

### Ulasan Buku/*Book Review*

*Miskawayh's Ethical Thought and Its Sources*. By Mohd. Nasir Bin Omar. 2003. Bangi: Fakulti Pengajian Islam, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. 175pp. Reviewed by Ibrahim Abu Bakar.

This small book is on the sources and ethical thought of Miskawayh, Muslim ethicist who died in the month of Safar in 421 A.H. or in February 1039 A.C. (p. 4). Based on the preface (pp. ii-iii) and the acknowledgement (p. iv) written in this book, it is a work originated from the scholarly efforts of Mohd Nasir while he was studying at a university in the United Kingdom. This is evident from his deep appreciation to all those who had helped him in writing his book “particularly, Professor Dr. Hassan Askari and Professor Dr. David Kerr”. He also thanked Professor Dr. Jogen Nielsen and Dr. Sigvard Von Sicard for their valuable suggestions and criticisms for the book improvements (p. iv). These four professors were not Malaysian scholars and they did not live in Malaysia when this book was published in 2003.

After the acknowledgement, the book begins with the list of abbreviations for Miskawayh's works as well as the books, journals and periodicals about his life, thought and works (pp. v-ix). Since this book writes the notes at the end of its chapters, the abbreviations are useful for shortening the notes.

Although the book is small in size but it has eight chapters. The first chapter is on Miskawayh's life, education and works. He was born in Rayy around 320 A.H./932 A.C. His father died when he was still very young. As a widow, his mother took care of him and his education before she remarried to a man who is much younger than her age. Miskawayh was not happy with his mother second marriage. In 341/953 Miskawayh was able to secure the employment with al-Muhallabi (d. 352/963), the vizier of the Buwayhid prince Mu'izz al-Dawlah (d. 356/967) in Baghdad. (p. 5). It was about 12 years Miskawayh served al-Muhallabi as his companion and librarian and he then continued to serve al-Muhallabi's successor Abu al-Fadl ibn al-Amid (d. 360/972) and his son Abu al-Fath who succeeded his father Abu al-Fadl. After the death of Abu al-Fath, Miskawayh left Baghdad for Siraz where he secured the employment as the secretary, companion and librarian of 'Adud al-Dawlah (d. 372/982) and of his son Sams al-Dawlah

(d. 388/998) who succeeded his father ‘Adud al-Dawlah. After the death of Sams al-Dawlah, Miskawayh’s life and career or employment were unknown (pp. 6-7) until his death in 421/1030. He left behind many works and about 19 of them were later on edited and published, 4 still in the manuscript forms in the libraries in Europe and Muslim countries. There are about 19 works of Miskawayh are untraceable (pp. 8-12).

The second chapter is on Miskawayh’s contemporaries namely Yahya ibn ‘Adi (d. 364/974) who was a well-known Syrian-Christian translator, logician and ethicist whose work entitled *al-tahdhib al-akhlaq* similar to the title of one of Miskawayh’s works, al-Hamadhani (d. 398/1007) who was an Arabic and Persian writer, born in Hamadhan and died in Hirat, Abu Bakr al-l-Khawarazmi (d. 383/993) Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi (d. 414/1023) who was a philosopher, jurist and sufi master, Abu Sulayman al-Sijistani al-Mantiqi (logician) (d. 375/985), Ibn al-Khammar (d. 408/1017) who was a Christian scholar and translator, al-Tha‘alibi (d. 427/1036) who was a learned Muslim theologian and the Koranic exegete, and Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037) who was one of the great Muslim philosophers (pp. 24-27).

The third chapter presents a brief survey of studies on Miskawayh by some scholars who have written their studies in English, Arabic and other languages. Among those who have studied Miskawayh are M. S. Khan whose work was published by E. J. Brill in Leiden in 1964, C. K. Zurayk whose two works on Miskawayh were published by American University of Beirut in Beirut in 1966 and 1968 respectively, ‘Abd al-Haq Ansari whose work was published by Aligarh Muslim University Press in Aligarh in 1964, and ‘Abd al-Aziz ‘Izzat whose work was published by Maktabah al-Mustafa al-babi al-Halabi in Cairo in 1964 (pp. 42-54).

