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Book Reviews

Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya (Makers of the Muslim World)*, London: Oneworld Academic. 2019. ISBN 978-1-78607-689-2; eISBN-978-1-78607-689-8.

Reviewer: Hafiz Abdul Karim, PhD candidate, ISTAC, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: hafizkarim28@gmail.com

The prevailing trend of studies on Ibn Taymiyya in the Western scholarship has always been segmented in nature. It may have begun with Henri Laoust, who examined the scholar's social and political theories in his *Essai* (1939).¹ Following him is a plethora of studies covering various aspects of Ibn Taymiyya, ranging from examinations of his life and views to critical study upon his extensive works. Jon Hoover's *Ibn Taymiyya*, however, detaches away from the said approach. The author instead has offered a much wider assessment of every known aspect of Ibn Taymiyya's legacy. This could have come from the fact that this book is part of the *Makers of the Muslim World* series, where it focuses to bring scholarly series of biographical books concerning Muslim figures throughout history. Although the intended outcome was merely to have it within a book-length academic introduction, it nonetheless rightly serves as the first synthesised study of Ibn Taymiyya in the Western world, as argued by the author himself (p. 11). This kind of treatment is rarely given to this enigmatic scholar, perhaps due to the monumental and variegated writings that he left behind, which may complicate the process of doing so. In this sense, this book is a welcomed contribution to a better understanding of Ibn Taymiyya and his ever-contested legacy in a consolidated and interconnected way.

Having served till now as Associate Professor in Islamic Studies of Nottingham University, the author's expertise mainly revolves around Islamic intellectual history, medieval theology and

¹ Henri Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taki-d-Din Ahmad b. Taymiya* (Cairo: l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1939), 775.

philosophy, and Christian-Muslim theological interaction. More precisely, he seems to be most familiar with the discourse on the subject of Ibn Taymiyya. This is well encapsulated within most of his writings that were directed to the discussions concerning the Damascene theologian. His previous writings had explored deep into the thought of Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, one of Ibn Taymiyya's disciples, which Hoover argues as having conveyed the general Taymiyyan outlook rather comprehensively (p. 131). In some ways, Hoover's objective in this book for a synthesised appraisal of Ibn Taymiyya is partially realised through his prowess and experiences in dealing with the scholar that he had displayed in his previous works. The rest of Hoover's delivery are discernible through his nine comprehensive chapters that have successfully addressed all the important points pertinent to his task. In my view, this work is not only an attempt by the author to incorporate fragmentary pieces of Ibn Taymiyya's legacy and synthesize them but also to function as a platform to introduce his own viewpoint on the scholar, which has its forerunner in his segregated experiences engaging with the Taymiyyan literature before. Hoover frames this viewpoint as an "aim to provide a more accurate picture of the scholar through a historical account of his life and thought based on recent research" (p. 10).

The aim seems to be justifiable on account of Hoover's historical approach. One significant contribution provided by this approach is how it helps the author to refine the social and intellectual contexts in which Ibn Taymiyya had lived and thought. Readers would appreciate these contexts by firstly acknowledging the peculiar difficulties in understanding the character of Ibn Taymiyya's works. According to Hoover, instead of "composing large systematic manuals of theology, substantive law, spiritual practices or verse-by-verse commentary of Quran", the scholar "responded directly to the controversial issues and concerns of his time", i.e., he "wrote to meet the need of the moment" (p. 45). Hoover's assertion manages to signal the complexity of Ibn Taymiyya's writings, particularly of how they are often interlocked within various contexts and reverberating around issues that they each represent. In this respect, comprehending Ibn Taymiyya without being aware of these

contexts would hardly do him any justice, and may even resort to selective references and misinterpretation. Exploring these contexts may help provide a refreshing perspective of the latter through examination of the background, environment, and reality behind the scholar's ideas and views.

Hoover adduces these contextual constructs in various places of discussion within this book. One clear example is his exposition on the scholar's controversial anti-Mongol *fatwā* (religious rulings) in relation to the social and political environment of Mamluk-Ilkhanid Mongol rivalry in the first chapter of this work. Elsewhere, these are visible in Hoover's analysis of the scholar's view on the caliphate system with regards to the then weakening state of the 'Abbasid caliphate, his contextual analysis on the background of events leading to Ibn Taymiyya's imprisonments on three occasions, and many more. Hoover's efforts in synthesising various anecdotal reports and annalistic accounts pertaining to this scholar into a critical yet lucid historiographical narrative are undeniably remarkable, specifically in the way he analyses these reports in constructing the narrative chronologically by years. The simplicity of his presentation exhibits his proficiency with the Taymiyyan literature. Although most of his references were secondary, he did refer to the primary sources to 'fill in gaps in the research and clarify ambiguities' (p. 10). In fact, I am of the opinion that the author invariably yields to the scholar's works as the final cadence of his assessment, rather than giving more weight to the secondary sources. His work is thus not only comprehensible to many but also brimming with rigorous and independent analysis.

