

BOOK REVIEW

'Abdurrahman Badawi, *Quelques figures et thèmes de la philosophie islamique*. Editions G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1979, 253 pp.

This book is a collection of eleven articles written by the author, with a short appendix commenting on one of these: "Influences islamiques sur la littérature française à l'époque classique." Some of the comments have already been published in *Studia Islamica* XLVII, 1978.

Unless one is an avid reader of Badawi's works, it is difficult to determine which of the articles have been previously published and where. Nonetheless, it is probably safe to suggest that all of them have, perhaps with the exception of the last ("Al-Bīrūnī et sa connaissance de la philosophie grecque, 219-245").

There is a similarly unfortunate vagueness in the relationship between the title of the book and its contents. Whereas the title suggests the book deals with Islamic philosophy, one discovers from the preface that it is the first of the articles, "L'humanisme dans la pensée arabe," which gives the collection its unifying theme. However, this theme is apparently such that it is justifiable to include in the collection an article ("Sciences humaines et culturelle dans le monde arabe") which deals rather perfunctorily with the development of humanity faculties in modern Arab academic institutions, in fields ranging from psychology to archeology. Justifiable or not, the inclusion of this article is bound to make the reader feel that the demands on his imagination have been unduly excessive, as he is made to shift from *falsafah*, through the so-called *pensée arabe*, to matters dealing with arts faculties.

A fair number of articles in the collection indeed deal directly with topics in *falsafah*. There is reference to b. Muḥammad Zakariyyā al-Rāzī, al-Sijistānī, Miskawayh, al-Fārābī, and al-Bīrūnī, and to the bibliographical autobiography of Ibn 'Arabī. Also included is a short but interesting discussion of a manuscript the author is probably correct in ascribing to Ibn al-Ṭayyib, a middle commentary on the first four books of the *Oraganon*, and including reference to the discussion in Ibn al-Ṭayyib's commentary on the *Categories* (Dār al-Kutub, 212 *Hikmah*) of the arguments for and against attributing this work to Aristotle. Two other articles ("Influences islamiques..." and "Les points de rencontre de la mystique musulmanne et de l'existentialisme") deal less directly with *falsafah* than with the author's theories of the possible influences varied aspects of Islamic thought may have had on French Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought.

Since it is the first of the articles (viz., "L'humanisme...") which purports to provide a unifying theme to the collection, let us examine it in greater depth. On reading it one is immediately struck by the author's range of intellectual commitments. This is apparent from both his consciousness of, and even admiration for, so-called Occidental humanism, and from his wide-ranging understanding of Arab culture. He considers Persia, Mesopotamia, and Palestine the cradle of Arab culture, the

spiritual origins of which are rooted in the religions of the Persians, Jews, Chaldeans, and Christians. Islamic civilization merely constitutes a period in Arab culture. In this sense, when one speaks about Arab thought one speaks not only in the basic linguistic sense of the ideas of those who wrote in Arabic, but also in the cultural sense of those belonging to the all-encompassing category of Arab culture.

Under such circumstances, it will hardly be surprising to find in Arab Islamic thought almost anything one wishes to look for. What is even less surprising is the author's own interpretation of "L'humanisme": indeed it is that aspect of thought in which is expressed or reflected the principle that "tout est pour l'homme, rien contre l'homme, et rien en dehors de l'homme...", and indeed "l'homme" which is meant here is "l'homme de chair et d'os," but such meanings do not exclude the human aspiration to be divine. Quite the contrary, such aspirations as these confirm rather than disprove the presence of the main element of doctrinal (as opposed to historical) humanism, namely, "un système complet dont le centre de perspective est d'ores et déjà l'homme..." They do this because the Man of divine philosophical or mystical systems is not an abstract idea of an imaginary man (p. 26). Rather, his status can be attained in practice by men of flesh and blood.