The fourth chapter describes the Greek sources of Miskawayh’s ethics; they are Aristotle’s works either directly from his works or indirectly from his commentators, Plato’s and Socrates’ works. Aristotle’s works include politics, ethics, logics and physics. Galen’s works are also the sources of Miskawayh’s ethics.

The fifth and sixth chapters are on the Christian sources and Muslim sources of Miskawayh’s ethics respectively. Among Miskawayh’s Christian contemporaries are Yahya bin ‘Adi (d. 364/974), Ibn Zur‘ah (d. 398/1008) and Ibn al-Khammar (d. 331/943). (p. 106). The Muslim sources for Miskawayh’s ethics are many;

they are Muslim mystics such as Hasan al-Basri, Rabi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah and al-Junayd, Muslim jurists such as Abu Hanifah and al-Shafi‘i, Muslim theologians such as Abu Hasan al-Ash‘ari and Muslim philosophers such as Ibn al-Muqaffa‘, al-Jahiz, al-Kindi, al-Farabi, al-Amiri, al.Razi and Ibn Sina (pp. 115-120).

The seventh chapter elucidates one of Miskawayh’s works namely the *Wasiyyah*. According to Mohd Nasir, Miskawayh’s *Wasiyyah* is his Islamic ethical framework since it refers to many Islamic and Muslim sources namely the Koranic verses, the Prophetic traditions and the works of Muslim scholars. The references for his Prophetic traditions are from the works of Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Hanbal and others. The Arabic texts of the *Wasiyyah* and their English translations are made available to their readers in this chapter (pp. 130-136).

The book last chapter is chapter eight that contains the conclusion. This concluding chapter briefly states about the main themes presented in the earlier chapters of the book namely Miskawayh’s educational background, jobs, contemporary scholars, and sources of his ethical thoughts and doctrines. Mohd Nasir clearly states his disagreement with some modern scholars who hold the views that “Miskawayh’s dependence on Greek philosophical ideas outweighed his reliance upon the Qur’an, Islamic traditions and earlier Muslim scholars, nor that his personal adherence to Islam was merely superficial” (p. 151).

This book on Miskawayh’s ethical thought and his ethical sources is a very useful work of Mohd Nasir because it traces and unfolds the necessary and important areas of a Muslim scholar namely his educational background, his sources of knowledge and information and what he has done with many sources of his knowledge and information. The Arabic texts of *Wasiyyah* and their English translations made available in this book should be seen as the textual proofs for Miskawayh’s ethical thoughts and doctrines originated from Islamic and Muslim sources as well as other sources.

This book is considered to have its weakness, if its readers expect to see the complete transliteration system for the Arabic nouns and verbs since the book lacks its completeness in this regard. Since the book provides the notes at the end of each one of its eight chapters, there is the spacing issue in writing the notes. Take for example the notes for the first chapter take ten pages, from page 13 to page 22, the texts in the first chapter take eleven pages, from

page 2 to page 12. Other chapters also have more or less pages for their notes in comparison with the texts in those chapters. This book is able to reach 175 pages due to the notes at the end of chapters and the works listed in the bibliographical section from page 156 to 175. However, both the long notes and works listed in the bibliography are important for an academic work like this one.

The author of this book probably thinks of the term “ethics” as a plural noun. This is evident from many places in the book. On page ii, he writes, “In Islam, ethics are inseparable from religion, and are built entirely upon it”. He also writes, “Miskawayh’s ethics are rooted in his metaphysical ideas regarding God, the universe and the human soul”. (p. 49). On page 139, he writes, “Miskawayh’s ethics are clearly based on the active striving of soul for its purification”. It seems that the author of this book does not consider ethics as a branch of philosophy addressing ethical and moral issues, and he does not use ethics as the scientific or philosophical treatment of morality. The term “ethics” with the meanings of a branch of philosophy as well as the philosophical or scientific treatment of morality is often written as a singular noun, not as a plural noun.

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