

are adduced to elucidate his arguments. In addition to these epistemological and metaphysical dimensions, language has an aesthetic side and moral impact: ugly words make people behave in a bad way. The appropriate use of language appears thus not only as the fundamental obligation for humans, but as their *raison d'être*. Language is what holds the cosmos together. From this emerges a particular responsibility for the Arabs. *Bayān* is the struggle to accomplish this task.

The fourth chapter addresses the medieval reception of al-Jāhiz's philosophy of language, much of which was negative or misrepresented his views. The two cases discussed here are Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d. 1005) and ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078), who is known for his elaborate and innovative views on *lafz* and *mā'nā* and his argument that language plays a fundamental role for all the sciences. The fifth chapter offers a conclusion, focusing on professionalization, an appropriate balance in good speech and the role of language in a holistic view of human obligations. The book ends with an English summary.

Sprache und Verstehen will appeal to a broad readership, ranging from undergraduates to experts in various fields. Social and cultural historians will be interested in al-Jāhiz's statements concerning the different ways of expression of Arabs and non-Arabs and of lower and upper classes and the modes of communication between them. Historians of religion are going to find theology beyond the narrow circle of the *mutakallimūn*. Those interested in the history of theories and philosophies of language will appreciate a very accessible glimpse into the medieval Arabic tradition. With its unpretentious and clear style, the book embodies some of the very principles it discusses. Yet, while it may be praiseworthy not to waste too many words on a subject, the subject of the book could have been broader. The universal framework announced at the beginning appears mostly in the form of brief references to modern philosophies of language in the footnotes. The account of al-Jāhiz's historical context and its intellectual landscape is based on a fairly small selection of literature. Likewise, a more detailed response to other publications on al-Jāhiz, in particular the articles by Montgomery available at the time, would have been useful, especially since the bibliography on the author remains short.

Anna Akasoy

University of Oxford

E-mail: anna.akasoy@orinst.ox.ac.uk

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Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being

By SAJJAD RIZVI (London: Routledge, 2009), xiii + 222 pp. Price HB £70.00. EAN 978-0415490733.

Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics is the first English-language monograph devoted to an examination of the central role of *tashkīk al-wujūd* (gradation or modulation

of being) in Ṣadrīan ontology. Understanding the manner in which *tashkīk* figures in Ṣadrā's metaphysics is of utmost importance in coming to terms with how he manages to tackle some of the most vexing philosophical problems, such as the relationship between unity and multiplicity, or how it is that we can employ language to make positive statements about seemingly disparate things in the world. Consequently, it can also present us with a clearer picture of what it is that Ṣadrā is doing that is so unique at such a late stage in the history of Islamic thought.

The first part of the book, 'Preliminaries', is comprised of two chapters. Ch. 1 offers a summary of the current state of Ṣadrā studies, which already boasts some sixteen monographs on aspects of his life and thought in English alone (with at least two more books due out in 2012). Rizvi also offers his own methodological insights about Ṣadrā's role as a philosopher-sage for whom philosophy functioned as a way of life and an art of becoming more human. Since philosophical inquiry in medieval Islam was inextricably linked to the pursuit and acquisition of virtue, the philosophical life was nothing other than Socrates's 'examined life'. This explains why self-realization, knowledge of God, and the quest after virtue can be said to lie at the heart of Ṣadrā's philosophy (pp. 25–6).

In ch. 2, Rizvi delves into the main features of Ṣadrīan ontology. For Ṣadrā, all things exist by virtue of being and therefore arise within it and through it. Being is the most evident of things, but, by the same token, the most hidden of them as well. The only way we can take being seriously as an actual reality, and not simply as a second-order intelligible (*mā'qūl thānī*), is precisely when we see it as possessing extra-mental reality (*wujūd khārijī*) (p. 53). We can then move beyond the mere semantics of being and analyse its structure as an actual 'thing'. It is this dimension of Ṣadrā's thought that presents the most formidable challenge to the way we think about being. It is one thing to speak of being as a concept and analyse the manner in which it is graded and ambiguous with respect to predication and linguistic analysis. But it is quite another thing to expound the reality of being as both extra-mental and fundamental to everything. From this position, it is not a far step to see that if being is fundamental and underlies all things, it can only be so on account of its ability to take on varying degrees of its own manifestation, which is how things 'come about'.

Thus, as the sole basis of reality, being is also a dynamic principle, which is why Ṣadrā understands the entire cosmos to be nothing but the flow of being and its individuation on both vertical and horizontal planes of existence. This is tantamount to saying that since things exist on the scale of being in unequal measure, being is characterized by its own dynamism with respect to the ebb and flow of its modes, thanks to its varying degrees of intensity and diminution. The reality of things is precisely accorded to them by virtue of how much being they manifest, that is, how intense they are on the scale of being. Thus, things as modes of being are so on account of being's graded nature, and not for any reason within themselves. This explains why Ṣadrā, contra Suhrawardī and a host of other prominent Muslim philosophers and theologians, denies reality to quiddities (*māhiyyāt*).

