

THE PERIPATETICISM OF NASIR AL-DIN AL-TUSI

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Açar Sözlər: Nəsirəddin Tusi, İbn Sina, Südur, Şərh əl-İşarat, Füsul, Təcrid, Varlıq, Tanrı

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Nasir al-din al-Tusi has been usually considered in the history of philosophy as a peripatetic philosopher¹ who followed Avicenna. Indeed this view has objective reasons. Namely, al-Tusi wrote a commentary on Avicenna's famous work *al-Isharat wa-al-tanbihat* (*Remarks and Admonitions*) and defended him against the major Ash'arite, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. He also wrote his *Musari al-Musari* (*Struggling with the struggling*) against Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani's *Kitab al-Musara'a* (**Struggling with the Philosopher**), which was the criticism of Avicenna's views, and tried to prove the weaknesses of al-Shahrastani's arguments. There are also a number of treatises written by al-Tusi in peripatetic style.

Considering al-Tusi's abovementioned activities, some researchers of his thought accepted him as a loyal representative of the peripatetic philosophy. Our main thesis is that this approach does not wholly reflect al-Tusi's thought system. By being based on abovementioned works, claiming that al-Tusi was a loyal peripatetic who followed Avicenna in his all teaching, is not other than one-sided reading of al-Tusi's thought. In fact, al-Tusi was also one of the most outstanding representatives of the Medieval Islamic theology (*kalam*). He is considered as one of the founders of the post-Gazali period *kalam* tradition known as **mutaakhkhirin** (the later period). *Tajrid al-I'tiqad*, which is his major theological work, is a clear example of his activ-

¹ By peripatetics I mean here al-Farabi, Avicenna and their followers. I exclude here Averroes and non-Muslim peripatetics who had special peripatetic system which differed from those of al-Farabi and Avicenna.

ities in this field. More than 200 commentaries have been written on this book by the scholars of the different *kalam* schools. It shows, in turn, how important is al-Tusī in *kalam* tradition.

For determining the thought tradition to which al-Tusī belonged, it is important to look at his main philosophical and philosophico-theological works as well as to his views on the major points of disagreement between peripatetic and *kalam* traditions.

It is undeniable that the most famous and influential philosophical work of al-Tusī is *Sharh al-Isharat*. This book is considered as one of the greatest explanations of al-Isharat *wa-al-tanbihat*, where Avicenna put forward his views on logic, physics and metaphysics. The commentary was written by al-Tusī in 644/ 1256, while he was in the castle of Nizari Ismai'lis. From the explanations of the author at the end of the book, we learn that the book was written in hard times. After praising Avicenna and his book at the beginning of the book, al-Tusī touches on Fakh al-din al-Razi's critical commentary on Avicenna's abovementioned work. al-Razi, he says, wrote a commentary to explain the views of Avicenna, but nevertheless he overstepped the bounds of criticism in his book and for this very reason some people said that al-Razi's work was a severe criticism (*jarh-injury*) rather than commentary (*sharh*). Whereas, for al-Tusī, it is necessary for commentators to pull out all the stops to explain the purpose of the author; in this case he will not be a critique but a commentator. If a commentator encounters a view in the text, which cannot be put into the right direction, then he can justly express his dissatisfaction. It means that for al-Tusī, the work of commentators is not to criticize the author of the book that they comment, but their work is to explain what the author means by what is said. al-Tusī also emphasizes that he will be in conformity with this rule in his commentary.²

Indeed, he obeys the rule while expounding the text, and even in cases when he does not agree with Avicenna he reminds readers of the term that he has put forward at the beginning of the book and tries to explain what Avicenna means.³ Considering this fact, it could be said that the approach, which considers al-Tusī as a peripatetic only by basing on *Sharh al-Isharat*, is simply wrong.

For us, al-Tusī's philosophical- theological works, like *Tajrid* and *Fusul*, are the main sources for determining his views on the controversial issues between peripatetic and *kalam* traditions. For, he is neither a commentator here as he is in *Sharh al-*

² *Sharh al-Isharat*, published by Karim Fayzi, Qom, 1383, vol. 1, pp. 75-77

³ *Ibid*, vol. 3, p. 331

Isharat, nor a critique as he is in *Musari al-Musari* and *Talkhis al-Muhassal* as well as he is not here a transponder of different views like he is in *Qawaid al-Aqaid*. In these abovementioned works, he clearly puts forward his own views on different subjects and tries to prove them. Considering all these, it is possible to regard the two books, in particular *Tajrid*, as the core works of al-Tusi's thought.

