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Review

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Markham is trying to engage with Said Nursi from many standpoints. Sometimes we see Nursi as challenging Charles Darwin and Bertrand Russell (pp. 23–33), sometimes we see Nursi agree with St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila (p. 93), and Markham puts John Hick into conversation with Nursi (p. 53). According to Markham, Nursi is a “both/and” rather than an “either/or” thinker:

It is important therefore that both Muslims and non-Muslims engage with the thought of Said Nursi. In a variety of different ways, he is able to challenge conventional ways of thinking about the relationship between faith and morals. Nursi is a “both/and” thinker rather than an “either/or” one. So his ethic is both firmly rooted in the Qur’an, and yet discernable to anyone willing to reason properly about the world. He accepts both the reality of pluralism and insists on the truth of Islam. He has both a demanding renewal ethic for individual Muslims to cultivate and continues to call for an appropriate transformation of society. He celebrates the achievements of modernity and is not afraid to question its coherence. (p. 22)

Throughout the book, the idea is emphasized that “The age of an epistemological relativism, coupled with an enthusiasm for John Hick’s pluralist hypothesis, is over.” Markham suggests “engagement” as the next phase for dialogue:

Like Nursi, I am advocating an engagement which is orthodox yet open. Like Nursi, I am aspiring to be rooted yet engaged. This model of interfaith dialogue is much more exciting than the world of skeptical Christians and Muslims gathering to criticize all those within each tradition who believe in the truth of their respective traditions. This is the dialogue mode of the second phase. The time has come to move beyond this. (p. 175)

He is optimistic about interfaith dialogue. It is arguable, however, whether the engagement model is the second phase of the pluralist hypothesis. Conceptually, his position may seem powerful; but, practically, engagement seems a first step for dialogue.

*Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* really challenges us; here we come face to face with a book that is somewhat out of the ordinary about a Muslim thinker from Turkey. Its engagement with Said Nursi is most instructive for both Muslim and Christian thinkers. However, every engagement brings its own logic; that is, it has its own limitation: if it is an engagement, will it be a temporary relationship or a process leading up to a marriage? The quality of this engagement will be clarified by the discussions about the book. These are themselves part of the logic of engagement.

*The Legend of the Middle Ages: Philosophical Explorations of Medieval Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.* By Rémi Brague. Translated by Lydia G. Cochrane. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009. Pp. 287. Hardcover \$35.00.

Reviewed by **Mehmet Karabela** McGill University

The majority of *The Legend of the Middle Ages: Philosophical Explorations of Medieval Christianity, Judaism, and Islam* has been published previously in different forms, but this edition has been completely revised by the author, the well-known French

medievalist and intellectual historian Rémi Brague. It was first published in French under the title *Au moyen du Moyen Âge* in 2006. The book consists of sixteen essays ranging from Brague's early years at the Université Panthéon-Sorbonne (Paris I) in the 1990s up until 2005. As a collection of articles, therefore, *The Legend of the Middle Ages* is not designed to be a monograph; one should not expect a single argument from the book, although it does explore key intersections of medieval religion and philosophy that I will touch upon later.

*The Legend of the Middle Ages* opens with an interview that clearly establishes the character of the author. In this section, Brague makes a distinction between institutionalized *philosophia* and private *falsafa* in Islamic countries, where philosophy remains a matter for small numbers of individuals. According to Brague, the tensions between philosophy and religion were not negotiated in the same way in the Muslim world as they were within Christianity: even though Jewish and Muslim philosophers achieved something like the Christian Scholastics, they were often isolated, and their influence was largely concentrated on the margins of society rather than in the center. On the other hand, philosophy became a university course of studies in medieval Europe, and more importantly, in practical terms, it became a breadwinning career (pp. 1–2).

