

Muammer İskenderoğlu. *Molla Fenârî'de Tasavvuf Metafiziği: Mişbâhu'l-Üns Üzerine Bir İnceleme [Sufi Metaphysics in Mulla Fanârî: A Study on Mişbâh al-uns]*. İstanbul: Değişim Yayınları, 2016. 133 pages. ISBN: 9786054925865.

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The civilizations that societies build are largely shaped along the lines of the works produced by that society's scholars and the influence of their works upon it. In other words, what a society's people reads and is interested in, or the fields of thought into which they inquire, is an accurate indicator of its level of development in terms of its collective consciousness. Thus, one can take great pride in the increasing number of studies on, and interest in, theoretical problems in Turkey. Likewise, studies on mystical thought also gradually take off and extensive studies on the thought of mystics who composed such works, principally Muhyî al-Dîn al-'Arabî (d. 638/1240), are undertaken. The study under review is the outcome of a similar interest: a study of Mulla al-Fanârî's (d. 834/1431) *Mişbâh al-uns*, which is a commentary on Şadr al-Dîn al-Qûnawî's (d. 673/1274) *Miftâh al-ghayb*.

The study comprises a preface, introduction, two chapters, and a conclusion. In the preface, the author states the reasons that led him to undertake this work and added a summary of its contents. The introduction is reserved for the intellectual world in which Mulla Fanârî grew up, as well as his life, works, and the method and sources of *Mişbâh al-uns*. The first chapter discusses the essential discussion topic of how the Sufis classified the sciences. Mulla Fanârî's views on the subject, as well as the principles and problems, measures and method of the discipline of divinities (*'ilm al-ilâhî*), are presented in order to locate it among the sciences. In the second chapter the topics of the divinity; the Absolute Being (viz., God); God's unity; the attribution of essence, attributes, and the active names to God; the emergence of possible beings; and the degrees of existence are studied.

After this general exposition, we move on to a detailed analysis of each part of the book. In the preface, the author notes the two main reasons that led him to compose

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this book. One of them is the wish to protest the view that philosophy, theology, mysticism, and the other sciences are separate from each other (5). Furthermore, scholars who do not have a holistic sense of science can make no contribution in any of these fields, whereas those who do can make substantial contributions to each of them. The themes discussed by Mulla Fanārī in *Miṣbāḥ al-uns* obviously corroborate this view. The second motive is the dearth of studies on Mulla Fanārī in Turkey, even though he grew up in Anatolia. This situation puts the country's scholars to shame because he has garnered more attention in a "neighboring country," in the words of the author, where he was studied and his glosses were – and still are – produced. However, in order not to be misunderstood, the author promptly adds that he does not believe that there were – and still are – secret treasures of the Ottoman era waiting to be discovered, as some scholars claimed (6).

These statements are not altogether unsubstantiated. Certainly, it is a most critical conundrum that the author of a scholarly study focused on a single point and thereby prevented the topic's comprehensive treatment. With all due respect, the author's manner of addressing this issue is far from irenic. Hence, while criticizing the lack of a holistic view of the sciences, he states that his aim is "to protest the structure of subfields with blinders of the so-called scientific community of our country" (5). Once again, when he opines that there are no more secret Ottoman-era treasures waiting to be discovered, he accuses those scholars who hold the contrary view of being "so-called scholars," even "marketing this view to make a living." He then taunts them to "discover these treasures and present them to the scholarly community" and repeats the same accusation for a third time (6). As a matter of fact, coming across these lines, which are contrary to the academic style of criticism in the first pages of the book, wears the readers out at the very beginning and partially lessens their willingness to peruse it any further.

The introduction seeks to present a general description of the intellectual world in which Mulla Fanārī grew up as well as of his life, works, and the commentary style he employed in *Miṣbāḥ al-uns*. İskenderoğlu opens the chapter by reminding the readers that Fanārī lived in the "second classical" – also called "post-classical" – age of Islamic thought and notes that the sciences interacted with each other to a greater degree during this period (9). Moreover, it is one of the period's characteristic issues to determine the intersecting and separate aspects of the relevant sciences and, accordingly, who shall be called a theologian, a philosopher, or a mystic. In his opinion, the classifications formulated by al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) involve contrived divisions and are there-

fore highly problematic (10-11). Even though İskenderoğlu explained his views on the aforementioned classifications in a few sentences, he gave short shrift to the readers who are encountering these issues for the first time. For those who read the lines of criticism about al-Jurjānī and al-Ghazālī and expect a comprehensive and exhaustive treatment of the matter thereafter, this short shrift keeps the critical mention elliptical.