Readers would also appreciate Hoover's insight on the concept of worship. Contrary to others who had written about Ibn Taymiyya, Hoover believes that the scholar did have a 'distinctive message', which he refers to as the concept of worship. According to him, this has predominantly recurred as a central theme or pattern in the whole body of Ibn Taymiyya's works, serving as the 'driving force' of the scholar's endeavors in presenting and propagating his version of Islam (p. 45). Its prevalence in the Taymiyyan corpus, as far as Hoover was concerned, has permeated into the scholar's theological conceptualisation of *al-shahādah* (Muslim confession of faith) and into his views on legal and spiritual matters, indeed even politics. Of

all the significant things about this book, it is perhaps Hoover's discussion of the epistemic framework of Ibn Taymiyya's thought that has contributed the most to his main objective. Hoover has instituted such a framework to explain the diverse thoughts of Ibn Taymiyya. Some people may go for other concepts to denominate the central theme of the scholar's works, such as his view on human nature (*fitra*) and his utilitarian reasoning, which were ubiquitous in his writings. However, Hoover's take on worship as the central concept is quite justified. It may be argued that the concept furnishes the logic behind most of the Taymiyyan outlook, and it even comprehends his said concept of *fitra* and utilitarianism approach of law and benefit. Realising this at the epistemic level would help the readers in moderating the theologian's fierce outlook, as well as contriving a neutral image in comprehending the myriad of alleged controversies addressed by the scholar. Rather than conceiving the Taymiyyan outlook as polemically rooted or having no vision of its own except intransigent adherence to the foundational texts of Islam, this epistemic framework identifies the theologian as an independent thinker by his own right, liberating him from undue reductionism approach that often positions him as merely a troublemaker or polemicist of his time. On top of that, the author in some ways has also managed to construct his synthesised perspective on Ibn Taymiyya by integrating the scholar's whole outlook within the reach of this framework.

In his epilogue, Hoover illustrates the mixed receptions of Ibn Taymiyya over the centuries since his time (p. 128-129). These receptions were in fact heterogeneous, ranging from his influences upon the fifteenth century scholar Ibn al-Wazīr in mediating Sunnism and Zaydī Shi'ism to his impacts on the Ash'arite Qadizali reform movement in seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire. In the modern period, his anti-Mongol *fatwā* found reception through Al-Qaeda's declaration of *jihād* upon the United States of America in 1993 as well as through the effects of his utilitarian reasoning of weighing the benefits and detriments on *al-Gamā'ah al-Islāmiyya*'s call for the end of violence upon the Egyptian government in 1997. These selective and diversified receptions, however, had happened in history before modern times. I was hoping for some elucidations on

the potentials of Taymiyyan discourse impacting modern areas of study. Nevertheless, these may display the practicalities and instructive nature of Hoover's historical approach, which manifest through the impartiality and objectivity of his writings. These qualities enable him to exhibit the depth and richness of the theologian's corpus, the influence of which runs through various sects of Islam with their own different takes and perspectives, despite of his conventional disparaging imagery. All things considered, this book helps re-address several misrepresented ideas of Ibn Taymiyya, at least in providing a new narrative, contextual constructs, and epistemic conception for the scholar's broad spectrum of views, critiques, refutations, and his methodology of writing. Hoover's exhilarating and purgative perspective of the scholar did justify to some extent his aim to provide an 'accurate image' of the scholar, thereby making this book an essential reading for anyone seeking a more authentic account of his life and thought.

A. Helwa, *Secrets of Divine Love: A Spiritual Journey into the Heart of Islam*, Capisatran Beach, CA: Naulit Publishing Hous, 2020.

Reviewer: Dr. Ratna Roshida Ab Razak, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Email: ratna_razak@upm.edu.my

The book under review teaches us how to discover our true purpose in life and our spiritual potentials. It is about a spiritual journey into the heart of Islam that brings together under the theme of Divine Love the Quran's spiritual secrets, ancient mystical poetry, and stories from the world's greatest prophets and spiritual masters to help readers reawaken their faith, overcome their doubts, and build their relationship with God. The author, A. Helwa uses scientific facts, practical exercises, and guided meditations as tools and means of awareness to detect and conquer the negative inner critic that

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR
ء	'	'	'	ز	z	z	z	گ	—	g	g
ب	b	b	b	ژ	—	—	ř	ل	l	l	l
پ	—	p	p	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n
ٹ	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ş	ه	h	h	h ¹
ث	th	th	th	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ş	و	w	v/u	v
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḍ	ḍ	ž	ی	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	-a ²
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al ³	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	'	'	'	¹ – when not final ² – at in construct state ³ – (article) al - or l-			
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğ				
ڈ	—	—	ḍ	ف	f	f	f				
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	q				
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k				

VOWELS

	Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iy (final form i)	iy (final form i)
	و	uww (final form ū)	uvv
		uvv (for Persian)	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au	ev
	ی	ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a or e
	u	u	u or ū
	ی	i	o or ö
	ی	i	ı

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. چھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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