Muhammed Âbid el-Câbirî. *Arap Ahlâkî Aklı* [*The Moral Reason of the Arabs*]. Translated into Turkish by Muhammet Çelik. İstanbul: Mana Yayınları, 2016. 824 pages. ISBN: 9786059136037.

Hümeyra Özturan[*]

In an attempt to meet the need for works with a holistic view of Islamic ethical thought that reviews the existing studies from various vantage points, *Arap Ahlâkî Aklı* (*al-ʿAql al-akhlāqī al-ʿarabī*), the last volume of Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī's (d. 2010) tetralogy,[1] deserves our attention. One more review will go some way in helping others ascertain its claims on ethical thought separately and especially open a discussion of his views on "philosophical ethics." Thus, this review aims both to convey the essence of his reading of the literature and the claims he made in this book, and to draw the reader's attention to the translated text, which received first prize in Sheikh Hamad Award for Translation and International Understanding at Qatar in 2015.

Even though al-Jābirī's extensive source criticism exceeded 800 pages, his survey is based on a few basic propositions. The author contends that Arab ethical thought has five roots and that almost all such works draw sustenance from one or more of them. However, not only did al-Jābirī undertake a literature survey, but he also proposed a perspective and literary style that he deemed to be lacking. Based on this general framework, I will present the author's treatment step by step by highlighting and discussing his basic arguments.

This composition is meant to fill a lacuna of comprehensive works on Arab ethical thought. What needs to be underscored here is that al-Jābirī's aim involves Arab,

* Assist. Prof., Marmara University, Faculty of Theology, Department of the History of Philosophy.
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instead of Islamic, ethical thought, and thus he set aside a vast reserve that would be qualified by "Islam." Keeping my reservations concerning this approach to the end, I followed suit and employed the expression "Arab thought."

Al-Jābirī's most important statement concerning his survey of ethical literature is that comprehensive works of the history of Arab ethical thought have been hindered by the "restriction of ethical thought to philosophy" (8–11). The reduction of the scope of moral thought to philosophy is certainly to "judge by the measures of a perspective that views it as a subfield of philosophy, without any association with religion" as al-Jābirī conveys, and "the composition of ethical works solely with respect to religious aspect in Arab-Islamic culture is not a consequence of philosophical decline" (10–11). While concurring with this much, his successive claim that "what forms the moral reason is not the epistemological structure and concepts, but the system of values" is misguided. Even though he states that he refrains from interpreting ethical thought following the sequence of "report, recognition, demonstration" as in his previous works and aims for a reading "that also incorporates other worlds," he appears to be misled or mistaken in the aforementioned reading by underestimating, even denying, the link of moral reason with the epistemological structure (22). For instance, following his precept, Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) goes almost unmentioned and al-Fārābī's (d. 339/950) ethical perspective, which is strongly attached to theoretical reason, is noted in passing over the "imperial politics" (449–61).

Moreover, one wonders why the "medical approach to ethics" could be regarded as a "philosophical achievement" by al-Jābirī and the "epistemological approach" is not, given that ethical statements were also subjected to epistemological analysis as forms of propositions (397). Moreover, in the first part of the book he poses the question as to why an analytical inquiry like that of Plato and Aristotle did not emerge in Arab-Islamic culture, although there was a proclivity to intellect as the source of ethical judgments (128–35). Disregarding those philosophers who pursued such an inquiry and then posing the question appears to be an inconsistency, one similar to denying any role for epistemological structure in the formation of moral reason and then regretting "that we do not have one."

Another striking statement is his assertion that, building on the analysis in the first part, he asserts that *akhlāq* (ethics) and *adab* (mores) are conflicting and contested concepts because the former is a preference of the followers of the Greek legacy, and the latter is of Persian provenance (65). One can say that the relation and tension, if there is any, between these concepts can be taken up in further studies of ethics. In fact, this subject does merit study.

In the remainder of the same part, al-Jābirī briefly summarizes the emergence of ethical problems in parallel with the unfolding of Islamic history from the perspective of the "crisis of values" (his own idiom) (73–155). This narrative is so exemplary that it could serve as a point of emulation for the ethical sections of theology (*kalām*). The author contends that theologians mentioned ethical issues like freedom, responsibility, punishment, and reward as a consequence of this crisis, but "did not develop a methodology for a separate discipline" (155). Whether this approach is in the form of "criticizing theology for not being philosophy" or not will be discussed below.

