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Review: 'Mullā Ṣadrā and Eschatology: Evolution of Being'

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***Mullā Ṣadrā and Eschatology: Evolution of Being*, by Eiyad S. al-Kutubi. London and New York: Routledge, 2015, viii + 151 pp.**

One of the hallmarks of Mullā Ṣadrā's (d. 1050/1640) intellectual agenda is his attempt to reconcile rational thought with certain issues of theological sensitivity. Among such issues, the Qur'anic doctrine of 'the Return' (*ma'ād*) of the individual human soul united with the body in the afterlife has always attracted the attention of Muslim intellectuals and become one of the points of conflict between philosophers and theologians. Abū 'Alī ibn Sīnā's (d. 428/1037) pronouncement of disappointment with the possibility of rational arguments for bodily resurrection (*al-ma'ād al-jismānī*) and Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) dismissal of the former's position on this issue, among some others, as blasphemous is the most frequently quoted example of the long-held tensions between philosophy and theology in Muslim history. In this respect, al-Kutubi has chosen an important subject matter for his book on Mullā Ṣadrā and discussed it in a comprehensive and balanced manner.

Before discussing the content of the book, I would like to make a few remarks about the difference between al-Kutubi's approach as it first appears and his actual approach as adopted throughout his book. It is understandable that a Mullā Ṣadrā scholar may wish to highlight the originality of the philosopher's system, but one must avoid an apologetic overemphasis on this issue. While al-Kutubi emphasizes in the book's introduction 'the significance and novelty' of Mullā Ṣadrā's 'philosophical theories' (p.2), for the most part he is consciously explaining the philosopher's thought in relation to the ideas of his predecessors, which is actually one of the merits of the book. He also emphasizes the philosophical character of Mullā Ṣadrā's arguments to show that 'his objective is not so much to justify the scriptural and traditional contents, but to show their philosophical merit' (p.2). In his study, however, al-Kutubi is everywhere conscious of the Qur'anic context of Mullā Ṣadrā's thought. I doubt if we can draw a clear line between the philosophical and scriptural aspects of Mullā Ṣadrā's work, and I do not think it even necessary; al-Kutubi's book is itself proof

that the originality of Mullā Ṣadrā's approach is not at odds with its synthetic character. On the other hand, to 'show the philosophical merit' of the Qur'an and Hadith could be considered to be one way of justifying the truth of the religious texts. Ṣadrā's very attempt to revive the doctrine of bodily resurrection within a philosophical context confirms his belief in the superiority of revelation over mere human reasoning, and his use of rational arguments to demonstrate the Return as 'a necessary ontological event in the evolution of the human being' is not just the support of a philosophical principle (p. 3). In discussing Mullā Ṣadrā's intellectual career, we should take into serious consideration his position as a devout Shi'i thinker who devoted a large portion of his work to arguing for not only the articles of Muslim faith such as the Return, but also specific Shi'i doctrines as in his *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, which is not listed by al-Kutubi in his bibliography of Mullā Ṣadrā's works.

Despite the above-mentioned methodological emphasis by al-Kutubi, in his actual treatment of the subject matter, he has successfully discussed Mullā Ṣadrā's eschatology with reference to both Greek and Islamic frameworks. His first chapter opens with a long Qur'anic quotation and proceeds to discuss the significance of the bodily resurrection in Shi'i theology. The chapter also highlights Mullā Ṣadrā's avoidance of mere allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an, which differentiates him from rationalist philosophers, most prominently Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Ruṣhd (d. 595/1198). In this context, the author should have also mentioned the difference between Mullā Ṣadrā's approach to the afterlife and that of Isma'ili philosophers. The author comes very close to this point when he explains the metaphorical use of terms or *amthāl* 'to convey profound meanings' in 'the intellectual world' (*'ālam al-ma'nā*) (p. 13). Yet he does not mention the possibility of Isma'ili influence. More importantly with respect to Isma'ili interpretations of the afterlife, what is truly missing from the book is the influence of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 673/1274), particularly during the Isma'ili phase of his career; while Ṭūsī is not directly cited by Mullā Ṣadrā, the influence is clearly traceable.

After his concise and well documented discussion of Mullā Ṣadrā's major philosophical doctrines in the first five chapters of the book, in which the philosopher's ideas are explained in relation to his past masters, most prominently Ibn Sīnā and Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī (d.587/1191), al-Kutubi focuses on the eschatological aspect of Ṣadrā's philosophy only in the last two chapters. He correctly begins with imagination (*khayāl*) as a subject of both philosophical and mystical writings, and, in discussing Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī's (d.638/1240) theory of imagination, he relies both on the latter's primary texts and Henry Corbin's reading of them. Nevertheless, in a book on Mullā Ṣadrā's eschatology, one would expect to see more of Ibn 'Arabī. While having done a great job with regard to the influence of Suhrawardī, the author does not devote sufficient attention to Ibn 'Arabī's influence. At least with respect to the doctrine of bodily resurrection, Ibn 'Arabī's influence is too significant for him to be treated as one thinker among others.

Although Mullā Ṣadrā's doctrine of bodily resurrection is discussed in its own right only in the last chapter of the book, the whole book is carefully organized to lead the reader step by step toward the philosopher's unique eschatology in which faith, intuition, and reason are reconciled. Al-Kutubi's book is not only a helpful guide to the philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā in general, but also a thorough analysis of one of his most important teachings within its intellectual context. In addition, the translation of Mullā Ṣadrā's *The Traveler's Provision* (*Zād al-musāfir*) that appears as an appendix lends even more value to the book. The translation is both accessible and exact. All in all, al-Kutubi's *Mullā Ṣadrā and Eschatology: Evolution of Being* is a wonderful addition to Mullā Ṣadrā scholarship and can benefit students and specialists alike.

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