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Doubts on Avicenna: A Study and Edition of Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas‘ūdī’s Commentary on the *Ishārāt*. By Ayman Shihadeh. Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science: Texts and Studies, 95. Brill: Leiden and Boston, 2016. Pp. 289. €97.00, \$126.00. ISBN 978-90-04-30252-5.

One of the most noteworthy recent trends in the study of medieval Islamic philosophy and theology is the increased recognition of the philosophical value of the so-called post-classical period, that is, roughly from the sixth/twelfth century onwards. Scholars now almost uniformly agree that instead of dealing a fatal blow to Islamic philosophy, Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī’s (d. 505/1111) critical remarks on Avicenna provided impetus for the integration of Avicennian philosophy to the Ash‘arī—or as argued by the author of the present study, neo-Ash‘arī—mainstream of Islamic philosophical theology. Furthermore, it is now commonly recognised that the long sixth/twelfth century was crucial in this process, for it was then that the ground was prepared for the most influential strands of thought in subsequent centuries by such pioneers as Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), and Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240). Yet it is still unclear how exactly the Avicennian heritage developed in the period between the death of the *shaykh al-ra’īs* in 428/1037 and the new critical ideas of the late sixth/twelfth century. As Ayman Shihadeh points out in his introduction to the present volume, knowledge of this period is crucial when we try to contextualise writers like al-Rāzī and thereby to ground and solidify our understanding the subsequent developments. Shihadeh’s new study ventures to remedy this situation by introducing us to al-Rāzī’s predecessor and alleged teacher, Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas‘ūdī, who was the first historically influential commentator on Avicenna’s final summa, the *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa’l-tanbīhāt*, and at any rate the author of the earliest extant commentary on that lavishly studied and commented work.¹

Shihadeh’s book consists of two parts, the first of which is a substantial study of al-Mas‘ūdī’s biography, intellectual context, and agenda (chs 1–2, pp. 7–85). This part features a detailed survey of selected sections of al-Mas‘ūdī’s commentary, *al-Mabāḥith wa’l-shukūk ‘alā Kitāb al-Ishārāt* (henceforth *Shukūk*) (chs 3–6, pp. 86–168), whereas the second part gives us a critical edition of the text. While there is no doubt that the edition will be greeted with particular excitement by scholars and connoisseurs of post-classical Islamic philosophy, one should not think of the preceding study as a mere introduction to the edition, for Shihadeh here presents a substantiated view on how we should understand the important but understudied development of the ‘philosophisation’ of mainstream Sunnī theology from al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī. Moreover, although he does not attempt to exhaust the complex relation of al-Mas‘ūdī’s disputed questions to Avicenna and al-Ghazālī, his detailed contextual analyses of al-Mas‘ūdī’s thought provide a significant contribution to the scholarship on his two predecessors as well.

Despite the important role of al-Mas‘ūdī in inaugurating the chain of commentaries on the *Ishārāt*, relatively few facts can be unearthed about his life and person—indeed the only contemporaneous account that we can rely on is al-Rāzī’s rather unflattering report of the debates he engaged in with al-Mas‘ūdī. In the first chapter of the book (pp. 11–20), Shihadeh does a remarkable job in piecing together the snippets of information into a proper biography. Al-Mas‘ūdī was most probably born in the first quarter of the sixth/twelfth century in the Khurasānī city of Marw, descending from a prominent family of Shāfi‘ī jurists.² He is likely to have begun his studies in Marw, which was a major centre of learning at the time, with the prominence of his family providing him access to the intellectual elite of the city from early on.³