After introducing the arguments mentioned above, al-Jābirī considers the question of "The Roots of the Order of Values in Arab Culture," a topic that forms the mainstay of his book. Claiming that the values of Arab culture can be interpreted by five basic roots, he offers a concept for each one that contains its essence. Hence, the basic concept inherited from Persian culture is *obedience*, *happiness* came from the Greeks, *the ethics of annihilation* came from mysticism, and *benevolence* came from pure Arab culture. Unable to locate what he intended for a pure Islamic legacy in the literature, he singles out *the righteous act*. In this general framework, I will point out the individuals he mentioned and his arguments, after which I will analyze them more emphatically with regard to the Greek legacy.

Claiming that the Persian legacy entered the Arab world during the Umayyad period, al-Jābirī suggests that this influence was first attested to in the letters drafted by the Persian scribes of the Umayyad rulers and then nestled in the literature through the translations of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 142/759). However, he does not consider the said influence and transmission to be coincidental, but rather a "preferred" transmission on the basis of the Umayyad rulers' needs (314–20), for the concept of *obedience* as a "value" protrudes in both cases, and that was exactly what Umayyads needed to secure their legitimacy. Pursuing the trace of this perspective, which puts the at ruler center stage, views him as the guardian of justice and the land, and glorifies obedience to him by contrasting it to "disorder," the author concludes that the Persian approach had a vast influence. To back this up, he provides examples from the works of Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940), al-Ibshīhī (d. 854/1450?), al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418), and al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058).

The author's conscious preference for the Persian legacy over the Greek one is also interesting. In his opinion, the Greek legacy signifies "individual happiness," a value that was underplayed for being, so to speak, "not in the best interests" of political authority (314, 318). This remark is astonishing, for the secondary claim

that "individual happiness" was this legacy's basic value is itself controversial. Even though the framework that al-Jābirī tried to build has its charms, describing this particular as being based on "individual happiness" by citing philosophers like Plato (d. 347 BCE) and Aristotle (d. 322 BCE) looks problematic. Both philosophers do not distinguish individual happiness from political pleasure in any way, and the pursuit of a virtuous city is always part and parcel of the good life. Besides, any *obedience* to the ruler that could by legitimized by philosophy and virtue is regarded as a value with regard to the hierarchical social order in both philosophers' mindset – or at least there are valid grounds for it.

In the chapter dealing with the Greek legacy, al-Jābirī sketches three perspectives attributable to Greek influence. The first one, the "medical perspective," comprises those philosophers who view immorality as a malady of the soul that requires treatment, a view inspired by Galenic medicine. Considering Abū Bakr Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī (d. 313/925), Thābit b. Sinān (d. 365/975-76), Ibn al-Haytham (d. c. 1040), and Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) to be members of this group, the author views this scientific medical perspective as a "success" (397) because, in his opinion, the Galenic legacy was developed and a genre emerged. Buttressing his argument for the presence of such a genre, he locates Thābit b. Sinān's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* and also claims that another *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* attributed to Yaḥyā b. 'Adī (d. 364/975) belongs to Ibn al-Haytham. al-Jābirī thinks that the place of this genre, which is original, individualistic and transcending the inherited legacy, has not been properly addressed in Arab ethical thought until now (368–420).

In the second perspective of the Greek legacy that al-Jābirī detected as "philosophical perspective," he deals with al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja (d. 533/1139), and Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198). Conceding al-Fārābī's ability to discuss ethical issues on a theoretical plane, the author asserts that this philosopher submitted to Persian values once the matter of discussion turned to politics, for al-Fārābī depicts a political authority that puts the principal (*al-raʾīs al-awwal*) at the summit of the hierarchy and suggests that the ruler rules both for his voluntary qualities and natural properties. The author regards this as the triumph of Persian influence and compares the ruler of al-Fārābī's virtuous city to the model of Ardashir.

One of al-Jābirī's most significant supports in this regard is Ibn Bājja's statement that "al-Fārābī was inspired by the Persian model." Having taken this cue, the author readily proclaims this philosopher's virtuous city the "city of Ardashir" (460–63). The most problematic aspect, as pointed at the beginning of this review, is an extension of the inadequacy of al-Jābirī's interpretation of Plato and Aristotle's political thought. These two philosophers were not thinkers who prioritized

individual happiness above everything else, proposed democracy as the virtuous form of government, and rallied against the hierarchical social order. Rather, both of them idealized a political authority that possessed full power and license, had the right to decide what was good for his inferiors, and was a sine qua non for a just and moral community. Hence, the Persian model does not have to be the only source of inspiration for al-Fārābī, who inherited the thought of these two Greek philosophers. Furthermore, al-Fārābī's principal appears to be necessary just for the moral integrity of the public.