Another characteristic of the post-classical period is the profusion of commentaries and glosses rather than original works. In the author's opinion, while the composition of commentaries and glosses was constantly criticized during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is good to see that they have recently been held in higher regard (12). This is a quite pertinent and accurate remark, for in addition to their assistance in providing the correct understanding of the problems, occasionally they were substantial enough in their own right to be considered a new work. On the other hand, if we consider that the introductory sections written before the commentaries also emerged as comprehensive and significant independent works, it becomes clear how apposite the genre of commentary and gloss is in our intellectual tradition.

According to İskenderoğlu, the post-classical period's third characteristic is the emergence of teaching material tailored for different levels in various fields (12). As the courses taught in Ottoman madrasas owe their curricula to this period, some scholars mention an "Ottoman school" contemporaneous with the "Indian school," or the "school of Isfahan" (13). The author suggests that one can accept that Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), the first Ottoman madrasa professor (*mudarris*), and later on Mulla Fanārī played important roles in terms of getting the philosophical, theological, and mystical thought propounded by Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), and Ibn al-'Arabī into Ottoman madrasas. But in his opinion, the works by both al-Qayṣarī and Fanārī on theoretical mysticism had no impact upon the madrasa curriculum, even though they were followers of Ibn al-'Arabī (15). These statements are examples of the series of uncertain and unsubstantiated claims that reoccur throughout İskenderoğlu's book. Hence, he refers to no specific source as regards what kind of curriculum these individuals followed and lists none of the works that were taught. Furthermore, the absence of any documentary evidence concerning the curriculum already inhibits a final decision on this matter.

After having decided that Ottoman thought remained very aloof to theoretical mysticism, İskenderoğlu claims that the sciences of logic and philosophy – again

without evidence – and that they were represented by only a few titles in the madrasa curriculum (15). He then reminds the readers of the “preference for jurisprudence over theological disciplines in the madrasas,” which, he asserts, was also a prominent issue in Kātib Chalabī’s (d. 1067/1657) series of criticisms. But this criticism is leveled against the post-Suleimanic era, as the author himself mentions, and thus cannot be related to the entirety of the Ottoman era (14). One wonders where the argument would lead if it were to follow these lines; hence, the author suggests that *kalām*, philosophy, and mysticism could hardly find a place in Ottoman madrasas. To top it all, he claims that an Ottoman philosophy with genuine and creative features never developed (15). Obviously, a researcher might have dissenting views from other scholars. However, İskenderoğlu’s brisk claims, which lack any scholar basis (i.e., he presents no corroborating sound evidence or examples), causes the readers to succumb to sudden bursts of puzzlement. These lines give the impression that the author has no scholarly objectives, is aloof from any objective perspective, and expresses his personal views in an emotional manner – all of which greatly diminish the book’s influence.

Given the express title, there is an incompatibility between what the introduction promises and what it actually presents. It is disappointing for the readers to come across the portrayal of Mulla Fanārī’s intellectual world in just a few pages, as if put off. Apparently, the author sought not to portray that intellectual world, but rather to convey the period’s barrenness with respect to philosophy. However, his statements on this matter do not exceed a few emotional lines. Thus, neither a balanced portrayal of Fanārī’s contemporary intellectual world nor a comprehensive and exhaustive analysis of this apparent “barrenness” can be found in the introduction. After briefly mentioning Fanārī’s life and works in the introduction’s second section, the author concludes by presenting the commentary style of *Miṣbāḥ al-uns* and its sources.