On the evidence of al-Mas‘ūdī’s astronomical work *al-Kifāya fī ‘ilm al-hay’a* as well as his commentary on Avicenna’s brief treatise *al-Khutba al-gharrā’*, Shihadeh situates al-Mas‘ūdī in Transoxania, most probably in Samarqand, by 1155. The move was probably related to the decreasing scholarly opportunities in Marw after the Oghuz invasion of 1153, and the simultaneous patronage offered by the Qarākhānids in Transoxania; as two pieces of evidence Shihadeh cites al-Mas‘ūdī’s dedication of the two works to the Qarākhānid elite. Although the second of these works is a philosophical commentary, it is likely that al-Mas‘ūdī received his patronage as a practicing astrologer and astronomer.⁴

From Samarqand al-Mas‘ūdī moved to Bukhara, where he must have arrived before 1180, as attested by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s *Jawābāt al-masā’il al-Bukhārīya* (‘Answers to the Problems from Bukhārā’). Al-Mas‘ūdī seems to have quickly ascended to the intellectual elite of the city, as reported by several contemporaneous sources, including al-Rāzī who is otherwise often rather critical of him. At the end of his life al-Mas‘ūdī may have returned to his native Marw, or at least visited the city. In Shihadeh’s analysis, his death date is likely to have been prior to 600/1204.

As Shihadeh shows in a brief but eminently helpful periodisation of the early reception history of the Avicennian heritage, the late sixth/twelfth-century departures of thinkers like al-Suhrawardī and al-Rāzī should be situated in the broader framework of tendencies within philosophy and *kalām*. By the beginning of the century, two opposing currents of reception of Avicenna seem to have crystallised in the East, Khorasan and Transoxania in particular. The first of these consisted of thinkers who attempted to stay true to Avicenna’s heritage, transmitting but also developing it in crucial respects.⁵ This current included thinkers such as al-Lawkarī (d. 517/1123), a second generation student of Avicenna, the famous mathematician and poet ‘Umar al-Khayyām, the philosopher and physician Sharaf al-Zamān al-Īlāqī (d. 536/1141), and the latter’s student ‘Umar b. Sahlān al-Sāwī. The second current is a continuation of the critique of philosophy initiated by al-Ghazālī and substantiated in the beginning of the century by Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d.

560/1165), whose work seems to have disseminated rapidly in the East. In the mid-twelfth century, this current is represented in particular by three figures, Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī (d. c. 590/1194), al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), and al-Mas‘ūdī himself.

Al-Mas‘ūdī is thus part of a vigorous dialectical milieu focusing on Avicenna’s philosophy. But although he is naturally located in the camp of Avicenna’s critics, his exact agenda is not easy to pin down. Even his contemporaries differed on whether he was a philosophically learned *mutakallim*, critical of philosophy along the lines of al-Ghazālī (Ibn Ghaylān), or a philosopher with a reprehensible partisan bias, whose pious impatience prevented him from grasping the nuances of rival philosophical doctrines (al-Rāzī). This is further complicated by the fact that al-Mas‘ūdī’s two philosophical works, the commentary on Avicenna’s *Khutba al-gharrā’* and the *Shukūk*, differ on a number of key theological questions, such as the problem of God’s unity and the multiplicity of His attributes, the question of the world’s pre-eternity vs its creation in time, the question of the beatific vision of God, the debate concerning hylomorphism, and the question of whether the eschatological punishment is limited in duration. Although he openly states in the preface to the former work that his purpose therein is to explain Avicennian philosophy in its own terms, without taking a critical stance to its problematic aspects, the work is not devoid of strangely Avicennian forays that are in stark contrast with the philosophically influenced Ash‘arism of the *Shukūk*, in which al-Mas‘ūdī seems to spare no opportunity to oppose Avicenna.