Al-Jābirī also accuses al-Fārābī of being influenced by the Ardashir model and of "moving from metaphysics, rather than ethics, to politics" because of his supposition that the principal had certain inherent aptitudes and predispositions (449). However, the author disregards the fact that al-Fārābī explained this via the theory of prophecy and that his main goal was to epistemologically open the way to those ethical provisions that might be conveyed to us through the Prophet. While pointing out the possibility of a "natural-born authoritative" person who could admit the ethical provisions from the active intellect directly to his imagination, this philosopher's interest was not imperial politics but to justify the religious ground of ethics. Moreover, there are many hints even in Plato and Aristotle of the presence of urban rulers who possessed virtuous and authoritative qualities with "god's grace." Therefore, the author's proclamation of this as the "triumph of the Ardashir model" is inflated, and his comparison of al-Fārābī's virtuous city with it looks altogether forced. The author concludes the section on philosophical perspective by describing Ibn Bājja's individual-based approach to ethics as a "breakthrough and originality," and Ibn Rushd's interpretation of Plato as "distinguished and freed from the ethics of compulsion" (465–99).

In terms of the third perspective of the ethical genre inherited from the Greek legacy, the author deals with Ibn Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) and al-'Āmirī (d. 381/992), whom he calls the "eclectics." In my opinion, al-Jābirī's most striking and severe claims appear in this supposed "eclectic" genre. He contends that this genre is particularly evident in Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, for it opens up a "grand bazaar of values," a collection of miscellaneous views, anecdotes, and claims concerning ethics without paying any attention to the theoretical ground. The predicament of these works composed by "taking seventy patches from one or another to sew a dress" is, in his words, the juxtaposition of opposite values that cannot be theoretically reconciled, and its presentation of them as necessary values without which one cannot do (540).

The author notes the presence of the many examples in *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, among them the various classifications, virtues, and approaches that contradict Aristotelian philosophy in an Aristotelian theoretical frame. Indeed, one must concede that the theoretical ground is often blurred in Ibn Miskawayh and that the greater part of his book consists of relayed accounts. But one cannot just readily conclude that it is entirely worthless, considering that it might have tried to collect the contemporary ethical reserve of knowledge and convey it in a conciliatory idiom. Thus, while there is a grain of truth in al-Jābirī's protest that "Why was nobody astonished at or objected to the marketing of this work as the most remarkable book that the Arab ethical thought produced till now?" one could also propose a justification for *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* (537).

The mystical legacy, the third root of al-Jābirī's order of values, is also relegated to the above-mentioned "crisis of values" that led to the adoption of the Persian legacy. The author almost claims that Islamic mysticism emerges from the opponents of Umayyads. Umayyad rulers had claimed the legitimacy by utilizing the values of the Persian legacy. al-Jābirī asserts that the opponents of the Umayyad rulers also adopted the values of the opponents of Sassanid rulers. On the contrary of the ethics of obedience, the mystics highlighted the ethics of annihilation. By claiming this, al-Jābirī also wants to imply that pure Islamic or Arabic legacies do not have the thought of annihilation in any way. On top of that, he suggests that the supplementary notions to the ethics of annihilation were diffused from the Hermetic and Christian cultures and consequently resulted in nothing but the "annihilation of ethics" (594, 617–18).

In the section detailing the author's search for the contribution of a pure Arab legacy, al-Jābirī discovers that the notions of benevolence (*muruwwa*), valor (*futuwwa*), and magnanimity (*karam*) were prevalent in the sources, and that benevolence as a value was appreciated by the middle-aged and the seniors, whereas valor was appreciated by the youth. In his expression, benevolence is "fully an Arab value and authentic to them" (675). In the section for assessing the pure Islamic legacy, he analyzes the works of al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), al-Māwardī, al-Iṣfahānī (d. 5th/13th century), and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). Criticizing al-Muḥāsibī for not treating mundane mores, al-Māwardī for Greek influence, and al-Iṣfahānī for methodological inadequacy, he considers al-Ghazālī's *Mīzān al-ʿamal* as being too much influenced by Plato and Aristotle. The author's conviction with regard to *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* is too harsh. Due to this work's definitive and restricting influence, the author opines that it is like "the death of contestation and the closure of the gate of interpretation" and that it is, moreover, "not only distant from Islamic ethics but

also a deviation from it," for what al-Jābirī seeks is an ethical work of "pure Islam" built around the notion of the "righteous act."

