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Richard C. Taylor

Marquette University, richard.taylor@marquette.edu

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Review of The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations by Mulla Sadra

Richard C. Taylor
Marquette University

MULLA SADRA. *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*. Translated by Seyyed Hussein Nasr. Edited by Ibrahim Kalin. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2014. xli + 123 pp. Cloth, \$39.95.-This work provides a complete English translation with facing page Arabic text of the metaphysical treatise *Kitāb al-Mashā'ir* by Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Yayhā al-Qawāmī al-Shirāzi or Mullā Sadrā (c. 1571-1636 CE), the most influential and well known Islamic philosopher after Avicenna (d. 1037). As Nasr explains in his "Translator's Preface," this translation arose from private extracurricular classes with advanced students (*dars-i khārij* in the Persian tradition) with close reading of the Arabic text followed by a draft English version with discussions of the translation. Once the matter of the translation was settled, comments on the text were presented and discussed, with all these being recorded. Ibrahim Kalin joined the group in 1996 and later proposed publication of the text, translation, and commentary. The present volume contains the Arabic text and English translation edited by Kalin along with his "Editor's Introduction" and modest notes on the translation. The second part of the project, the edition of Nasr's commentary, awaits future publication.

In many respects similar in kind to metaphysical explorations of existence or being in Latin Christian scholasticism, this work assumes the truth of the author's faith tradition and proceeds to explicate key metaphysical terms and teachings of the falsafa tradition that explain scriptural revelations found in the Qur'än. The Opening and First Penetration sets the stage with the explication of the notion of wujûd (existence or being, though the term is left untranslated throughout the text) following on the Islamic tradition's development of the notion in Avicenna's Metaphysics (Râhiyât) of the Shifü', a work known to the medieval Christian tradition through the twelfth-century Latin translation of Domingo Gundisalvi. In the opening book of that work Avicenna reasons that wujûd (in the Latin, esse) is not to be defined or demonstrated but rather merely needs to be brought to one's attention as something implicitly apprehended in the experience of reality. Here in the Penetrations, Sadra writes, "The reality of wujûd is the most manifest of all things through presence and unveiling, and its quiddity is the most hidden among things conceptually and in its inner reality." The task of all eight of the Penetrations is to reveal what is hidden about the conception and reality of wujûd in God as the Necessary Being and in creatures. This metaphysical term appears in the title of every one of the eight Penetrations except the last where the focus is on the Creator who is himself pure infinite wujûd without the limitation of form. Though not highlighted by the translator or editor, Sadra draws not only on the thought of Avicenna but also on that of one of the earliest works of the falsafa tradition, The Theology of Aristotle edited by al-Kindi, a work based on translations and paraphrases of the Enneads of Plotinus but with a distinctive rethinking of the One as the Pure Being and Creator free of delimitation by form. This is a work studied carefully by Avicenna. In the Sixth Penetration Sadra also recalls he once conceived of wujûd as something added to reality only in the mind's conception (as one can find in al-Farabi) but later came to hold it to be something in the internal nature of a thing caused by the creative action of the Necessary Being.

While it is valuable to have this text and translation available for those studying Islamic philosophy or even medieval philosophy generally, readers unable to consult the Arabic are sometimes at a considerable disadvantage since translations of important terms are not always consistent in reflecting the Arabic. Greater exactness and consistency of translation of the Arabic would add much for all readers of this challenging metaphysical treatise. Further, while the choice of wujûd for transliteration alone and not translation is not unacceptable given that the entire treatise concerns this term and its multiple contextualized meanings (as is the case with esse in the medieval Latin tradition), the decision to follow H. Corban's French translation to render forms of the root j- 'l such as ja'l "instauration," jâ'il "Instaurer," maj'ül "the object of instauration," seems unfortunate since for English readers that term is rare at best if not altogether unfamiliar or unknown. The base meaning of the term is 'to make.' The translation becomes problematic particularly in the initial pages of the Seventh Penetration which has the heading, "Concerning the subject that what is by essence the object of instauration and what emanates from the cause is wujûd without quiddity." A more literal translation of all the words of the Arabic is, "Regarding the thing which is essentially made by the Maker and that what emanates from the Cause is wujûd without quiddity." As in the discussions of essence and existence in medieval Latin thinkers such as Albert the Great and his student Thomas Aquinas, all created reality is continuously dependent on esse/wujûd received from the Creator. Finally, while the modest set of notes added by the editor provides interesting information on proximate members of the tradition of Sadra, the editor

inexplicably does not provide precise references when Sadra directly quotes from the Metaphysics of Avicenna.

Aside from the concerns mentioned in the paragraph just above, this work is recommended to students of medieval metaphysics in the Islamic tradition as well as to those who study medieval metaphysics in the European tradition. Both those traditions benefitted from the Metaphysics of Avicenna and also from works of the Circle of al-Kindi, which was the source of the Book of Causes or Liber de causis well known in the Latin tradition. To this extent The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations should prove to be a valuable contribution not only to the comparative study of philosophy in the Arabic and Latin medieval traditions but also to the study of the complexity of the metaphysics of existence/wvjùdJesse in its own right.

-Richard C. Taylor, Marquette University

Author Affiliation

-Richard C. Taylor, Marquette University