

Ibn al-Malāḥimī's Refutation of the Philosophers

Wilferd Madelung

The comprehensive refutation of the Muslim philosophers *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn fī l-radd ʿalā l-falāsifa* by the Khwārizmian Muʿtazilī theologian Rukn al-Dīn Maḥmūd Ibn al-Malāḥimī (d. 536/1141) was considered lost until the recent discovery of a single manuscript copy announced by Ḥasan Anṣārī in 2001.¹ The existence of the book among Ibn al-Malāḥimī's writings and its earlier availability in the Yemen had been known from references in Zaydī works of the early 8th/14th century which shed but little light on its contents and scope.² The hereticon and eventual suppression of Muʿtazilī theology in Sunnī Islam had obviously precluded a wider spread and impact of the book on Islamic thought. It was al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) refutation of the philosophers in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, composed four decades before Ibn al-Malāḥimī's, that came to be commonly recognized as the authoritative answer of Islamic theology to *falsafa*. The discovery of Ibn al-Malāḥimī's work is apt to modify significantly our understanding of the reaction of *kalām* theology to the spectacular ascendancy of an Islamic philosophy, inspired chiefly by the teachings of the Shaykh al-Raʾīs Abū ʿAlī b. Sīnā (d. 428/1037).

Criticism of philosophical metaphysics became a major concern of Ibn al-Malāḥimī in most of his theological writings. He had been thoroughly introduced to the thought of the philosophers by the grammarian, physician and man of letters Abū Muḍar Maḥmūd b. Jarīr al-Ḍabbī al-Iṣfahānī (d. 508/1115), who visited Khwārizm when Ibn al-Malāḥimī was already an accomplished Muʿtazilī scholar, and became his teacher.³ Abū Muḍar also brought the Muʿtazilī school doctrine of Abu l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 426/1044) to Khwārizm which Ibn al-Malāḥimī adopted after having earlier adhered to the predominant school doctrine of Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī (d. 321/933) and Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025). In his early massive exposition of *kalām* theology *Kitāb al-Muʿtamad fī uṣūl al-dīn* he expressly espoused the doctrine of Abu l-Ḥusayn and included a lengthy discussion and refutation of the ancient and the Muslim philosophers, quoting in particular the criticism of philosophical cosmology by the Shīʿī Muʿtazilī theologian al-

¹ Ḥasan Anṣārī, "Kitāb-i tāza-yi yāb dar naqd-i falsafa: Paydā shudan-i 'Kitāb-i Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn-i' Malāḥimī", *Nasr-i dānish* 18 iii (2001), pp. 31-32.

² See Rukn al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad al-Malāḥimī, *K. al-Muʿtamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*. The extant parts edited by Martin McDermott and Wilferd Madelung, London 1991, Intro. p. iv.

³ On Abū Muḍar al-Iṣfahānī see Ṣāḥib al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī, *Tārīkh ḥukamāʾ al-Islām*, ed. M. Kurd ʿAlī, Damascus 1365/1946, pp. 139-40; Yāqūt, *Kitāb Irsbād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb*, ed. D.S. Margoliouth, Leiden 1907-31, vol. 7, p. 145.

Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (d. between 300/921 and 316/923) in his *Kitāb al-Ārāʾ wa-l-diyānāt*.⁴ His lost *Jawāb al-masāʾil al-Isfahāniyya*, which was presumably dedicated to Abū Muḍar al-Isfahānī, contained a critical discussion of the thesis of the philosophers that doing good for a purpose was not really good and thus inappropriate for God. In his *Kitāb al-Fāʾiq fī uṣūl al-dīn*, an abridged version of the *Kitāb al-Muʿtamad* written at the same time as the *Tuhfat al-mutakallimīn*, he also included a substantial critical discussion of the teaching of the Muslim philosophers.⁵

