

Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas, edited by Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman (Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science: 83), (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2012), xii + 493 pp., ISBN: 978-90-04-20274-0, €161.00 / \$221.00 (hb)

A recent survey volume on medieval philosophy has called Dimitri Gutas, Professor of Arabic and Graeco-Arabic at Yale University, “the leading living historian of Islamic thought.”¹ Such judgments are to some extent a matter of taste, of course, but few scholars have as good a claim to the title as Gutas. His publications include pioneering work on the tradition of Greek-Arabic gnomologia,² one of the most significant monographs ever published on Avicenna,³ and a penetrating and influential study of the Graeco-Arabic translation movement.⁴ In collaboration with Gerhard Endress he has also led the GALex project to document this same translation movement.⁵ In short, this is a man who deserves a good Festschrift.

And he now has one, edited by two of his former students, Felicitas Opwis and the late David C. Reisman.⁶ (In fact, the Fest-

¹ John Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007), 338.

² Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation: A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1975), and for a useful briefer survey see his later study “Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature: Nature and Scope,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101 (1981), 49-86.

³ Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna’s Philosophical Works* (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

⁴ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsī Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998). For a collection reprinting his articles on aspects of the Greek-Arabic transmission, see Gutas, *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

⁵ *A Greek and Arabic Lexicon: Materials for a Dictionary of the Mediaeval Translations from Greek into Arabic*, published by Brill starting in 1992.

⁶ For the sake of full disclosure I should mention that at the time of his tragic and untimely death David Reisman was working with me at King’s College London on a project funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

schrift additionally brings home how many excellent students Gutas has produced over the years, since a number of them have contributed to the volume.) The generous scope of the book makes it possible to cover something like the range of topics dealt with in Gutas' own work – there are sections on ancient texts and their reception in the Islamic world, on Arabic philosophy, and on the “traditional” Muslim sciences, i.e., *fiqh* and *kalām*. In all there are 20 papers, one in German and the rest in English. I do not have space here to discuss the entire volume in detail, so I will concentrate on those that focus on the history of philosophy in the Islamic world, before summarizing the rest of the contributions at the end of my review.

The one paper in German is by the leading scholar of the Kindī circle and GALEX collaborator, Gerhard Endress. He has pursued the interesting idea of focusing on the flowery introductions to al-Kindī's works. I would confess to having paid little attention to the introductions in my own work on al-Kindī.⁷ Endress shows that they provide an important window into al-Kindī's cultural context. Of course his most famous addressees are the Caliph al-Mu'taṣim (to whom al-Kindī dedicated his greatest work, *On First Philosophy*) and the Caliph's son Aḥmad, whom al-Kindī tutored. But Endress also provides information on the Barmakid Muḥammad ibn al-Jahm, recipient of a brief work *On the Oneness of God and the Finiteness of the Body of the World* (pp. 299-300). More generally, his study enhances our sense of al-Kindī as a man whose career was shaped by patronage, rivalry, and collaboration, as well as by the Greek texts translated in his circle.⁸

Moving forward through the philosophical tradition, we reach an important announcement concerning Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, in an article by Robert Wisnovsky. A Christian philosopher who was for some time in the 10th century the leading Aristotelian in Baghdad, Ibn 'Adī has left a number of extant texts to posterity. Information on his entire *oeuvre* is available in a fundamental study by the just-mentioned Endress,⁹

⁷ Although they are not omitted from the English translations now available in Peter Adamson and Peter E. Pormann, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁸ In this respect the piece builds on a much earlier study by Gutas' teacher Franz Rosenthal, “Al-Kindī als Literat,” *Orientalia* 11 (1942), 262-288.

