

Al-Ghazālī on Condemnation of Pride and Self-Admiration (Kitāb dhamm al-kibr wa'l-ʿujb); Book XXIX of The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn). Translated with introduction and notes by Mohammed Rustom (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2018), xxxvi + 190 pp., ISBN: 978-1911141-136, \$20.60 (pb)

The book under review forms part of a large-scale project undertaken by The Islamic Texts Society to offer a critical translation of every book which comprises al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of the Religious Sciences*). The explicit aim of the endeavor is to produce volumes which are not only for scholars working in the field, but also for the wider public. Meeting both demands is no easy task for a translator. Fortunately, the translator of *The Condemnation of Pride and Self-Admiration* (the twenty-ninth book of the *Iḥyā'*) Mohammed Rustom has eminently succeeded on this front. He offers a very accessible, easy-to-read translation. At the same time, he pays serious attention to the Arabic text and points out difficult passages for which, on occasion (namely, when it is both grammatically and doctrinally possible), he does not hesitate to present an alternative translation. In cases where a given translation is not literal (see e.g., p. 91) or includes an interpolation (see e.g., p. 85), Rustom indicates this, and when there is a clear need for it, explains the reason(s) for doing so.

Regarding technical terms or expressions, such as *jabbār* or *tazkiyat al-naḥs* (p. 5, n. B and p. 49, n. A respectively), he makes it clear that their understanding (positively or negatively) largely depends on context. Rustom thus justifies the use of different English words to translate the very same Arabic term (for example, with regard to *jabbār*, he renders it as “arrogant” or in some cases “oppressor” when it pertains to humans, and “Compeller” when it pertains to God). Furthermore, Rustom makes good but critical use of Murtaḍa al-Zabīdī's famous commentary upon the *Iḥyā'*, the *Itḥāf al-sādat al-*

muttaqīn, drawing on it not just as a source for helpful explanations of unclear passages and phrases, but also as a reliable text for correcting most of the problematic readings in the printed edition of the *Iḥyāʾ* used as the basis for his translation (i.e., the increasingly popular Dār al-Minhāj edition).

Special mention should be made of how Rustom, inspired by al-Zabīdī, opts for the unusual translation of *maʿrifā* as “previous acquaintance” (p. 59, n. D), which indeed is the sense that al-Ghazālī had in mind in the context in question. Moreover, Rustom does not hesitate to qualify some affirmations as “unclear,” as, for example, the title of chapter 8 in part I of the book. This title is indeed puzzling, not least because the chapter divides into two parts, the first of which deals with the traits of pride, and the second with those of humility. Thus, the opening words of the actual title, *Akblāq al-mutawāḍiʿīn*, “The Character Traits of the Humble,” cover only the second part. One therefore wonders whether the original title did not in fact feature a reference to the *mutakabbirīn* as well, which would help us make more sense of the title, namely “The Character Traits of the Proud and the Humble.”

In only a handful of situations can one express some degree of reservation with regard to a given translation. By way of example, I refer here to the following three cases:

— p. 39, last paragraph: The passage, “Rather, true knowledge is that through which a person knows himself, his Lord, and the seriousness of the end. For God’s proof is against the scholars; hence, the magnitude of the danger of knowledge . . . ,” is in need of some qualification. Surely al-Ghazālī is not opposing knowledge as such (cf. p. 73: “the treatment of pride in terms of knowledge is for a person to know himself and to know his Lord . . .”). Rather, he is against an overconfidence in one’s own intellectual capacities which completely ignores the limits of human reason.

— p. 52, third paragraph: As Rustom explicitly mentions in the two corresponding notes, he omits “son of” before “black man” and “white man” respectively, but these qualifications seem to be crucial given that the hadith in which these expressions figure is used by al-Ghazālī to illustrate the problem of “pride because of *lineage and noble descent*” (emphasis mine).

— p. 122, third paragraph: “you, your ability, will and motion” should be reworded to avoid any stylistic/syntactical ambiguities: “you and your ability, will, and motion”

But these “suggestions for correction” offer at best minor improvements, and certainly do not affect the overall high quality of the translation in any significant way whatsoever.

In his introduction to the translation, Rustom highlights the particular significance of *The Condemnation of Pride and Self-Admiration* with respect to the wider framework of the *Iḥyāʾ*. Although it has not received much attention in contemporary scholarship on al-Ghazālī, there is no doubt that this particular book of the *Iḥyāʾ* is one of al-Ghazālī’s most interesting works on morality and human behaviour. Even today, and even outside of Islam, it offers stimulating ideas regarding the dangers inherent in egotistical love. At the end of his introduction (p. xxxvi), Rustom marvelously summarizes this particular text’s ultimate goal: “If a person can break away from the stranglehold of his ego and conquer his self, he will be able to nurture those qualities of the soul that naturally bring about humility. Put differently, to don the garb of humility is to do away with the self altogether. This is why, in the final analysis, humility is not simply to lower the self. Rather, humility is when there is no self left to lower.”