At the beginning of the *Tuhfa* he refers to his *Kitāb al-Muʿtamad*, stating that he had there described the views of the Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī (d. 329/960) and Ibn Sīnā on the origins of the world, the proof for the existence of an eternal Creator and His attributes, the imposition of obligations (*taklīf*), the reality of those obligated (*mukallaf*), the reality of prophethood, the religious laws conveyed by the prophets, and the Return in the hereafter (*maʿād*). He had shown there that these Muslim philosophers set forth the religion of Islam in accordance with the doctrines of the ancient philosophers, removing it from its reality and the teaching of the prophets. Then he had found that many of the would-be scholars of the religious law, among them a group affiliated to the school of al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), were eagerly acquiring the disciplines of these modern philosophers in the illusory belief that they could help them even in mastering the science of the religious law and its principles (*uṣūl*). These were then followed by some scholars of the Ḥanafīyya, Ibn al-Malāḥimī's own legal school. They all fell into this trap because they failed to realize that the study of the religious law must rather be preceded by the study of the *uṣūl al-fiqh* and the *uṣūl* of Islam, that is the study of *kalām* theology. He, Ibn al-Malāḥimī, was afraid that the Muslim community might end up in relation to Islam like the Christians in regard to the religion of Jesus. The leaders of the Christians had become so attracted to the philosophical science of the Greeks that they finally set forth their religion according to the doctrines of the ancient philosophers, supporting superstitions such as the Trinity, union with God (*ittiḥād*), and Jesus having become divine after being human.

Ibn al-Malāḥimī therefore intended in his present book to explain the teaching of these philosophers who claimed to be upholding Islam and expounded it according to their methods, to expose its corruption, and to describe the reasons of those inclining towards them on account of their exact sciences in the non-religious disciplines. This would fill a gap in the theological literature since he had not found any *kalām* theologian dealing adequately with the doctrine of

⁴ The relevant section is extant in a newly discovered manuscript of the *K. al-Muʿtamad*.

⁵ Ibn al-Malāḥimī does not mention his *K. al-Fāʾiq* at the beginning of his *Tuhfa*, but refers to it together with the *K. al-Muʿtamad* toward the end of the *Tuhfa*. Since the *Fāʾiq* was completed on 7 Rabīʿ II 532/ 22 December 1137, it is likely that the *Tuhfa* was completed after that date.

these modern would-be philosophers. He would thus first relate summarily what they said about the origination of the world, the proof for the existence of the Creator and His attributes, prophethood, the religious laws, the hereafter, reward and punishment. Next he would demonstrate their agreement with the views of the Dahriyya, the Dualists and the Greek Christians. Then he would present in detail the arguments with which they gave preference to their method over that of the Muslims and answer them, mentioning the position and arguments of the Muslims in every chapter.

Ibn al-Malāḥimī does not mention al-Ghazālī and his *Tabāfut al-falāsifa* here or elsewhere in his book. He no doubt considered al-Ghazālī's refutation of the philosophers as inadequate, partly because he saw him as an Ash'arī agreeing with the philosophers, against basic Mu'tazilī positions, on determinism, denial of human free will, and affirmation that God was the source of all evil in the world, even though He was pure goodness. Al-Ghazālī in turn had charged the philosophers with support of such Mu'tazilī "innovations" as the denial of divine attributes additional to God's essence and the admission of natural causation of all events and action in the world by God.⁶ In view of al-Ghazālī's neutral exposition of the views of the Muslim philosophers in his *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, Ibn al-Malāḥimī may well have counted him among those scholars of the school of al-Shāfi'ī who eagerly promoted philosophical thought among the students of Islamic law.

Ibn al-Malāḥimī's refutation of the Muslim philosophers is indeed more comprehensive and systematic than al-Ghazālī's. He does not share al-Ghazālī's prime concern with the legal status of the philosophers which had induced al-Ghazālī to concentrate on the famous three issues on which they must be condemned for infidelity (*kufr*): their assertion of the eternity of the world, their denial of God's knowledge of particulars, and their denial of the physical resurrection. Besides these three major points al-Ghazālī had dealt more summarily with seventeen specific questions on which the philosophers could be charged with heretical innovation. Although his criticism was obviously based on Ash'arī dogma, he had emphasized that he only intended to demonstrate the defects of philosophical teaching rather than defend any particular doctrine, which he would do in another book.

Ibn al-Malāḥimī in contrast systematically presents and compares the teaching of the modern Muslim philosophers and "the Muslims", by whom he primarily means the Mu'tazila. While he discusses at length the three issues on which al-Ghazālī charged the philosophers with unbelief involving the death penalty, he does not single them out for special condemnation. Instead of focusing on a number of specific points of heresy he deals broadly with all major subjects of *kalām* theology, including some al-Ghazālī had ignored or touched upon only

⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. M.E. Marmura, Provo, 1997, pp. 97, 230.

marginally in his *Tabāfut*, such as the imposition of obligation by God on mankind, prophethood, and the nature of religious laws. Throughout he seeks to demonstrate that the Muslim philosophers, while going to great lengths in claiming to uphold Islam with their rational proofs, either were unable to do so on the basis of their principles or entirely distorted the substance of Muslim beliefs. He is scathing in his denunciation of their assertion that their theology and cosmology, in contrast to that of the Muslim *kalām* theologians, was based on apodictic demonstration (*burhān*) and pours ridicule on the results of their *burhān*, such as that from the One only a single one can issue.