The heterogeneity of the material notwithstanding, Shihadeh draws the plausible conclusion that al-Mas‘ūdī was first and foremost a theologian committed to the Ash‘arī cause, and that the commentary on the *Khutba al-gharrā’* could well have been an attempt to harmonise Avicennian philosophy with Ash‘arī orthodoxy (pp. 28–43). On the other hand, al-Mas‘ūdī’s two known logical works, *Risālat al-mukhtaliḡāt* and *al-Ajwiba ‘alā al-Tawḡī‘a li’l-takḡī‘a*, both deal with the topic of modally mixed syllogisms and are broadly Avicennian in approach, indeed the latter is a defensive response to Ibn Ghaylān’s related criticism of Avicennian logic, but as Shihadeh points out (pp. 25–26), we should be wary of hasty conclusions concerning their author’s broader commitments. Al-Mas‘ūdī may simply have heeded al-Ghazālī’s judgement concerning the use of logic in theology, and consequently focused his critical acumen on the more substantial doctrines of the philosopher.

Ultimately, however, it is the *Shukūk* from which the most complete picture of al-Mas‘ūdī’s commitments is to be expected. The crucial questions concern the nature of the work and the motives behind its composition. How does it arise from its context? In what sense is it a novel, even innovative work? And what can we infer from its critical attitude towards its target text?

Based on the evidence of al-Rāzī's response to the work, Shihadeh situates it in the third quarter of the twelfth century. Roughly contemporaneous with it is al-Mas'ūdī's line-by-line commentary to Avicenna's brief treatment of philosophical theology and cosmogony known as *al-Khutba al-gharrā'* which, as already mentioned, is decisively different in approach from the *Shukūk*, for it aims at a neutral exposition of Avicenna's ideas and refrains from the openly polemical attitude of the *Shukūk*. In fact, Shihadeh argues that the *Shukūk* is a commentary in a rather specific sense. True to its title, 'Investigations (*al-mabāḥith*) and Doubts (*al-shukūk*) on the Book of Pointers and Reminders', the book latches on to a tradition of what Shihadeh calls 'aporetic' commentaries, that is, commentaries 'which target one or more works of an earlier authoritative figure with the exclusive purpose of raising problems, or objections, on selected points therein' (p. 2; cf. pp. 45–46). Such an approach can be adopted for the purpose of criticising the system expressed in the target text in favour of an alternative approach, or for the purpose of emending the initial system. In any case, unlike a refutation (*radd*), a genre familiar since the formative period of *kalām*, an aporetic commentary is not designed to simply refute the target system by any means available but rather to provide an insider's view to the topic, and it typically engages with the target system by means of subtle arguments that often deal with questions of detail.

In characterising the aporetic commentary tradition, Shihadeh names only Abu Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 313/925) and Ibn al-Haytham (d. c. 430/1039) as important predecessors, and although he does characterise the tradition as 'small but well-established' (p. 45), one may perhaps raise the question whether this is sufficient to constitute a tradition. Nevertheless, the connection to Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and Ibn al-Haytham highlights the fact that al-Mas'ūdī's primary objective is not to explain the *Ishārāt*, nor is the *Shukūk* structured in the manner of a proper *sharḥ*, that is, as a succession of interspersed lemmas and comments that stays true to the order of procedure of the target text. Rather, al-Mas'ūdī lists fifteen central doctrines of Avicenna that he has doubts about, and then proceeds to criticise them, occasionally presenting his own alternative. Furthermore, it is clear that al-Mas'ūdī's purpose is not to refine the Avicennian system, for his solutions are frequently incompatible with its most fundamental tenets.

An interesting feature in this regard is al-Mas'ūdī's insistence, in the conclusion of the work, that his approach has been free from all 'prejudice and partisanship' (pp. 50–53). This is remarkable, because it is precisely this aspect of al-Mas'ūdī's work for which Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī takes him to task in both his answers to al-Mas'ūdī and his large commentary on the *Ishārāt*. According to al-Rāzī, al-Mas'ūdī fails miserably on his own standards—possibly due to his highly irascible temper that al-Rāzī describes vividly, and condescendingly, in an account of their meetings (p. 31). In al-Rāzī's view, a commentary should aim to further our knowledge of the topics

addressed, which is only possible by reading the target text as charitably as possible, bringing to the table all possible qualifications and additional arguments in its favour, and subjecting one's own alternative view to as thorough a scrutiny as possible. Al-Mas'ūdī is a standing example of the contrary, prejudicious and partisan, approach, for time and again he opts for the least charitable reading of Avicenna and neglects to subject his own ideas to any kind of critical investigation. Furthermore, he accuses al-Mas'ūdī of failing to proceed according to a proper order in any of the problems; instead of proceeding from paraphrase through critique to solutions, he frequently confuses the steps and leaves a mess in his wake.⁶

