

Book Review/*Ulasan Buku*

The Political Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of Cosmology and the Human Soul by Idris Zakaria. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. 2002, pp. 224. Price RM40.00. ISBN 967-942-594-0. Reviewed by Ibrahim Abu Bakar.

As indicated by the title of the book, Idris seeks to present Avicenna's political aspects and their relation and connection with Avicenna's views on cosmology and human soul. For his presentation of Avicenna's political aspects, Idris refers to the three works of Avicenna namely the *Shifa'*, the *Siyasa* and the *Isharat*. Although Idris refers to the *Shifa'*, he explains further that his main focus is on the tenth treatise of the *Metaphysics* in the philosophical work since that particular part contains the basic ideas of Avicenna's political philosophy. For the *Isharat*, Idris focuses on Avicenna's ideas on sufism or Islamic mysticism dealing with human soul.

The book has seventeen chapters which are classified into four different parts beginning with the first part on the political theory of the *Shifa'*, followed by the second part on the political theory of the *Siyasa* and the third part which provides some ideas found in the two works of Avicenna namely the *Shifa'* and the *Isharat*, and finally the fourth part which is a commentary and conclusion. The first and second parts have their own conclusions. The conclusion for the first part is on the four main topics found in Avicenna's philosophical thought namely the metaphysical and cosmological doctrines as well as the prophetic and legal concepts. As a Muslim philosopher, Avicenna acknowledges the existence of God and other beings either directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously depend on Him. Avicenna also sees the importance of prophethood for human life in this world since the prophet who received illuminations and inspirations from God is able to provide guidance and law which aimed at controlling, regulating and safeguarding human social, economic and political necessities in this world. Avicenna is known for his classification of beings into many categories in his cosmology such as the heavenly beings and the worldly beings. Moreover, the heavenly beings have some influence on the worldly beings.

The conclusion for the second part is not really a conclusion if it is compared with the conclusion for the first part. The conclusion for the second part is on the sources of the *Siyasa* of Avicenna. It does not conclude the main themes of the second part. The second part concentrates on Avicenna's thought on human needs to manage himself, his household, his society and his state or country. A household consists of a husband, a wife and children. Household management is one of the four types of human managements in a state or a country. Other three managers of human beings are known as kings, governors

and lords. Hierarchically the four types of human managers have their own duties and clients. For example, a king has to control and manage his state or country through his governors and the governors through their lords. The duties of a king are to protect human lives, to look after their needs and to administer the state or country. As already indicated earlier, there is no conclusion for the third part. The final and last part, the fourth one, on commentary and conclusion, runs from chapter 15 to chapter 17

Chapter 15 summarizes Avicenna's foundations of political philosophy. On page 204, Idris summarizes them by saying, "It is obvious that the cosmological doctrines and the theory of human souls are the foundations of Ibn Sina's political philosophy, whereas the prophet and his laws become fundamental elements in his theory" Chapter 16 summarizes the position of politics in Avicenna's philosophy. As admitted by many scholars who have studied Avicenna's philosophy, he paid less attention to politics in comparison with his attention paid to logic, physics, mathematics, metaphysics and medicine. However, in line with the Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle who preceded him, Avicenna accepts politics as a branch of philosophy. In the Greek philosophical tradition, philosophy is divided into theoretical and practical divisions. Avicenna contributed to both divisions of philosophy through his metaphysical doctrines as well as his ways of managing human beings consisting of both body and soul. His contribution to political philosophy, nevertheless, is considered as an addendum to his philosophy. Chapter 17 is about the position of Avicenna in the history of Islamic political philosophy. On page 215, Idris concludes this last chapter by saying, "What we can conclude about Ibn Sina's place in the history of Islamic political philosophy is that he presents a mixture of ideas drawn from several thinkers on the subject, both Greek and Muslim, and that he formulates them according to his own philosophy and system"

The book is probably originated from a doctoral thesis since Idris expresses his deep thanks to his supervisor Dr. Norman Calder in the preface. The book greatly contributes to a deeper and broader understanding of Avicenna's political aspects and his thought of cosmology and human soul. The book has some spelling mistakes and abundant typographical errors especially for the Arabic words and the transliterated Arabic words. It is wise to pay attention to those errors, if the book is going to be published for its second edition. Although the title of the book used the name Avicenna but the name Ibn Sina is predominantly used in the book.

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