He departs in this works from the peripatetic tradition in a number of issues like his approach to the theory of emanation (*sudur*), which has an important place in Avicenna's thought. In *Tajrid*, he assumes a sceptical attitude on this theory. At the same time, he is very critical of it in *Fusul*. For his deduction in *Fusul*, the acceptance of emanation leads us to accept that one of any two beings should be, directly or indirectly, the cause of another one. For the theory of emanation makes it necessary for all beings to be in one chain. Thus, all beings should be, directly or indirectly, related to one another because of the causal link between them. However, it does not correspond to what we see in the sensory world. In addition, for al-Tusi, the multiplicity that exists in the first intelligence is either existential (*wujudi*) or non-existential (*adami*). If it is existential then two options are possible: this multiplicity has emanated either from God, therefore **from the One**, or it has emanated from one other than God, then the necessary being should not be one but many. In case it is non-existential then it should be accepted that the non-existential multiplicity has an effect upon existential ones, and this is, in turn, impossible.

By putting forward the impossibility of all these options, al-Tusi deduces that the theory of emanation is incorrect.⁴ Although he rejected Emanationism in *Fusul*, his undecided attitude towards this theory in *Tajrid* as well as his defence of it in his treatise called *Risala fi Isbati al-'aql al-mufariq* (the treatise on the proof of the separated intellect)⁵ show that he did not reach a final conclusion on this subject. In his correspondences with Sadr ad-Din Qunawi, al-Tusi emphasized the difficulty of the above-mentioned problem⁶ as well as in his letter to Shams al-Din Khosrowshahi he

⁴ See. *Fusul*, published by Abdallah Nimat, Beirut, 1986, p. 65; Abdallah Nimat, *al-Adilla al-Jaliyya*, pp. 67-72; al-Suyuri al-Hilli, *al-Anvaru al-Jalaliyya fi Sharh al-Fusul al-Nasiriyya*, published by Ali Hadi Abadi-Abbas Jalali Niya, Mashad, 1420/1999, pp. 81-82

⁵ See. *Risala fi Isbat l-'aql l-mufariq*, within *Talkhis al-Muhassal*, Beirut, 1985/1405, pp. 479-481

⁶ al-Tusi, *Ajvebat Masail Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi*, within *Ajvebat Masail al-Nasiriyya*, published by Abdallah Nurani, Tehran, 1383, pp. 230-232

acknowledged that he could not have solved the problem of how the multiplicity-the universe was generated from the One, which is unitary.⁷

As is known, one of the controversial subjects between peripatetic and *kalam* traditions is the conception of God. *Kalam* scholars accept God as a freely choosing agent (*al-fail al-mukhtar*) and peripatetics, in turn, as a necessitating cause (*mujib*). In his *kalam* works al-Tusī defends the *kalam* conception of God. For him, it is impossible for the effect of a necessitating cause to be after its cause, and this, in turn, necessitates either the pre-eternity of the universe or the after-existence of the cause. For the reason that they lead to infinite regress (*tasalsul*) both options are impossible.

At the result, al-Tusī comes to a conclusion that the creator of the universe is a freely choosing agent.⁸ However, unlike other *kalam* scholars, like Fakhr al-Din al-Razi⁹, he does not claim that Avicenna and other peripatetic philosophers do not accept God's omnipotence as a freely choosing agent. He claims that peripatetics do not completely dismiss the conception of freely choosing agency. For al-Tusī, 'the omnipotent (al-qadir) is one who is free to act, or, not to act towards bringing things into existence'. The omnipotent chooses one of two options (to create, and vice versa) when will is added to power (omnipotence). Peripatetic philosophers, he claims, do not reject this notion and they accept God's omnipotence in this sense. Furthermore, philosophers accept the free will of God, though they explain it differently from theologians. For them, every agent who acts with his own will is a freely choosing agent.¹⁰ The main difference between peripatetics and *mutakallims* (*kalam* scholars) lays in the possibility or the necessity of creation. That is to say, is creation necessary in case the above-mentioned attributes become together? For the reason that Avicenna and other peripatetics accept God as a necessitating cause, they defend that creation is necessary. For *mutakallims*, in turn, God is free to create or not create; He is under no obligation, and creation is not necessary but contingent on God's free choice and will.¹¹ Moreover, by force of their above-mentioned notion, peripatetics claimed the pre-eternity of the universe (*qidam*). *Kalam* scholars, in turn, advo-