The *Shukūk* tends to focus on major questions, the *uṣūl* rather than the *furū'* of the Avicennian system. In quantitative terms, the greatest effort is spent on problems of psychology: six of the book's fifteen sections (qq. 3–6 and 13–14) directly address questions of the Avicennian theory of the soul. Other foci are the fundamental principles of natural philosophy and mathematics, such as the existence of matter (q. 1), the finitude of bodies (q. 2), and the principles of efficient causation (qq. 9–12). Finally, considerable attention is given to the theological questions concerning the demonstration of the Necessary Existent (q. 7), the proof of His unity (q. 8), and the explication of the way in which the created world proceeds from and is known by Him (qq. 9–11 and 15).

In fact, the thematic focus of the *Shukūk* is another important pointer towards al-Mas'ūdī's underlying agenda. Shihadeh has chosen to focus his study on the theological questions; the core of the first part of the book consists of four case studies on particular problems raised in the *Shukūk*, three of which are related to metaphysical questions concerning God. The first two are concerned with efficient causation and potentiality (qq. 9, 10, and 14), the third with Avicenna's celebrated proof for the existence of a necessary being (q. 7), and the fourth with Avicenna's version of hylomorphism (q. 1), a topic that illustrates al-Mas'ūdī's debt to Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī. The first three questions are of immediate theological relevance, and in each of them Shihadeh provides ample evidence of al-Mas'ūdī's debt to al-Ghazālī. Moreover, many of the remaining sections of the work have a comparable Ash'arī agenda: question 11 attacks the idea that from one principle only one effect occurs, and together with question 8 on God's unity despite the multiplicity of attributes, it provides a venue for a critique of Avicenna's rigorous interpretation of the divine unity in favour of a model that is more adaptive to the idea of really distinct attributes. Finally, in the discussion of God's knowledge of particulars in question 15, al-Mas'ūdī simply refers the reader to al-Ghazālī's deconstruction of the Avicennian doctrine. This does not mean, however, that the *Shukūk* is akin to the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* in objective and approach, for although it might share the latter's overarching purpose of defending orthodox doctrine from deviations, it has the more constructive objective of establishing a systematic

alternative to Avicennian philosophy and is therefore much more explicit in its positive commitments.

One possible worry, however, is whether Shihadeh's focus on the theological questions might give a slightly skewed picture of the *Shukūk*, given that easily the most extensive part of the work is concerned with cognitive psychology and the ontology of the human soul.⁷ This could also bear on the question of al-Mas'ūdī's overall agenda: perhaps it was not so much, or at least not exclusively, the emerging counter-Avicennian theological current that he latched on to, but instead—as suggested recently by Robert Wisnovsky⁸—a tradition of geometrically motivated critique of Avicenna's cognitive psychology. On the other hand, even the discussion of the soul may have been motivated by theological interests. Apart from the obvious theological relevance of the eschatological question of what sort of metaphysics is most suitable for accounting for the soul's immortality (qq. 5 and 13–14; cf. the similar concern in the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, discussions 18–20), Shihadeh suggests (pp. 80–81) that al-Mas'ūdī's attack on Avicenna's representationalist theory of perception (qq. 4 and 6)—in favour of Abū al-Barakāt's externalism—may have aimed at an alternative theory of God's knowledge of particulars.⁹ Furthermore, as Shihadeh argues (p. 84), it may be that al-Mas'ūdī's discussion of questions of natural philosophy, which may seem to be devoid of any theological motivation, also follows a Ghazālīan program: it is only the philosophers' doctrinally problematic *metaphysics* that one needs to be wary of, but in natural philosophy their ideas are much more promising than those put forth in earlier *kalām*—at least when emended through a careful consideration of perceptive critics such as Abū al-Barakāt. Yet despite these similarities, Shihadeh argues, the *Shukūk* should be read as a definitive step forward from the *Tahāfut*, or at least as bringing together the different aspects of al-Ghazālī's work by incorporating the positive exposition of the Sunnī creed to the critical discussion of the philosophical alternative. In this sense, al-Mas'ūdī would inaugurate a nascent tradition of philosophical theology, which would be solidified by al-Rāzī's more meticulous approach.