In presenting philosophical doctrine, Ibn al-Malāḥimī primarily quotes from a source – without ever identifying it – that often agrees literally with al-Ghazālī’s *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* but occasionally deviates substantially. On first sight one might think that he relied on a different recension of al-Ghazālī’s work. It seems more likely, however, that he and al-Ghazālī both copied from an exposition of philosophical teaching designed for Muslim readers by a follower of Ibn Sīnā. Al-Ghazālī’s source, or sources, for his *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* are not known. It has been suggested that he used and adapted Ibn Sīnā’s Persian *Dānīsh-nama-yi ‘Alā’ī*.⁷ While there is certainly substantial agreement between the contents of the *Dānīsh-nāma* and al-Ghazālī’s exposition, it is, however, not close enough to identify it as al-Ghazālī’s main source or even an immediate source. Much of the actual formulation of philosophical doctrine in the *Maqāṣid* may well go back to an author of the school of Ibn Sīnā rather than al-Ghazālī.

Aside from this anonymous and unacknowledged source Ibn al-Malāḥimī, in contrast to al-Ghazālī, frequently copies from the writings of the philosophers directly, sometimes at length. Most often Ibn Sīnā is quoted, usually, though not always, with the title of his work. Thus there are quotations from his *Kitāb al-Shifā’*, *Kitāb al-Mabda’ wa l-ma’ād fi sa’adat al-naḥs*, *Maqāla fi l-quwā al-insāniyya*, *Kitāb al-Nafs*,⁸ and *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*. In some cases, for instance for the *Kitāb al-Shifā’*, a recension different from that now available appears to have been used by Ibn al-Malāḥimī. There is also a quotation from a sermon (*khuṭba*) attributed to Ibn Sīnā in which he ridicules those who worship God in the belief that He acts with the purpose of benefiting humans. Ibn al-Malāḥimī frequently quotes Muslim philosophers later than Ibn Sīnā, without, however, naming them or their works. At the present stage of research about the early school of Ibn Sīnā, it does not seem possible to identify any of them. Some are critical of Ibn Sīnā’s views. There are lengthy quotations from a text in which the anonymous author seeks to interpret the Muslim eschatological expectations such as the Resurrection, the Scale (*mīzān*), Intercession (*shafā’a*), the Passage over hell

⁷ See Jules Janssens, “Le Dānesh-nāme d’Ibn Sīnā: Un texte à revoir?” *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale* 28 (1986), pp. 163-77.

⁸ It is unclear to which of Ibn Sīnā’s works dealing with the subject of the soul this title refers. The quoted text differs from the relevant section of the *K. al-Shifā’* on the soul.

(*ṣirāt*) in accordance with philosophical principles. Ibn al-Malāḥimī admits that he is not sure how representative the author's opinions are of those of the philosophers in general since they do not normally deal with this subject in their books. Of pre-Islamic philosophers he refers to Plato, Aristotle, Proclus, John Philoponus, and of earlier philosophers of the Islamic era to al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Abū Bakr b. Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī besides the Christian Yahyā b. 'Adī.⁹ His quotations of their opinions and writings, however, are indirect.

In setting forth the doctrine of the Muslims as against the false interpretations of the philosophers, Ibn al-Malāḥimī repeatedly cites Abu l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, referring to his *Kitāb Taṣaffuḥ al-adilla*. He does not mention any other Mu'tazilī scholars by name. In his chapter on the human soul he quotes at length from a *Kitāb al-Ma'ād* by an otherwise unknown author Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb whose *nisba* appears in variants in the manuscript, but is most likely to be read al-Jadīdī. Jadīd was the name of a street quarter (*sikka*) of Bukhārā to which the author's name may refer.¹⁰ The formula *rahimahu llāh* used by Ibn al-Malāḥimī after his name indicates both that he approved of his views and that al-Jadīdī was no longer alive. Unfortunately it is unclear whether the quotation of Ibn Sinā's *Kitāb al-Nafs* in this chapter was copied by Ibn al-Malāḥimī from al-Jadīdī's work or taken directly from Ibn Sinā's book. Of his own works, Ibn al-Malāḥimī refers to his *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad*, *Kitāb al-Fā'iḳ*, *al-Masā'il al-Iṣfahāniyya*, and a *Mas'ala fi l-rūḥ* about the reality of the spirit according to the faith of the Muslims.