⁷ *Masail Nasir al-Din al-Tusī an Shams al-Din al-Khosrowshahi*, within *Ajvebat Masail al-Nasiriyya*, published by Abdallah Nurani, Tehran, 1383, p. 268; This letter later on was responded by Mulla Sadra. See. Mulla Sadra, *Ajvebat Masail al-Nasiriyya*, within *Majmua Rasail Sad al-Muallihinin*, published by Hamid Naji Isfahani, Tehran, 1375, pp. 171-177

⁸ *Tajrid*, published by Muhammad Javad Husaini Jalali, Qom, 1407/1986, p. 191; Ibn Mutahhar Hilli, *Kashf al-Murad fi Sharh Tajrid al-I'tiqad*, published by Hasan Hasanzadeh Amuli, Qom, 1425, pp. 393-394

⁹ See al-Rāzī, *Muhassal*, tr. Huseyin Atay, Ankara, 2002, p. 164

¹⁰ *Qavaid al-'Aqaid*, within *Talkhis al-Muhassal*, Beirut, 1985/1405, p. 445; *Sharh al-Isharat*, Vol. 3, p. 98

¹¹ *Qavaid al-'Aqaid*, p. 445

cated the conception of the createdness and newness of the universe (*huduth al-'alam*) and creation ex nihilo¹².

By expressing that 'nothing else is eternal except God'¹³ al-Tūsī seems to be inclined to accept the *kalam* notion. At the same time, by saying 'time is not considered important in true eternity and newness' he accepts the notion of essential eternity (*al-qidam al-dhati*) not temporal eternity (*al-qidam al-zamani*), and this is, in turn, an attempt towards reconciling the Avicennian Peripatetic conception with that of *kalam* tradition. Namely, Avicenna also accepts that the universe is created in terms of essence (*dhat*).

Another separation point between the two above-mentioned traditions is 'God's knowledge of particular material things'. It was written in some medieval *kalam* books that for the philosophers (Farabi, Avicenna and their followers), because of His simplicity God knows the particular things according to their universal attributes within Him, accordingly, he does not know them particularly. So, did Avicenna really claim that? Although al-Tūsī severely criticizes Avicenna in this very subject in *Fusul*, in *Sharh al-mas'alat-l-ilm* (the commentary of the problem of knowledge) he claims that Avicenna has been misunderstood. For him, the beings which depend on time and space need the internal and external senses for cognizing things. Thus they cognize changings exactly when they happen and they also judge about their existence and non-existence as well as about other characteristics that appear within the frame of time and space. As to a being, who does not depend on time and space, His way of cognition is universal (*kulli*) and includes the knowledge of all things. He knows when a thing comes to existence and what is the time interval between it and other things before and after its existence.

However, unlike the beings, which are dependent upon time and space, He does not judge that a thing that existed before no longer exists. It means that God does not judge about the past or present states of things. Al-Tūsī gives an interesting example for the elucidation of this issue. He says: 'think of a person who reads the list of books. He will read the list, of course, by following and seeing the sequential letters. But let us think of one who keeps the list folded. His attribution to all letters is equal. Furthermore, because he possesses the whole list he is aware of what it includes. Nothing big or small is out of his knowledge.' al-Tūsī quotes here the following

¹² *Talkhis al-Muhassal*, Beirut, 1985/1405, pp. 269-270

¹³ *Tajrid*, p. 120

verse from the Qur'an: 'And with Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows them except Him. And He knows what is in the land and the sea. Not a leaf falls but that He knows it. And no grain is there within the darkness of the earth and no moist or dry [thing] but that it is [written] in a clear book' [the sura of al-An'am-the cattle, 6:59]. For al-Tusī, the peripatetic philosophers put forward this notion for establishing the transcendence of God (*al-tanzih*). That is to say, just as we say that God knows testable, smellable and tactile things, but because of His transcendence we do not say that He is one who tastes, smells and touches, likewise, by saying that He knows particular things (*juz'i*) universally (*kulli*), we absolve Him from the organic cognition.¹⁴