In the end, even if the *Shukūk* were a mixture of divergent motivations, Shihadeh's claim of al-Mas'ūdī's theological agenda is well corroborated by his detailed analysis of the questions that *are* of immediate theological relevance. In many cases, he not only elucidates the discussion in al-Mas'ūdī, but also manages to shed light on the underlying Avicennian ideas in a novel way. It is therefore worthwhile to look at two of Shihadeh's analyses at some detail.

In Chapter 3 ('Efficient Causation and Contingent Existence: Problem 9', pp. 86–108), Shihadeh addresses the question of the causal relation between God and the world as discussed in section 9 of the *Shukūk*. In pre-Avicennian *kalām* which, as Shihadeh carefully lays out, founded its conception of God's causation on an analysis of human agency, creation was conceived first and foremost as God's

causing the coming to be (*hudūth*) of the world. As a result, God was not considered to play a role in maintaining the continued existence (*baqāʾ*, *istimrār al-wujūd*) of created things; even in Ashʿarī occasionalism, each new creation is conceived in terms of *hudūth* (pp. 86–89). This emphasis on *hudūth* was in stark contrast with the philosophers’ idea of the eternity of the world. According to Avicenna, only the continued existence of the contingent thing is caused by its metaphysical cause (as opposed to a physical cause of motion). This is based on Avicenna’s famous modal analysis of the existence of created things: considered in itself, the created thing is contingent and cannot exist on its own—if it could, it wouldn’t be contingent but necessary. Hence, its continued existence requires a metaphysical cause, and although in the order of emanation the proximate metaphysical cause is the active intellect, ultimately the only sovereign cause is God, who exists necessarily through Himself (pp. 89–93).

Although al-Masʿūdī does not expressly mention al-Ghazālī in this section, the latter’s critical response to Avicenna set the stage for al-Masʿūdī’s entry. Al-Ghazālī’s strategy was to subscribe to the standard *kalām* position, but not without refining it in response to Avicenna’s criticism: it is not the prior non-existence due to which the world depends on its cause but the positive property of its coming to be. Al-Ghazālī does not extrapolate on this idea in the *Tahāfut*, unsurprisingly given the exclusively critical intention of the *Tahāfut*, but the *Iqtisād* suggests that he held Ashʿarī occasionalism to be able to meet Avicenna’s challenge: since *hudūth* takes place anew at every moment, it combines the two kinds of metaphysical causation—God both maintains and brings the world into existence (pp. 95–98).

But al-Masʿūdī is not satisfied with al-Ghazālī’s answer. Following a straightforward assimilation of the features of Avicenna’s metaphysical and physical causes, he states that a thing’s dependence on a cause for its *hudūth* entails its independence with regard to its continued existence. Conveniently for his purposes, al-Masʿūdī all but ignores the fact that Avicenna had expressly attributed this independence to effects of physical causes but *not* to the effects of metaphysical causes (pp. 102–108). Perhaps al-Masʿūdī was driven by a theological motive, for the occasionalists’ amalgamation of the two senses of causation leaves open the possibility that there is no beginning to the series of God’s instantaneous creations. For all we know, the world, in the sense of this series, could after all be eternal! But if the causation of *hudūth* is categorically distinguished from the causation of *baqāʾ*, this worry is avoided.