In the beginning of the first chapter, İskenderoğlu writes that he would describe al-Qūnawī and Fanārī’s approaches to their respective topics in the manner of an introduction to mystical metaphysics (*‘ilm al-ilāhī*). With this objective in mind, he first explains this science’s place by scrutinizing these two scholars’ classifications of sciences and then depicting their views on principal issues concerning *‘ilm al-ilāhī* (23). He opens a section with the heading “The Classification of Sciences in Mysticism” and asks: “Is it possible to speak of a comprehensive and intensive scheme of the classification of sciences by Sufis?” He then remarks that he will investigate the issue as regards Ibn al-‘Arabī, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, and

Mulla Fanārī (23). Indeed, he does give a general picture by presenting their overall classifications. And yet the readers will not find the answer to the question posed at the beginning, because the author conveys the information but then closes the section without any further analysis and comment.

In fact, one cannot answer such a large question by citing a few examples from these Sufis' classifications of sciences only from the period of verification (*taḥqīq*), for attaining a correct view on this matter requires one to consider the schemes developed by scholars from other disciplines and other Sufis, among them Jābir b. Ḥayyān (d. 200/815), al-Kindī (d. after 252/866), al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198). Even Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, whom the author accuses of making no contribution to the madrasa curriculum on the subject of metaphysics, and his mentor 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 736/1335), had classifications of sciences. Moreover, it has to be shown whether the Sufis' classifications had distinct, original, or deficient aspects when compared to the aforementioned schemes of classification in order to reach a decision on this matter. Otherwise, one cannot obtain a correct answer to the question. Subsequently, this section is dysfunctional and moves on to the next section without much ado.

The chapter's remaining section headers are "The Subject, Principles and Problems of *'ilm al-ilāhī*," "The Measure and Method of *'ilm al-ilāhī*," "Basic Principles of *'ilm al-ilāhī*," and the relevant sections of Fanārī's *Miṣbāḥ al-uns*. The issues taken up therein are certainly among the most apposite concerns of the history of Islamic thought. Therefore, not just Sufis but also scholars from other disciplines stated their own views on them. The author relies solely on the relevant sections of the *Miṣbāḥ al-uns*. In the absence of a certain framework, however, it gets harder for readers to comprehend the issue examined. Rather than directly engaging with the subject, principle, and issues of *'ilm al-ilāhī*, İskenderoğlu should have briefly informed the readers of what was meant by these concepts, why the scholars chose these three bases for a body of knowledge to be regarded as a science, and whether some scholars did not consider the presence of all three bases to be necessary or even some added onto them. Once again Fanārī's statements concerning the issue would have made more sense if the author had explained why the Sufis considered it essential to construct *'ilm al-ilāhī* on these three bases and mentioned the views of those who opposed considering mysticism as a discipline. In the treatment of the measure and method of *'ilm al-ilāhī*, it was also important to explain the course and reason for pursuing a measure before Fanārī – hence primarily Ibn al-'Arabī, al-Kāshānī, Mū'ayyid al-Dīn b. Maḥmūd al-Jandī (d. 691/1292), and al-Qayṣarī

dealt with the issue in their works – and a more emphatic portrayal of the issues of unveiling (*kashf*) and inspiration (*ilhām*). Finally, similar statements can be made for the section dealing with the basic principles: It obstructs one's comprehension of the topic, as does the author's choice to conjoin it with a framework without making any attempt to explain the principles, for all the author does is drop the scholars' names.

In the second chapter, İskenderoğlu presents sections entitled “Absolute Being: God,” “The Unity of God: The Attribution of the Names of Essence, Attribute, and Action,” and “The Emergence of the Possible Beings and the Levels of Being.” In the first section, he states that Muslim thinkers debated the concept of existence rather extensively because it was related to so many things simultaneously, and then focuses on in what sense Fanāri predicated existence to God (53). In order to do this, İskenderoğlu conveys the commentator's view of God as the Absolute Being and his supporting evidence for that view. In the section on the unity of God, he presents Fanāri's views on the division of unity into *real* and *numeric*; that unity has three levels (viz., essential [*dhāti*], attributable [*waṣfī*], and active [*fi'ili*]); on God as the real unity; the obscurity of God with respect to His essential unity; and, by necessity of the unity, only one appears of One. The third section explains how the divine names were attributed to God, how the link between God and world was maintained without hindering God's unity, and how the multiplicity in the world could spring from God as pure unity. Issues like the relation of the beings' emergence with the notion of love (*muḥabba*) and the sacred (*qudsī*) *ḥadīth* on the hidden treasure (*al-kanz al-mahkfī*); the nature of God's will; the rulings (*ḥukm*) of the divine names; the connection of the designations related to those names with divine attestation; the impossibility of knowing the essence of God, are also tackled in this section.

