

Gibb Lecture #1: “Avicenna and Avicennism”

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- 1) The standard narrative
- 2) Three commentaries by Ḥillī
- 3) Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī: author of a *sharḥ* (“commentary”) or a *jarḥ* (“calumny”)?
- 4) The spectrum of *taḥqīq* (“verification”)
- 5) From *taḥqīq* (“verification”) to *muḥaqqiq* (“verifier”)

Jamāl ad-Dīn “al-‘Allāmah” al-Ḥillī

- 1) *Kashf al-Khifā’ min Kitāb al-Shifā’* (Casting off the Covering from [Avicenna’s] Healing)
- 2) *al-Muḥākamāt bayna Shurrāḥ al-Ishārāt* (Arbitrations between the Commentators on [Avicenna’s] Pointers)
- 3) *Kashf al-Murād fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-I’tiqād* (Uncovering the Desired Meaning in Commenting on [Ṭūsī’s] Outline of Belief)

al-‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī, *al-Muḥākamāt bayna Shurrāḥ al-Ishārāt* (Arbitrations between the Commentators on [Avicenna’s] Pointers)¹

Now then: ... Since the *Pointers*, among the writings of the Master Abū ‘Alī ibn Sīnā, [is a book that] a group of people has put its mind to commenting on [*bi-sharḥihi*] while others [have put their mind to] denigrating it and slandering it [*bi-qadhihi wa-jarhihi*], the son who is dear to me and precious to me ... asked me to judge between the commentators in a fair-minded way [*bi-l-inṣāf*] and to establish the truth [*wa-taḥqīq al-ḥaqq*] without any unfairness or injustice. ... He [Avicenna] said:

Naṣīr ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī, *Ḥall Mushkilāt al-Ishārāt* (Resolving the Problems of [Avicenna’s] *Pointers*)²

Amongst those who have commented upon it [viz., the *Ishārāt*] is the Distinguished Scholar [*al-fāḍil al-‘allāmah*] Fakhr ad-Dīn, king of the debaters [*malik al-mutanāzirīn*], Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Khaṭīb ar-Rāzī, may God reward him well! ... With these efforts he added nothing but denigration [*lam yazidhu illā qadḥan*], and for this reason some clever person labeled his commentary a “calumny” [*wa-li-dhālika sammā ba‘du z-zurafā’i sharḥahu jarḥan*]. It is a prerequisite for commentators that they expend every effort, to the extent possible, for the sake of what they have committed themselves to comment on, and that they defend, by means of whichever defense the founder of that discipline uses, what they have burdened themselves with elucidating, in order that they be commentators and not contrarians, interpreters and not objectors [*li-yakūnū shāriḥīna ghayra nāqīḍīna wa-mufassirīna ghayra mu‘tarīḍīna*].

1. MS Istanbul: Damat Ibrahim Paşa 817, 2b3-12 (Mislabelled and miscatalogued as the *Muḥākamāt* of Quṭb ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī) = MS Istanbul: Ahmet III, A3400, 2b4-3a2.

2. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa-t-Tanbihāt ma‘a Sharḥ Naṣīr ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1957-60), Vol. I, 162,10-19.

The spectrum of *taḥqīq*

- 1) Provide alternate readings.
- 2) Identify unnamed authors, titles, volumes and chapters.
- 3) Gloss mysterious terms.
- 4) Supply new proofs of unproven propositions.
- 5) Reorder and correct weak proofs.
- 6) Harmonize incongruent theories.
- 7) Discard unprovable theories and supply proofs for opposing theories.

Badr ad-Dīn at-Tustarī, *al-Muḥākamāt bayna Naṣīr ad-Dīn wa-Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī* (*Arbitrations between Naṣīr ad-Dīn and Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī*)³

Since *the Pointers and Reminders* is famous in name and great in substance ... the leader, the distinguished scholar, mouthpiece of the *mutakallims*, Fakhr ad-Dīn Muḥammad ar-Rāzī (may God's mercy be upon him), composed a commentary that, among those that have reached us, is almost unparalleled in terms of establishing the principles, making plain the knotty passages, solving its puzzles, and analyzing its propositions – except for the fact that in it he proceeded in the manner of the contrarians rather than [following] the path of the commentators [ghayra annahu jarā fihi majrā n-nāqīdīna lā maslaka sh-shāriḥīna], up to the point that he left hardly any of [the Pointers'] principles or arguments alone except to smite it with some contrariness or opposition [illā wa-<qad> ta'ana fihi bi-naqḍin aw mu'arāḍatin]. On account of him [i.e., Rāzī], the foundational structure of philosophy was shaken and the basic props of intellectual propositions came to be unbalanced. Because of this, philosophy came crashing down, from the high summit of what is known to the low foothills of what is supposed, from the top of the stairs to the bottom level (even though the solution to some of them [i.e., the problems of the *Pointers*] came to be known during the course of his objections). Afterwards he was overtaken by the distinguished verifier [al-fāḍil al-muḥaqqiq], chief of the philosophers, Naṣīr ad-Dīn Muḥammad at-Ṭūsī (may God's mercy be upon him). He wrote what poured forth upon him in uncovering these riddles, resolving the problems of the *Pointers* [ḥall mushkilāt al-Ishārāt], fending off the objections and eliminating the doubts....

Quṭb ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, *al-Muḥākamāt bayna Sharḥay al-Ishārāt* (*Arbitrations between the Two Commentaries on [Avicenna's] Pointers*)⁴

This, my friends, is my discourse in supercommentary [form], devoid of contrariness and free of slander [salīman min al-jarḥ], in accordance with your request, and responding to your proposal. In it I placed the two commentaries on the scale, and extracted the pearls from the two oysters, and attended to the discussions from both sides. ... The Learned Commentator [i.e., Ṭūsī] said:

3. MS Istanbul: Laleli 2551 1b4-2a1 = MS Istanbul: Fazıl Ahmet Paşa (Köp) 898, 1b8-2a5 = MS Istanbul: Carullah 1312, 1b5-25.

4. MS Istanbul: Şehit Ali Paşa 1750, 1a7-20.