In chapter 4, Shihadeh engages with al-Masʿūdī’s discussion of Avicenna’s modal metaphysics (qq. 10, 14). The background is formed by Avicenna’s Aristotelian argument from possibility to potentiality in a substrate, and from that potentiality to the eternity of the world. Evidently, contingent things must be possible before they come to be. But if this possibility is to be real, it must somehow exist independently

of the mind. Avicenna locates it in the principle of all potentiality, that is, matter. Matter, in turn, cannot have come to be from nothing, for in that case it would have had to be possible, which calls for another, prior principle of potentiality, leading eventually to an infinite regress. Hence, at least the material substrate of the world must be eternal. Now, since matter has no actual existence in itself and can only exist through a form, there must always have been forms to actualise the principle of potentiality. Hence, not only the world's material substrate but the world itself must be eternal (pp. 109–110).

An especially interesting aspect of Shihadeh's analysis of the Avicennian argument is that he suggests Avicenna to have introduced a concept of dispositional possibility to Islamic philosophy. Distinct from *per se* possibility (conceptual or logical possibility), dispositional possibility refers to the preparedness of matter to receive (or instantiate) a given form. Unlike *per se* possibility, dispositional possibility comes in degrees of proximity and remoteness, depending on the prior development of the material substrate of potentiality and possibility. For instance, the matter of the embryo is much more likely to develop into a living human than the matter of the semen (pp. 110–120). According to Shihadeh, this distinction escapes al-Ghazālī's criticism in the fourth argument of the first discussion of the *Tahāfut*, from which al-Mas'ūdī again takes his cue, namely that Avicenna's demonstration of the world's eternity relies on attributing a purely conceptual possibility to a real substrate. This is because al-Ghazālī does not recognise that Avicenna speaks of possibility in two senses: only the dispositional possibility of a concrete instantiation of a kind of contingent thing requires a substrate, but when we speak about the *per se* contingency of contingent essences, that resides in the essences themselves (pp. 120–126).

However, there are aspects to Shihadeh's interpretation of Avicenna in this regard that could perhaps be contested. One is his interpretation of *per se* possibility on p. 116. In *Ishārāt* II.5.6, Avicenna seems to say that the *per se* possibility of a thing must inhere in another, that is, in the matter which is the substrate of the thing's possibility by being that thing potentially. According to Shihadeh, this makes sense as long as we speak of particular things—to use his example, the possibility of a particular instantiation of the colour black, the blackness of my shoes, say, does depend on the prior potentiality of certain matter (leather) to receive the colour black. However, Shihadeh then says that this does not make sense for blackness considered absolutely, for this would entail that should there be a moment at which there are no possibly black things in the world, blackness will have become impossible absolutely. There are two problems with this idea. Firstly, if possibility is distinct from actuality, then even in the *per impossibile* case of *not one* thing of a specific sort being presently actual, this would not mean that things of that sort are impossible—precisely because there is a material substrate that bears the possibility

of their future actualisation. Secondly, Shihadeh's interpretation does not seem to tally well with the idea, which Avicenna may well have endorsed, that all absolute possibilities are always realised in *some* instantiation(s)—there just have always been, are now, and will always be black things. If Avicenna held this view, then it becomes debatable whether he really held a strict distinction between dispositional and *per se* possibility. Moreover, it seems that this view is required for the initial argument for the world's eternity to work, for if things can be possible *per se* without a substrate, then presumably this is true of matter as well, and so a crucial step in the argument falters. It may have been his successors, such as Bahmanyār b. Marzubān (d. 458/1066), who first came up with the distinction, albeit from clearly Avicennian ingredients (pp. 118–120).¹⁰ And if Avicenna held the dispositional and the *per se* possibilities to coincide when considered in a *metaphysical* perspective, then al-Ghazālī may have been spot on. It is also interesting to read that al-Mas'ūdī criticises Avicenna precisely for confounding the two concepts of dispositional and *per se* possibility, arguing that while dispositional possibility does require a substrate, *per se* possibility does not. It may be that al-Mas'ūdī missed a distinction in Avicenna (as suggested by Shihadeh), but it is also possible that he was among the first to actually make the distinction. Perhaps it really took off first in the twelfth century with al-Mas'ūdī and al-Rāzī, as Shihadeh himself suggests in a later remark (pp. 141–142).