The fourth and last section comprises themes such as the qualities of the level of gathering (*al-jam'*) and existence, which is the first level that can be known; this level's relation to *umm al-kitāb* / *wujūd al-'āmm*; the causes of emergence (*zuhūr*) reconsidered in relation to these concepts; the notion of love and the sacred *ḥadīth* concerning the hidden treasure; levels of the cosmic (*kawnī*) truths and the divine names; the breath of the Merciful (*al-naḥas al-Raḥmānī*); the levels of total connection (*al-nikah al-kullī*); the level of ignorance (*amā'*); the Supreme Pen (*al-kalam al-a'lā*); the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawh al-mahfūz*); the Imaginal World (*al-'ālam al-mithāl*); the level of the dust cloud (*habā'*); and the Throne (*al-'Arsh*), the Pedestal (*al-Kursī*), orbs, four elements, and seven heavens. Following the method employed

in the first chapter, the author conveys the relevant views of Mulla Fanārī by means of translations from *Miṣbāḥ al-uns*.

The concluding chapter begins with İskenderoğlu reminding the readers that Fanārī was an important thinker of the second classical age. But, in the author's opinion, theoretical mysticism was quite weak in terms of any systematic presentation when compared to philosophy and theology, and thus Fanārī, along with Ibn al-'Arabī and al-Qūnawī, lagged far behind both groups on this matter (123-24). Certainly, one needs to bear in mind mysticism's methodological difference from theology and philosophy and that this would necessarily show up in the Sufis' works. Hence the Sufis, al-Qūnawī foremost among them, provided explanations on this matter and expressed the view that what appeared to lack systematicity was a veritable system in itself for various reasons. In the remainder of the chapter, the author suggests that the contribution of Fanārī's commentary to understanding the main text is debatable (124). As a matter of fact, if such room for doubt on the commentary's substance is present, the issue should have been grappled with in an analytical work, not a book. And yet again, İskenderoğlu has left an unanswered question in the readers' minds without presenting any further evidence or example before wrapping this section up: The explanations in Fanārī's commentary is too long and intricate, which, he claims, sometimes makes the text indecipherable. Numerous quotations designed to explain these issues could be counted among the commentator's weaknesses (125). Finally, the author reminds that more extensive works on the aforementioned views of Fanārī can be done, and concludes his work.

Overall, this book has some serious weak points. As already noted, the most crucial problems are the absence of any justification for the author's claims, the lack of a certain framework to deal with the issues, and the lack of any analysis of the subjects taken up. A striking aspect of this work is İskenderoğlu's use of rather emotional and vindictive language when describing opposing viewpoints. One can contend that this mars the work's scholarly nature and weakens its impact. Aside from the interruptions in the introduction, however, the work does transmit Fanārī's thought in a steady flow. But the lack of context for the ideas of both the commentator and the author hinders one's comprehension of why the subject matter under consideration is important. İskenderoğlu states that it has to be regarded as just a descriptive work (125-26); however, the title declares that it has to be an analytical study. In such works, both the transmission of what the author of the work under study wrote and why and in what context such issues were taken up

requires analysis. On the other hand, even a basic description would be useless if there is no adequate framework in which it can be placed. Thus, the content is way below what is expected, even though the title of the book and the chapter headings are quite comprehensive and assertive. Thus, it would be accurate to state that the greater part of the work under review consists of translations of some of Fanārī's views. But these translations are not smooth and thus give the impression that it was hastily written. Also, the numerous syntactical errors and occasional spelling mistakes have to be noted. Another weak point is the author's failure to consult some basic references, especially dissertations, on Fanārī. Moreover, one cannot find some of the titles listed in the bibliography and the footnotes, a state of affairs that greatly decreases the book's reliability. Notwithstanding all of these defects, it will be useful for those readers who cannot peruse the primary sources due to the language barrier but would like to get an outline of Mullā Fanārī's views on the aforementioned subjects.