⁹ Gerhard Endress, *The Works of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī: An Analytical Inventory* (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1977).

and an edition of his philosophical treatises was published in 1988.¹⁰ Now Wisnovsky details the contents of a manuscript held in Tehran (Madrasa-yi Marwī 19, copied in 1073 AH/1662 AD). Among other texts it includes 53 works of Ibn ‘Adī, of which 24 were previously thought lost. Wisnovsky provides incipits and explicits of the newly discovered treatises. Once the manuscript is available through a facsimile edition announced here (p. 307, n. 2), it should provoke renewed efforts at understanding Ibn ‘Adī’s thought. With any luck this will also lead to a more adequate assessment of those texts that were already available, but have been only partially studied.¹¹

Appropriately enough, given Gutas’ major contributions to the study of Avicenna, several papers here look at the background and writings of *al-Sheikh al-Ra’is*. Jules Janssens notes parallels between the *Ta’liqāt* and the *Metaphysics* section of the *Shifā’*, most of which deal with “natural theology” (p. 222). Given the imprecision of the parallels it seems that the *Shifā’* is being quoted from memory by the author of the *Ta’liqāt* (Janssens does not try to decide here the question of whether it should be ascribed to Avicenna himself). The relationship between the two texts is sufficiently close that Janssens suggests seeing the latter text as a kind of commentary on the former.¹² Speaking of the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifā’*, for me a highlight of the volume is Amos Bertolacci’s study of the essence/existence distinction in that work. He argues that our understanding of the distinction should begin with chapter I.5 of the *Metaphysics*, rather than V.1-2 as is often done. There, Avicenna is giving us a treatment of universals, whereas I.5 is a more straightforward exposition of the distinction itself. This suggestion is highly significant. For, as Bertolacci shows with a meticulous analysis of I.5, that text does not suggest (as does V.1-2) that essence is “neutral” with respect to existence. Rather essence is *always* connected to existence (p. 261; it is a *lāzim*, “some-

¹⁰ Saḥbān Khalīfāt, *Maqālāt Yahyā ibn ‘Adī al-falsafīyya* (Amman: al-Jāmi‘a al-Urduniyya, 1988).

¹¹ For a very useful overall assessment of Ibn ‘Adī as a thinker (in the context of exploring the possibility that he may have authored a work ascribed to al-Fārābī), see Marwan Rashed, “On the Authorship of the Treatise *On the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages* attributed to al-Fārābī,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 19/1 (2009), 43-82.

¹² Actually he calls it a “supercommentary” (p. 201) but I assume this is a slip, since the *Shifā’* is not itself a commentary.

thing approaching the status of a property,” pp. 270-271). In other words, the scope of essences is not larger than the scope of existents,¹³ or in still other words, there are no essences that do not exist. As for *why* exactly essences must always exist, this is a matter for further speculation. Obviously the essences do not receive existence from their own resources, so to speak – this is just what it means for them to be contingent. Is it then because God directly or indirectly bestows existence on all possible essences out of His generosity? Or simply because there is no essence that cannot at least be thought, so as to receive mental existence?

One of the goals for Avicenna scholarship more widely is a better understanding of how metaphysical issues like these relate to his logic, and especially his modal logic. Thanks to Tony Street and Paul Thom, this goal is coming ever closer to being reached. Another excellent contribution here, by Street, explores the question of whether Avicenna interpreted modal propositions according to a *de re* or *de dicto* analysis. The influential later logician al-Kātibī goes for the *de re* reading, which links modal statements to temporal occurrence (pp. 236-237). However, taking guidance from al-Ṭūsī, Street argues that at least in the *Isbārāt* Avicenna thinks we instead make modal claims by reflecting on natures and the properties with which they are compatible or necessarily linked (pp. 245-246). This would bring logic into close contact with metaphysics, indeed the very metaphysical issues discussed in Bertolacci's paper.

Yet another important study with Avicenna at its center is Alexander Treiger's discussion of the history of the Avicennian notion of modulation or *tashkīk*, which was so important for later authors including Mullā Ṣadrā. The fundamental question considered by Treiger is whether Avicenna was the first to propose that there is a modulation of existence between God and contingent things. Obviously this notion draws to some extent on Aristotle's idea of *pros hen* predica-