These remarks notwithstanding, Shihadeh's analysis of Avicenna and al-Ghazālī in this chapter is laudable and, although this may not have been its primary aim, it makes a significant contribution to the scholarship on both of these seminal thinkers. In this regard, it is also noteworthy that Shihadeh's interpretation of al-Ghazālī's discussion of modality in the *Tahāfut* takes grounded exception to some recent interpretations by arguing that al-Ghazālī's modal theory was quite faithful to traditional Ash'arism.¹¹

Another interesting point in al-Mas'ūdī's critique is his statement that *all* modalities, and not just possibility, are negative notions that can be reduced to other positive notions such as being caused and being uncaused, which alone exist in reality (pp. 134–135). This is an idea that has interesting parallels with al-Mas'ūdī's younger contemporary al-Suhrawardī's refutation of a number of core Avicennian ideas (including the modalities) as merely intellectual concepts (*i'tibārāt al-'aql*). In his discussion of modality (q. 14), al-Mas'ūdī also attacks Avicenna's demonstration of the soul's incorruptibility, again following al-Ghazālī's example. This is relevant, because in the Avicennian system human souls are in the unique position of being both temporally occurring and immaterial entities, and thus inviting the question of how their contingency can be explained by means of a model that grounds contingency on a material substrate of potentiality. Moreover, Avicenna bases his demonstration of the soul's incorruptibility precisely on its lack of a material

substrate that could contain the possibility of the soul's non-existence: as an incorporeal substance the soul subsists through itself, not through a substrate that is capable of receiving other, conflicting forms. Al-Mas'ūdī takes Avicenna to task by stating that if the body can be the substrate of the possibility of the soul's *coming* to be, by symmetry it must also be capable of being the substrate of its possibly *ceasing* to be. His motive here is familiar from al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arī tradition: the soul's immortality cannot be demonstrated rationally but must be accepted on the basis of Revelation (pp. 136–141).

Al-Mas'ūdī's discussion of modalities in the context of the question of the eternity of the world proved influential for subsequent philosophical theology. By making explicit the distinction between *per se* possibility and dispositional possibility, and by granting that dispositional possibility has a material basis and is therefore a real feature of the world but *denying* that *per se* possibility has a positive content, he provided decisive impetus for Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's more thoroughgoing revision of Avicennian metaphysics (pp. 141–142).

When it comes to the second part of the book, the critical edition of the *Shukūk*, I found Shihadeh's work to be uniformly excellent. The edition consults all four known copies of the text and is based on a sound analysis of their interrelations. The only qualm is the choice of Sulaymān Dunyā's edition (4 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1960) for the comparison of al-Mas'ūdī's quotes with the original text of the *Ishārāt*. In my view, Jacques Forget's older edition (Leiden: Brill, 1892) seems to be free of many of the problems in Dunyā; indeed, in many of the places in which Shihadeh reports a difference between Dunyā and al-Mas'ūdī, Forget would have provided a uniform reading either in the text or among alternative readings.¹²

To conclude, Shihadeh's book is an extremely valuable contribution in a number of respects. It provides us with important insight into a crucial phase in the reception of Avicenna's philosophy, and the edition will be a solid foundation to what will certainly be no small number of future studies. Shihadeh provides plenty of evidence for a sustained counter-Avicennian current in pre-Rāzīan theology, a current characterised by its aporetic tendency, which in al-Rāzī's critical review fails to do justice to its target. At the same time, as Shihadeh shows, this period of Islamic philosophy and theology is remarkable for the novel, if occasionally inchoate ideas introduced in it. In addition to this, the study contains significant contributions to the scholarship on Avicenna and al-Ghazālī. Hence, the book shows that just as the late ancient commentators have proved to be very useful guides in the Aristotle scholarship of recent decades, the Islamic reception of Avicenna is an invaluable asset for understanding the target theory.