As a result of his personal reading and study, al-Jābirī is persuaded that a Qur'an-based ethical understanding has to be a perspective centered on the "righteous act." From this point of view, only one person and his two works qualify: ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām's (d. 660/1262) *Qawāʿid al-aḥkām fī maṣāliḥ al-anām* and *Shajarat al-maʿārif wa-al-aḥwāl wa ṣāliḥ al-aqwāl al-aʿmāl*. Al-Jābirī therefore asserts that these works best represent the pure Islamic legacy, for their author prioritized the notions of wellbeing and beneficence; was not misled into adapting Persian, Greek, Hermetic values to Islam; and offered an ethical perspective that was attentive to the congruity of words and deeds. However, such good works could not make a name for themselves because of the works of "eclectics" like Ibn Miskawayh.

Released from the perspective of reducing ethical thought to philosophy, as exacted by European culture, al-Jābirī concludes his hefty work by stressing that Arab ethical thought's true aspects could manifest themselves and that there is a need for an ethical perspective freed from the influence of Persian values (799–812). The work is seriously inflated with numerous and lengthy quotations from the sources in order to justify the arguments. However, a narrative that paraphrased the issues more concisely, instead of the said quotations, and referred the reader to the source material via footnotes might have both relieved the text's heftiness and improved the arguments' traceability.

The greatest contradiction in this work is al-Jābirī's objection to the interpretation of ethical thought by sticking to a certain ideal on the one hand, and judging the classical sources based on such an ideal throughout his text, on the other. From this vantage point, an "ideal" ethical thought in his mind emerges as prioritizing democratic values, individualistic, "more humane" (his own words) (437); dwelling on the notion of love; respectful of the rights of women and animals; rejecting asceticism – all worked out analytically not on the basis of the epistemological structure, but on the order of values. Unfortunately, as al-Jābirī does not state it expressly, one cannot understand why he opposes Persian values far more than he does Greek values, or why he views the mystical ethics of annihilation as deterioration while recognizing the medical perspective as a success. Or, to put it another way, he has not justified his views in this regard. Although he objects to the imposition that ethics "could only be tackled with a philosophical analysis" (10) he accuses many works and perspectives for not treating the subject matter with a rational method. For instance, he criticizes that the ethical sections of theological works were not based on a methodology, or that *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* barred the gate

to demonstration. From this viewpoint, the work's greatest failure is that the author's idealized perspective is either unjustified and manifestly explicated, or that it is unclear on which "common ideal" he assessed the books of theology and ethics.

Al-Jābirī's omission of Islamic culture's other elements, namely, his interpretation being based solely on "Arabness" and thus disregarding the contributions of the Seljukids and Ottomans, are mentioned in the reviews of his other works and readily apply to this volume as well. His quite reductionist takes especially in the sections dealing with Persian values, and even hostile attitude is so intense that he could be accused of nationalism. However, all of these criticisms should not deter the reader from appreciating the work's many virtues. Ethics enjoys broad coverage in the literature due to its philosophical, theological, jurisprudential, and literary aspects. Ethical thought resides in each work of the genre, whether openly or between the lines. Unfortunately, the need for works dealing with these various sources in a holistic perspective with an eye to revealing the basic elements of Islamic ethical thought is immense. Hence, al-Jābirī's attempt, although limited to Arab thought, to treat the ethical thought propounded in Islamic culture, with respect to the classical sources of philosophy, theology, mysticism, and related disciplines in a holistic manner, and in an original vista as opposed to a historicist narrative, has to be seen as the work's greatest contribution. In this sense, al-Jābirī's perspective is open to dispute; however, his undertaking in this perspective is certainly admirable.

In this review, al-Jābirī's claims concerning the philosophical corpus were the primary focus. However, his claims concerning theology and mysticism, especially the connection he made between the Persian legacy and mysticism, looks also controversial. In addition, it would be fruitful to reckon with and discuss al-Jābirī's claims that ethics were neglected in the jurisprudential literature and that it appeared in the sources as something based on reason rather than religion, or his provocative questions like whether the morals sections of the jurisprudential books were written under Persian influence.