The arguments Ibn al-Malāḥimī employs against philosophical doctrine are primarily rational, based on plain common sense. He quotes Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* secondarily, mostly to demonstrate that the Muslim philosophers, while claiming to be in concord with the revealed message of Islam, in fact explain it away by their arbitrary interpretations. These interpretations, he charges, are in conflict with the literal meaning of the text as well as with any legitimate metaphorical meaning which must be accepted when the literal meaning does not agree with reason. They are in their arbitrariness like those of the Bāṭiniyya, whose esoteric speculation defies any rational control. Ibn al-Malāḥimī deals with the Ismā'īlī Bāṭiniyya in a special chapter where he quotes from a so far unknown section of the treatise of the early anti-Ismā'īlī polemicist Muḥammad b. Zayd Ibn Rizām al-Ṭā'ī.

At the end of his book Ibn al-Malāḥimī presents excerpts from a *Message of Sincere Advice (al-Risāla al-Nāṣiḥa)* by the secretary and man of letters Abu l-Faraj 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Hindū to a friend. Ibn Hindū, it is known, was a trained physician and had studied the philosophical sciences. A collection of wise sayings of the Greek philosophers (*al-Kalim al-rūḥāniyya fi l-ḥikam al-Yūnāniyya*) and excerpts from an epistle encouraging the study of philosophy (*al-Risāla al-musharwīqa fi*

⁹ Ibn al-Malāḥimī confuses John Philoponus and Yahyā b. 'Adī, calling both of them Yahyā b. 'Adī al-Naḥwi.

¹⁰ See al-Sam'ānī, *al-Ansāb*, s.v. al-Jadīdī.

l-madkhal ilā ʿilm al-falsafa) by him have been published.¹¹ In the present epistle he chides and ridicules his friend for his vainglorious display of philosophical learning and terminology and reminds him of the superior values of the Qurʾān and the faith of Islam.

The single extant manuscript of Ibn al-Malāḥimī's *Tuḥfa* was formerly preserved in the Nāṣiriyya Library in Lucknow and is now kept in the Riḍawīyya Shrine Library in Meshhed. It is written in *nastaʿliq* script evidently by a scribe of Persian literary culture and was completed in Dhu l-Ḥijja 1104/August 1693. It was copied from a single original dated in the second half of Rajab 693/June 1294, about two and a half centuries after Ibn al-Malāḥimī's death. This original was most likely a Yemenite manuscript written by a Zaydī scribe as suggested by the formulas of blessing. It probably had deteriorated in many places, and the scribe of the later manuscript copied what he saw without much effort to restore the correct text. There are obvious concealed gaps throughout. A critical edition will have to rely on comparison with parallel texts in Ibn al-Malāḥimī's other books and in the works quoted by him. Many emendations, however, must remain speculative as long as no other manuscript is found.

References

- Anṣārī, Ḥasan, "Kitāb-i tāza-yi yāb dar naqd-i falsafa: Paydā shudan-i Kitāb-i "Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn-i" Malāḥimī," *Nasr-i dānish* 18 iii (2001), pp. 31-32.
- Bayhaqī, Ḥāḥir al-Dīn, *Taʾriḫ ḥukamāʾ al-Islām*, ed. M. Kurd ʿAlī, Damascus 1365/1946.
- Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif-i buzurg-i Islāmī* 1-, ed. Kāzīm Mūsawī Bujnūrdī, Tehran 1989-.
- Ghazālī; *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. M.E. Marmura, Provo 1997.
- Janssens, Jules, "Le Dānesh-nāmeḥ d'Ibn Sīnā: Un texte à revoir?" *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale* 28 (1986), pp. 163-77.
- Rukn al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad al-Malāḥimī, *K. al-Muʿtamad fī uṣūl al-dīn: The extant parts* edited by Martin McDermott and Wilferd Madelung, London 1991.
- Yāqūt al-Rūmī, *Kitāb Irshād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb* 1-7, ed. D.S. Margoliouth, Leiden 1907-31.
- Samʿānī, Abū Saʿd ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad b. Maṣṣūr al-Tamīmī, *al-Ansāb* 1-13, Hyderabad 1962-82.

¹¹ On Ibn Hindū and his writings see *Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif-i buzurg-i Islāmī*, vol. 5, pp. 124-27.