Rustom also draws his readers’ attention to the fact that al-Muḥāsibī’s *al-Riʿāya li-ḥuqūq Allāh* (mainly for content) and Ibn Abī Dunyā’s *al-Tawāḍuʿ wa-l-khumūl* (for hadiths and narrations) constitute the two major sources for *The Condemnation of Pride and Self-Admiration*. Hence, it is not without surprise that one finds many references to both works in the notes to the translation. But al-Ghazālī copied, or was at least heavily inspired by, more passages than are referred to in the actual notes. For example, for chapter 2 of part 1, one finds in notes 1-3 references to al-Bukhārī and Muslim, but all three of the traditions in question are also present in the *Tawāḍuʿ* (a reference to it is only included in note 1). In fact, parts of the *Tawāḍuʿ* are extensively used in chapters 1-3 and near the end of chapter 8 of part 1. As for al-Muḥāsibī’s *Riʿāya*, it also has been used by al-Ghazālī in a much more significant way than the notes actually suggest.

Yet Rustom is clearly aware of this, as can be deduced from the following remark in his introduction (p. xxvi): “But al-Ghazālī’s main source is *al-Riʿāya* In many instances, al-Ghazālī reproduces and/or reworks passages from this book. Yet, even in so doing, al-

Ghazālī is able to reinvigorate al-Muḥāsibī's treatment of pride and self-admiration by carefully integrating materials from the *Ri'āya* into the framework of the organisational genius that guides his own concerns in *The Condemnation of Pride and Self-Admiration*. This results in a much better, and a more logical and stylistic presentation of the subject matter. Even on a purely conceptual level, al-Ghazālī is able to situate the theoretical problem of pride into his sophisticated conception of the human soul in a way that is more nuanced and detailed than we find in the *Ri'āya*." In a private communication, the translator informed me that to have included a reference to all borrowings and creative adaptations would have caused over-documentation and prolixity in the notes, which indeed is a more than valid argument. All of this is to say that Rustom is clearly aware of the fact that al-Ghazālī sometimes restructures or reworks the *Ri'āya*'s discussions on pride and self-admiration into book twenty-nine of the *Iḥyā'*, while also including substantial additions *and* omissions along the way.

Only a detailed examination will allow us to see whether, and if so, to what degree, these alterations and adaptations are doctrinally significant. In order to give the reader an idea of how al-Ghazālī integrates al-Muḥāsibī's treatment from the *Ri'āya* of pride in particular into his book, I present here two concrete examples:

— In the lines that the *Ri'āya* (ed. 'Aṭā, Cairo, 1971, p. 378) devotes to the occurrence of pride between the servant and the Lord, different Qur'anic verses are quoted, three of which are mentioned by al-Ghazālī—in the very same order—at the end of his treatment of the category of pride towards God at the beginning of chapter 5 of part I (even though the notes identify the Qur'anic quotations, it is regrettable that they do not offer a single reference to their use in the *Ri'āya*). However, the first lines of al-Ghazālī's discussion have no parallel with al-Muḥāsibī's exposition, at least not in the immediate context surrounding these Qur'anic quotations, which leads us to believe that something may have been added here by al-Ghazālī. In so doing, especially by including historical examples, such as Nimrod and Pharaoh, al-Ghazālī in all likelihood wanted to stress how stupid and tyrannical such a form of pride actually is.

— In the same vein, near the end of chapter 4 of part II, one finds references to the sayings of David, the companions of the Prophet (on the day of Ḥunayn), and Job that are also mentioned in the *Ri'āya* (pp. 341-43)—a fact that is largely referred to in the notes, although they do

not mention that the hadith, “So God (Exalted is He) inspired him [i.e. David] ... yourself” (p. 127, lines 1-4), is also mentioned in the *Ri‘āya* (p. 342, lines 7-8). It is worthy to observe that al-Ghazālī, with regard to David, adds a saying on patience (which is related to the Biblical story of David and Bathsheba); and, concerning Job, he includes a final note that emphasizes Job’s recognition that God is the real source of his patience. These additions by al-Ghazālī are rather telling insofar as they underscore the fact that the human virtue of patience always has its ultimate source in God.

Granted that al-Ghazālī borrowed from the works of others rather extensively—and in a way that even for his time went beyond conventional practice—as Lazarus-Yafeh noted already almost half a century ago, he nevertheless did so in a very intelligent manner. Indeed, his ability to creatively restructure and adapt his sources allowed him to introduce many new and innovative ideas and/or perspectives into his writings. In order to be able to evaluate such moves in al-Ghazālī’s work in a correct way, it would be imperative to identify, as much and as precisely as possible, the sources upon which he relied. In his introduction, Mohammed Rustom offers us important clues with respect to al-Ghazālī’s treatment pride and self-admiration. Thanks to them and to his outstanding translation, future research can shed greater light, for example, on the precise merit of al-Ghazālī’s fascinating exposition of the virtue of humility in particular.

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