At the beginning of the second chapter, Rizvi acutely situates *tashkīk* within its Neoplatonic/Islamic context, but also clears the ground by looking back to Aristotle and the problem of predication vis-à-vis the verb 'to be'. He then traces the history of the term *tashkīk* and its relationship to being from Avicenna through to the school of Ibn 'Arabī. It seems that Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī was one of the first authors to admit the possibility of *tashkīk* within being itself (pp. 43–4). At the same time, Rizvi states that the famous member of the school of Ibn 'Arabī, Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, denies that *tashkīk* can occur 'in the reality of being' (p. 45). However, as Caner Dagli has demonstrated in his 2006 Princeton University doctoral thesis, the picture is not so clear-cut, as Qayṣarī seems to affirm the reality of *tashkīk* in extra-mental being itself. This would hardly be a surprise at any rate, since Ṣadrā is clearly indebted to Qayṣarī on a number of fronts. But like all of the other instances in which previous influences can be discerned in Ṣadrā's writings, he adopts these insights and fleshes out their implications within the framework of his dynamic metaphysics.

The book's second part, 'Analysis of Ṣadrian Ontology', is comprised of three chapters. In ch. 3, Rizvi tackles the issue of the predicatability of being. In other words, he seeks to answer this question: how does being relate to thought and language? Contrary to Kant, who a century after Ṣadrā put forth the influential idea that being is not a real predicate, Ṣadrā maintains that being is a real predicate. He argues that being is not merely a copulative, but rather is a property, since it does possess reality in the act of predication itself (p. 64). And this, of course, goes back to *tashkīk*. Being's graded nature entails that it can participate on every level of language-naming while actually adding new information about the subject of which it is a predicate. The subject–predicate relationship with respect to being thus arises as a result of the nature of the way in which being acts as a predicate: it adds new information or gives us something to take away with respect to the subject, because the subject of which being is a predicate is nothing but an instantiation of being (cf. p. 72).

In ch. 4, Rizvi deals with another aspect of Ṣadrian ontology, namely 'mental being' (*al-wujūd al-dhibnī*). Just as being exists extra-mentally and in language, so too does it have a mode of existence upon the mental plane. This seems to have been a thorny problem for some of Ṣadrā's main detractors, such as Mullā Rajab 'Alī al-Tabrīzī. Rizvi also devotes a part of this chapter to the famous Ṣadrian notion, appropriated from Suhrawardī and reworked into Ṣadrā's ontology, of knowledge by presence (*al-'ilm al-ḥuḍūrī*) (pp. 89–91), or, as I would prefer to translate it, 'presential knowledge'. Ṣadrā maintains that knowledge is itself an ambiguous concept, and behaves in many ways like being. Yet knowledge is also subsumed under being and is thus a mode of being. God knows things presentially since His very knowledge of things entails that they come into being. All things in existence, all modes of being, are thus nothing other than the modalities of God's knowledge. The human self, likewise, is nothing but an extension of God's knowledge. Since God is present with His objects of knowledge, Ṣadrā reminds us that our very existence is His presence with us. Thus, the more we come to know of our own existence, the more we come to

understand the manner in which God is present with us. This is where being, knowledge, and presence meet up *in divinis*. For God to ‘be’ is for Him to know, and for Him to know is for Him to be present with what He knows.

The book’s final chapter lucidly explains how multiplicity arises from the One, even though it is simple in every respect. Multiplicity does not, in the final analysis, somehow occupy an order of existence independent from the One. Based on the notion of *tashkīk*, it is shown here to be nothing other than the One, but in delimited fashion. This sets the stage for Rizvi’s discussion of the circle of being, which describes how the graded nature of being allows it to descend the scale of being upon the arc of descent (*al-qaws al-nuzūlī*) and re-ascend upon the arc of ascent (*al-qaws al-ṣū‘ūdī*) (pp. 108–9). As being unfolds downwardly or centrifugally, it coagulates and takes on various modes relative to its positionality upon the downward scale of its devolution. Then, as it increases in intensity and climbs the scale of being—in keeping with the principle of substantial motion or change (*al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*)—it continues to become more real and shucks off any and all coagulations that it acquired during its downward descent.

After engaging in a helpful discussion of how Ṣadrā’s proofs for the existence of God are rooted in his ontology (pp. 124–7), Rizvi turns to the role played by the Twelve Imāms in Ṣadrā’s anthropology and eschatology. One is left with the impression that much more needs to be done here for Rizvi to support his claim that the Imāms are central to Ṣadrā’s noetics and soteriology (cf. p. 130). We know, for example, that in his most extensive discussions of soteriology, which are to be found towards the end of the *Asfār* and throughout the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, Ṣadrā does not accord a significant role to the Imāms. Instead, he draws on Ibn ‘Arabī and Qayṣarī to argue for the universal nature of God’s mercy in the afterlife.

When reading a thinker like Mullā Ṣadrā one is faced with several major difficulties at the outset: first there is the question of understanding his ontology. If one can surmount this hurdle, then one has to make sense of how Ṣadrā treats particular problems in conversation with disciplines ranging from philosophy and theology, to Sufism and scriptural exegesis. Without passing this barrier, one may be misled into thinking that Ṣadrā’s originality lies where it likely does not. So a great deal of historical knowledge and philosophical skill is also required in order to discern the various kinds of discourse at work in Ṣadrā’s writings. If one can overcome this challenge and see how Ṣadrā’s creative appropriations on any given topic fit into his worldview, then one may be able effectively to demonstrate his innovativeness and significance. Sajjad Rizvi’s *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics* is indeed successful on all of these fronts. It is therefore a fine addition to the field of Islamic philosophy in general, and Ṣadrā studies in particular.

Mohammed Rustom

Carleton University

E-mail: mrustom@connect.carleton.ca

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