Dr Badawi's wide-ranging reflections in this article were apparently triggered by comments of C.H. Becker to the effect that the distinctive mark of Occidental culture is the humanist element, a mark which is absent from the Oriental culture (p. 3). Badawi had already addressed himself to Becker's thesis in his *Histoire de l'athéisme en Islam* (Cairo 1945), but apparently the question continued to trouble him all the more so because scholars in the field either have not dealt with the subject at all, or have arrived at a conclusion similar to Becker's. Their mistake, argues the author, stems from the fact that they do not take into account that humanism is a phenomenon that exists anyway and necessarily in every *haute culture*, and that the origins of this phenomenon lie in the spiritual root of the relevant culture (p. 33.)

Obviously, with its spiritual roots as widely spread as the author makes them out to be, Arab thought in the period of civilized Islam cannot but contain elements of humanism, given the author's analogous extension of the meaning of this term. What is surprising, however, is that the author finds these elements manifested only in some figures of Islam. He claims that the "movement" of humanism in Islamic thought crystallizes at the beginning of the fourth century A.H., the ground having been prepared by al-Rāwīdī in the previous century. It continues to develop until it reaches its climactic state in illuminative (*ishrāqī*) mystical literature as represented by al-Suhrawardī in the sixth century. Ibn 'Arabī and Ibn Sab'īn continue the tradition, and while this develops further through Mulla Sadrā and Mīr Dāmād right through to the eleventh century, it loses its initial distinctive characteristics by the end of the seventh century. The tradition is reflected in the writings of al-Jīlī, Ibn 'Arabī, al-Suhrawardī, al-Rāwīdī, Abū Bakr Moḥammad Zakariyyā al-Rāzī, and Jābir b. Ḥayyān. The spiritual roots of these writers lie in biblical, gnostic, hermetic, neo-platonic and Babylonian (astrological) literature. As for al-Ghazzālī, he is not included in the list because, as the author says, "nous ne croyons pas à la sincérité de ses expériences" (p. 34, n. 1).

We now come to consider one basic problem in the author's general thesis: as was pointed out previously, it is precisely this opening article which gives the collection its unifying theme. The author cites as a main characteristic of the humanist cult its exaltation of Reason, but "La raison qu'exalte l'humanisme n'est pas cette raison sèche, abstraite, qui ressemblerait à une machine à fabriquer des concepts figés dépourvus de vie, comme la raison scolastique perdue dans un désert de

vide dialectique et stérile syllogistique, mais elle est cette conscience totale de l'âme humaine vis-à-vis des objets extérieurs..." (p. 7). This "conscience totale de l'âme," if distinct from classical rationalism, would explain the exclusion of a thinker like Ibn Rushd from the humanist movement in Islam. But the article makes no mention of a philosopher like al-Fārābī; and yet the collection includes an article on him. The reader is then at a loss as to what to make of such evidence. If al-Fārābī is included in the collection because he is a humanist, then surely one can argue that all the so-called rational philosophers of Islam should also be included. In this case, however, Islamic rationalism in *falsafah* will simply be "conscience totale de l'âme," and it will be reasonable to suggest that the temporal boundaries which the author gives for the movement should be changed. On the other hand, if this "conscience de l'âme" is distinct from classical rationalism, then it is not clear to what extent it in fact characterizes European humanism.

The author tries to deal with this problem by insisting that rationalism in Islamic thought is meaningless unless understood as the complement of spiritualism. This dualism is also manifest in the natural and divine aspects of Man in Islamic thought: European Man is natural man, pure and simple. Oriental Man is an admixture of the natural and the divine. European Reason is natural reason, pure and simple. Oriental Reason is a creature with spiritual parts. Hence the focus on man and the exaltation of reason, being two distinguishing characteristics of humanism, delineate a humanist movement in Islam notwithstanding the changed definitions of man and of reason.

But this being the case, it is possible to argue that all philosophers in Islam were humanists because all philosophers dealt with the position of man in a divine order. Furthermore, the majority of them regarded reason in the spiritualist, neo-platonic manner in question. It becomes pointless, then, to use humanism as a tool to distinguish between trends in Islamic thought. But was not this uselessness to be expected in the first place, given the attempt to apply modern distinctions and categories of thought to different cultures?

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