

**‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġhdādī’s Philosophical Journey : From Aristotle’s Metaphysics to the ‘Metaphysical Science’**, by Cecilia Martini Bonadeo (Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science: Texts and Studies, 88) (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2013), xii + 378 pp., ISBN: 978-90-041-24916-5, €161.00 / \$209.00 (hb)

‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġhdādī (1162-1231 C.E.) was a remarkable individual. He was schooled in the Greek and Arabic philosophical traditions as well as in the traditional Islamic sciences, making him one of the most notable polymaths of his age. He was also well-versed and highly competent in the field of medicine. He traveled extensively throughout the Islamic world, debating with philosophers and other scholars and gaining the esteem and patronage of important officials and rulers. Moreover, he was actively engaged in the polemical pursuit of purging philosophy of (what he regarded to be its undesirable) Avicennian components.

Cecilia Martini Bonadeo’s new book is a learned and authoritative study that synthesizes the existing literature on ‘Abd al-Laṭīf and sheds new light on various aspects of his life and thought. The book is structured into three main parts. Part 1 consists of a survey of the fate of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in the ancient and late-antique contexts and an overview of its variegated reception in the early Islamic period. This part of the book covers several key issues relating to the composition, textual transmission, translation, and interpretation of *Metaphysics*, in part, by exploring the practice of commentary writing that developed around it, especially from Alexander of Aphrodisias to Avicenna. Martini Bonadeo also devotes considerable attention to the changing conception of metaphysics as a discipline in Greek and Arabic philosophical circles. How did the ancient philosophers divide the various parts of the metaphysical inquiry and define its subject matter and principal aims? What place did metaphysics occupy in their thought, particularly with regard to theology and ontology? Martini Bonadeo addresses these questions thoroughly and stresses the roles played by the Greek Neoplatonists and the Arabic adaptations of Neoplatonic works produced in the circle of al-Kindī. In essence, this part of the book amounts to a very readable survey. It offers a *status quaestionis* of several key issues and provides the essential

historical background for the later analysis of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s approach to metaphysics.

Part 2 offers an analysis of the biographical evidence of the life and intellectual trajectory of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf. His voyages throughout the Middle East, his meetings with various teachers and scholars, his interactions with political figures, and the main stages of his medical and philosophical formation as recorded in the available sources are deftly discussed by Martini Bonadeo. We are fortunate to possess a wealth of information about ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, much of which is contained in the works of later Arabic bio-bibliographers and other authors; the remainder is conveniently found in ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s autobiography. This rich data mine allows for a detailed reconstruction of the various stages of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s medical and philosophical education; from his initial embrace of Avicennian learning to his later critical attitude toward it and his overarching project of forging a new synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy and the Islamic sciences. However, the value of this section of the book is not confined to ‘Abd al-Laṭīf alone; Martini Bonadeo paints a broad and rich picture of the social and cultural life of the period that goes well beyond ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s own career and provides valuable insight into the philosophical and medical education of the learned classes of his time.

In Part 3, the author scrutinizes the structure and contents of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s *Book on the Science of Metaphysics*, which was preserved in only two manuscripts, against the backdrop of the Greek and Arabic metaphysical traditions. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s metaphysical objective was to return to the doctrines of Aristotle and his faithful commentators, which he believed had been tainted by Avicennian theories. Avicenna’s views gained widespread acceptance after his death and deeply penetrated the various layers of Islamic education, including jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and rational theology (*kalām*), in addition to the philosophical curriculum itself. However, there were reactionary attempts by various thinkers to purge Aristotelian doctrines of these accretions. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, in the eastern Islamic lands, and Averroes, in al-Andalus, are two notable examples of philosophical opposition to Avicenna, even though the motives behind their opposition varied considerably. Martini Bonadeo’s analysis dwells on the various sources that made ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s revisionist project feasible: he referenced not only various versions of *Metaphysics* but also a rich array of works traceable to the Greek commentators (especially Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius), the circle of al-Kindī, and al-Fārābī. The

Arabic Neoplatonic corpus also played an important role in shaping 'Abd al-Laṭīf's views, placing him squarely in the tradition of those Arabic thinkers who relied on Neoplatonic works for their exegesis of Aristotelian sources.

Martini Bonadeo has produced a very carefully researched study. Her sources and quotations are well contextualized, and she provides a substantial number of passages gleaned from 'Abd al-Laṭīf's works and aptly translated into English, often for the first time. The author's style is clear and concise, and her exposition is thoughtful and informed by the latest and most authoritative scholarship on the subject. Moreover, she provides very detailed information on the manuscripts containing 'Abd al-Laṭīf's works and the editions used. All in all, Martini Bonadeo's book offers a successful balance of philological expertise and conceptual analysis.

However, although the author's discussions of the Greek and Arabic thinkers are in general satisfactory, her treatment of Avicenna is less compelling. This is unfortunate insofar as Avicenna is (after Aristotle), arguably, the thinker who had the strongest impact (both positive and negative) on 'Abd al-Laṭīf's approach to philosophy. In particular, Martini Bonadeo's summary of Avicennian metaphysics and cosmology (pp. 100-105) is incomplete and potentially misleading for readers who are not already familiar with the intricacies of Avicenna's thought. One wishes that the author's discussion of major Avicennian metaphysical themes (essence and existence, the modalities, and causation) had been more substantial and precise. The author altogether fails to mention the causation of the separate intellects from one another and the crucial role they play in celestial motion. Moreover, Martini Bonadeo does not provide any insight into the basic structure of Avicenna's cosmology. As a result, readers might get the impression that Avicenna ascribes only one soul to the heavens, when in fact he posits a multiplicity of souls (and intellects) to explain the activity and motion of the celestial bodies. Martini Bonadeo's treatment of this topic could have benefited from consideration of additional relevant publications (especially H. A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect. Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* [New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992]; A. Hasnawi, "Fayḍ," in *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle*, vol. II. *Les notions philosophiques* [Paris, PUF, 1990], I, 966-972; and D. Janos, "Moving the Orbs: Astronomy, Physics, and Metaphysics, and the Problem of

Celestial Motion according to Ibn Sīnā,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 21/2 [2011], 165-214).

A more general shortcoming of the book is that although the reader learns a great deal about the textual, formal, and structural aspects of the Greek and Arabic metaphysics traditions, there is, in the final analysis, no real attempt by the author to contextualize ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s ideas within the ongoing philosophical dialogue with Avicenna and the Avicennian philosophers who flourished shortly after his death. In this regard, I found that the author unduly emphasizes the Greek tradition at the expense of the crucial period spanning from Avicenna to ‘Abd al-Laṭīf himself, which she relegates to a secondary position. However, a more sustained analysis of the general metaphysical outlook that prevailed from Avicenna and Bahmanyār to al-Ghazālī, Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (to name only a few major figures) seems a requisite to complete the (otherwise excellent) picture sketched by the author. As a result of this omission, one does not fully grasp where ‘Abd al-Laṭīf situated himself vis-à-vis some of the critiques already articulated by these thinkers against Avicenna nor to what his relation to the post-Avicennian tradition precisely amounted. I feel that the book may have benefited from an additional chapter to fill this gap and to cover what is arguably the most nuanced and complicated period of Martini Bonadeo’s survey.

These two critical points notwithstanding, Martini Bonadeo’s book is a welcome and valuable contribution to the history of Arabic thought and the field of Greco-Arabic studies. The book is a thoroughly researched monograph that will undoubtedly remain the reference work on ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī for many years to come.

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