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NOTES

1 The only earlier commentary that we know of is by al-Mas'ūdī's contemporary Ḥaḥīr al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī (d. 565/1170), but this work has not survived.

2 Shihadeh makes a very convincing case for al-Mas'ūdī's devotion to Shāfi'ism, refuting some later descriptions of him as a Ḥanafī (pp. 26–27).

3 When it comes to his contact with philosophy, Shihadeh reports two interesting, albeit late and quite likely unhistorical accounts by the biographer al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363). These texts are *salāsila*, which establish a close connection between al-Mas'ūdī and two of the most prominent representatives of Avicennian philosophy in the earlier generation, that is 'Umar al-Khayyām (d. 517/1126) and 'Umar b. Sahlān al-Sāwī (d. mid-sixth/twelfth century).

4 In addition to the philosophical commentaries and treatises on the science of the stars, al-Mas'ūdī composed works on logic and jurisprudence.

5 For an example of the novel ideas emerging in this current of thought, see R. Wisnovsky, 'Essence and Existence in the Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Islamic East (*Mašriq*): A Sketch' in D.N. Hasse and A. Bertolacci (eds), *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics* (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 27–50.

6 On al-Rāzī's standards for the commentary, see also Wisnovsky, 'Avicennism and Exegetical Practice in the Early Commentaries on *Ishārāt*', *Oriens* 41 (2013), pp. 349–378, especially pp. 354–357. Shihadeh's analysis of al-Mas'ūdī's critique shows that al-Rāzī's remarks were not entirely unjustified (cf. pp. 102–104).

7 This emphasis has been pointed out recently in R. Wisnovsky, 'Avicenna's Islamic Reception' in P. Adamson (ed.), *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2013), pp. 190–213, especially pp. 195–197.

8 Wisnovsky, 'Avicenna's Islamic Reception', pp. 195–197.

9 In this regard, it is remarkable that al-Suhrawardī's slightly later theory of presential knowledge (*'ilm ḥuḍūrī*, *'ilm bi'l-ḥuḍūr*) was also an attempt at solving this particular problem (cf. J. Kaukua, 'Suhrawardī's Knowledge as Presence in Context', *Studia Orientalia* 114 (2014), pp. 309–324). Was the question of God's knowledge of particulars the catalyst for both of the sixth/twelfth-century alternatives to Avicenna's theory of knowledge? Both the 'relationalist' and the 'presentialist' theories are designed to endow God with access to particulars without this involving either change or corporeality in Him.

10 Furthermore, Shihadeh's distinction is very close to the modern distinction between logical and nomical possibility, and it is not clear whether Avicenna would have wanted to subscribe to anything like that in metaphysics—even if his logical works can be interpreted as supporting a notion of merely logical possibility (see A. Bäck, 'Avicenna's Conception of the Modalities', *Vivarium* 30 (1992), pp. 217–255).

11 If Shihadeh is right, it would be an interesting further question whether the modal theoretical implications of the synchronic possibilities available to *God* were nevertheless recognised by al-Ghazālī, and whether this recognition can be traced further back into the Ash'arī tradition.

12 Cf. p. 205 (nn. 2, 5, and 7) with Forget, p. 121; p. 239 (nn. 2–4 and 6) with Forget, p. 130; p. 251 (nn. 1 and 3) with Forget, p. 143; p. 268 (n. 4) with Forget, p. 149; p. 279 (n. 2) with Forget, p. 165; and p. 285 (n. 2) with Forget, p. 178.