In his correspondence with Sadr al-Din al-Qunawī and al-Bayārī, al-Tusī comes up with similar conclusion in the issue in question. For him, it is a misunderstanding of their views to claim that the philosophers accept that God is not cognizant of particular things and events. Moreover, it is not possible in their thought systems to put forward such claims, because they accept the principle that the knowledge about cause necessitates the knowledge about effect.¹⁵ Avicenna's similar explanations of this issue in *al-Isharat*¹⁶ verifies al-Tusī's views.

In conclusion, it could be said that al-Tusī takes an eclectic approach towards the separation points between Muslim-peripatetic philosophy and *kalam* tradition. Therefore, it would be a wrong attitude to claim that he was a peripatetic philosopher who followed Avicenna in his all views. His thought system seems to be a reconciliation between the two abovementioned thinking traditions.

¹⁴ *Sharh al-Mas'alat al-Ilm*, within *Ajvebat Masail al-Nasiriyya*, pp. 97-100

¹⁵ *Ajvebat Masail Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi*, within *Ajvebat Masail al-Nasiriyya*, Tehran, 1373, pp. 232-233; *Sharh al-Isharat*, vol. 3, pp. 335-338; *Ajvebat Masail Fakh al-Din Muhammad b. Abdallah Bayari*, within *Ajvebat Masail al-Nasiriyya*, pp. 44-46

¹⁶ See. Avicenna, *al-Isharat wa-al- Tanbihat*, tr. Ali Durusoy, Muhittin Macit, Ekrem Demirli, İstanbul, 2005, pp. 166-167; see also Avicenna, *at-Ta'liqa*, Qom, 1421, pp. 27-28

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NƏSİRƏDDİN TUSİNİN PERİPATETİKLİYİ

XÜLASƏ

Nəsirəddin Tusi bir çox fəlsəfə tarixçisi tərəfindən İbn Sinanın ardıcılı olan peripatetik bir filosof kimi qəbul edilir. Bu məqalədə qeyd olunan görüşün həqiqəti tam mənası ilə əks etdirmədiyi iddia olunur. Belə ki, Tusinin başda *Musariu-l-Musari* və *Şərh əl-İşarat* olmaqla İbn Sinanı Əbul-Fəth Şəhristani və Fəxrəddin Razi kimi əşəri kəlamçıların hücumlarına qarşı müdafiə etdiyi əsərlərinin mövcudluğu bir faktdır. Lakin eyni zamanda onun başda südur (Эманация) nəzəriyyəsi olmaqla İbn Sina düşüncəsinin bəzi önəmli ünsürlərinə şübhə ilə yanaşdığı və ya rədd etdiyi *Təcrid əl-E'tiqad* və *Fusul* kimi əsərləri də mövcuddur. Qeyd olunan faktlardan çıxış edərək Tusinin düşüncə sisteminin kəlam və peripatetik ənənələrini özündə ehtiva edən eklektik bir struktura sahib olduğunu iddia etmək mümkündür.

ПЕРИПАТЕТИЗМ НАСИР АД-ДИНА АТ-ТУСИ

РЕЗЮМЕ

Насир ад-Дин ат-Туси воспринимается многими историками философии как философ-перипатетик и наследник Ибн Сины. В статье утверждается, что вышеуказанное мнение не отражает реальность полностью. Является фактом что, во главе с **Мусари аль-Мусари** и **Шарх аль-Ишарат**, у Н.Туси есть множество произведений, которые защищали Ибн Сину от таких критиков как *Абуль-Фатх аш-Шахристани* и Фахр ад-Дин Рazi. Но тем временем, у него есть такие произведения как **Таджрид аль-Етикад** и **Фусуль** которые, относятся с подозрением и отрицанием к важнейшим деталям мысли Ибн Сины. Таким образом, вышеуказанные и многие другие факты показывают, что сознательная система Туси является эклектической структурой, которая воплощает в себя высказывания и традиции перипатетизма.

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