:3.

³ Shiblī Nu‘mānī, *‘Ilm al-Kalām aur al-Kalām* (Karachi: Nafīs Academy), 51–52.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

actualities. The first chapter of this section critically evaluates the authorship of a newly found manuscript *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Dīn ‘Aqā'id Ahl al-Sunnah*) that is attributed to al-Rāzī. The author considers it an early writing of al-Rāzī and concludes that he penned it prior to his study of philosophy and critical thinking (p. 60). Although, a review of this chapter seems out of scope without examining the original manuscript, the way the author drafted it provides some glimpses of the original writing. Not only the original Arabic text is quoted at several places (pp. 37, 38, 49, 50, to mention a few), but also main headings from the manuscript are provided in an appendix.

There is an interaction between science, philosophy, and theology in the chapter that discusses al-Rāzī's Platonist account of the essence of time from his *al-Maṭālib al-‘Āliyah*. The evolution of the idea of the necessary existent (*wājib al-wujūd*) of God is the focus of the next chapter. It brilliantly compares the positions of various Muslim theologians from Avicenna to al-Rāzī. The debate ends with the conclusion that according to the aforementioned scholars, "God's essence is just 'existence' in the common univocal sense of this word" (p. 151). Although this chapter uses a wide range of sources to articulate its arguments, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, an indispensable source for understanding al-Rāzī's point of view on God and existence of God,⁵ is overlooked. Furthermore, in the reviewer's opinion, explaining the works of al-Rāzī without referring to the Qur'ān and *sunnah* does not make a wise choice because he stressed, "My religion is to follow Prophet Muḥammad peace be upon him and my book is the great Qur'ān and my understanding of religion is based only upon these two."⁶

The section on al-Rāzī ends with reflective thoughts on the essence (*ja' l al-māhiyah*) in created things. Charges against Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) in the early Mamlūk period on corporealism (*tajsīm*) in God's attributes are discussed by Jon Hoover (pp. 195–230), who, in the Fourth Conference of the School of Mamlūk Studies, presented a paper on a similar topic. He examined four Mamlūk scholars including Ibn Jahbal al-Kilābī (d. 733/1333), Ṣafī 'l-Dīn al-Hindī (d. 715/1315), Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā'ah (d. 733/1333), and Shams al-Dīn al-Sarūjī (d. 710/1310). Surprisingly, this chapter does not consult 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ṣāliḥ al-Maḥmūd's magnum opus *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min al-Ashā'irah* (1995), an important source to understand the viewpoint of Ibn Taymiyyah about

⁵ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Mushtahir bi 'l-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 32 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 1:106.

⁶ 'Abd al-Waḥhāb b. 'Alī al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā* (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1964), 91.

Ash‘arī theology and theologians. Taking a thematic approach, the next chapters examine the relationship between Sunnī theology and philosophy, “reception of al-Ghazālī’s thought and the development of Ash‘arism in the pre-modern Islamic West,” (p. 291) and the status of Ash‘arism during the reign of Banū Ḥafṣ (1229–1574).

Two chapters are dedicated to studying the legacy and *Kitāb al-Mawāqif* (Book of stations) of ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1356), a famous Muslim theologian of Il-Khanid period (1256–1335 CE). The work presented in these chapters greatly contributes and identifies gaps (p. 362) in the field. However, the organization of chapters is puzzling as they are separated by a brilliant article on Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d. 1101/1690), a famous Muslim theologian, jurist, and Sufi of Naqshabandī and Shaṭṭārī order.

One may conclude that after the publication of encyclopedic works like *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (2008), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology* (2016), and *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy* (2019), finding a niche to write on this topic was a difficult yet indispensable task. The editors of *Philosophical Theology in Islam* deserve credit for compiling this comprehensive work. Shihadeh and Thiele have produced dozens of writings on the intellectuals and intellectual history of Ash‘arism. This makes the book a fruitful addition to the field of *‘ilm al-kalām*. It encourages the reader to look forward for more writings. Considering it an elegant work to understand philosophical theology in Islam, the reviewer recommends it to the scholars and advanced students of Islamic studies.

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