¹³ Furthermore, Bertolacci points out that the scope of essences or “things” may in fact be *smaller* than the scope of existents, because God exists without being a “thing” (p. 262, cf. pp. 275-277). Of course this presupposes a negative answer to the question of whether God has an essence, or has “thingness,” a notoriously vexed issue. On this see E. M. Macierowski, “Does God Have a Quiddity According to Avicenna?,” *Thomist* 52 (1988), 79-87, and Peter Adamson, “From the Necessary Existent to God,” in P. Adamson (ed.), *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2013).

tion. To take the famous example (*Metaphysics* Γ.2), everything called “healthy” is so called because it somehow has to do with the health of a person, yet a healthy diet is not healthy in the same sense as a healthy person. Treiger shows in detail how Aristotle, Alexander, the Neoplatonic commentators, and al-Fārābī all provide important background for understanding Avicenna on *tashkīk*. (For instance Alexander does say that “existent” is a predicate that falls between univocity and equivocality, p. 335.) Yet it is indeed only with Avicenna, and especially the *Mubāḥathāt*, that existence is both seen as a modulated *transcendental* that applies both to God and contingents (p. 360).

The contributions of Bertolacci, Street, and Treiger are the most “philosophical” pieces here, but numerous other studies will be important for those interested in the Arabic philosophical tradition. For instance the last paper, by Yahya Michot, translates passages from Ibn Taymiyya that present his understanding of the development of philosophy in Islam. An earlier reaction to philosophy is recorded by Beatrice Gruendler, who examines allusions to Aristotle in Arabic poetry. The cultural reception of philosophy is also touched upon in a breathtakingly polemical piece by Sonja Brentjes, which rails against the rhetoric of “decline” so often applied to the Islamic world. Brentjes is probably preaching to the choir by arguing for this point in such a volume. Or at least, I am a member of the choir, and agree that the “decline” narrative is to be rejected, being not only reductive and simplistic, but also misleading. Still, the more interesting part of this piece is not its rhetorically charged beginning or end but the more sedate description of educational curricula and patronage in Islamic societies, which summarizes Brentjes’ previous work in this area (pp. 139-149).

Several contributors discuss topics in the history of science, and these frequently have philosophical relevance – for instance Reisman’s study of the “medical ethics” of ‘Alī ibn Riḍwān or Von Staden’s very useful discussion of emotion, and in particular anger, in Galen. The Aristotelian philosopher Aristo of Ceos is also discussed, befitting Gutas’ interest in early Aristotelianism and especially Theophrastus. Here Fortenbaugh, a leading authority on Theophrastus, presents material related to a lost work on *eros* by Aristo. What we might call “pseudo-science” is also covered. One of the most impressive articles, by Kevin van Bladel, explores the historical sources of a

history of science (especially astrology) found in the *Fibrist*. A brief piece by Hans Daiber acquaints the reader with the 11th century scholar Ibn al-Faḍl who, among other things, wrote a refutation of astrology (p. 4). And a philological study by Charles Burnett and Gideon Bohak provides an edition and translation of newly discovered fragments in Judeo-Arabic for texts on magic. Hidemi Takahashi's piece is of a similarly philological nature, and details a collection of Syriac manuscripts now held at Yale.

There is also much material of philosophical interest in the studies on the "traditional sciences" included here, for instance Opwis' treatment of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's legal theory, which uses the notion of "suitability (*munāsaba*)" to avoid saying that previous legal judgements are actually "causes" of new judgements. Even *kalām* gets a look in, with good papers on a Mu'tazilite statement regarding the correct method of interpreting the Qur'ān, by Suleiman Mourad, and the complicated evidence bearing on a theological debate recorded in *Kitāb al-ḥayda*. This piece, by Racha el-Omari, is revealing of the ambiguous attitude of Ḥanbalīs towards *kalām* methodology (p. 421).

As the foregoing should make obvious, this is a rich and wide-ranging volume. It would take a person of highly eclectic tastes to be equally interested in all the contributions. But by the same token, anyone who works seriously on intellectual traditions in the Islamic world should find valuable material here. Every paper is at least solid; many are excellent, and will become points of reference for future research. As I have pointed out, the volume is especially strong on philosophy and science, but it manages to visit all the areas of inquiry dealt with in Gutas' own formidable research. That in itself is no mean feat.

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