Within this context, the reader encounters a type of Christian exceptionalism while enjoying Brague's style of witticism and seriousness (not only in the interview section but across the whole book). For example, one of his arguments is that "philosophic activity, in the Middle Ages, was institutionalized only within Christianity [whereas] in Islamic lands and in the Jewish communities, it remained a hobby, a passion indulged in apart from one's true occupation" (p. 228). Averroes is cited as a core example; it is pointed out that his true occupation was "religious law," not philosophy, a fact that Brague establishes quoting Warren Z. Harvey: "Socrates was judged; Averroes and Maimonides were judges" (p. 49).

These differences in the Christian and Islamic philosophical worlds, Brague explains, were due to different models of revelation that produced dissimilar interpretations of ancient Greek sources. Previously, Leo Strauss had spent a great deal of effort demonstrating the antagonistic relationship between Greek philosophy (reason) and the Biblical understanding of the world (revelation) in order to understand the transformation of Western civilization. For Strauss, this tension between reason (represented by Athens) and revelation (represented by Jerusalem) was a rich source for the vitality of the West. Within this broader context, Brague, in his *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization* (St. Augustine's Press, 2002), has expanded the Straussian dialectic of revelation and reason by emphasizing that Greek wisdom was always in the service of Qur'anic revelation and never accommodated the autonomy of the philosophical enterprise. Instead it was "a kind of Greek wisdom in an Islamic mantle," or a sort of theologically approved philosophy.

However, in the first part of *The Legend of the Middle Ages*, Brague concludes (as opposed to his method in earlier works) by submitting an antithesis to the use of the term "Islamic philosophy." For him, this term can only be used with the condition that "we understand 'Islamic' to denote a civilization, rather than a religion" (p. 70). This brings two elements to mind: (1) religious-flavored Islamic philosophy, and (2)

philosophy in Islamic civilization (referring to any philosopher, both Muslim and non-Muslim, under Islamic rule). In the second part of the book, Brague narrows his focus to common themes and considers three topics in medieval philosophical texts: physics, the concept of flesh, and racism. Even though these discussions are compelling, they drift away from the central theme of the book. Brague is concerned in his third section with the *jihad* of the philosophers, and he raises an interesting question as to how Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes see *jihad* as Islamic philosophers. He shows that these three Aristotelian philosophers present a more radical view than the nonphilosophical Islamic understanding of *jihad*—"the goal of the latter is conquest and the control of the state, not control of minds like philosophers who want to control minds and conquer souls as well" (p. 142)—and points out that "the philosopher rejects *holy* war, not war in general," simply because for the philosopher, only philosophy can approve a war, while religion cannot.

From here Brague moves on to consider two models of cultural appropriation of Greek philosophy (Christian and Islamic, respectively). He identifies the European mode of appropriation as "inclusion," in which the foreign body retains its complete alterity, as opposed to the Islamic model, which, for him, represents a "digestion," in which the original Greek discourse is internalized to the point of losing its independence. Brague devotes his fourth chapter to the issue of Aristotle's entry into Europe via the Arab intermediary, and the extra-European sources of philosophy in Europe. He argues that interest in Aristotelian and Greek philosophy in the Abbasid period tended to be used as a utilitarian weapon in order to confront two competitors in the region, Zoroastrians and Christians, whereas in Europe (in the eleventh and twelfth centuries) this interest was aroused from the need to systematize the law (referring to the Investiture Conflict).

In the latter part of the book, Brague aims to destroy the legends surrounding the term "Middle Ages," as he believes that it has taken on a negative connotation simply because the positive idea of modernity is often cited in opposition to the "dark Middle Ages." The image of a historical period or a historical figure is constantly subject to change, and the idea of the Middle Ages is no exception. For example, Reformation and Enlightenment Europeans saw the Middle Ages as "a thing of the past" out of which the West had to grow. Nineteenth-century commentators looked at this past from a Wittgensteinian ("family resemblances") perspective, refreshing memories of common Christianity and European heritage. An even more recent portrayal of the Middle Ages presents a historical space where different religions and cultures peacefully coexisted with the hope of creating a model (a golden age) for a potential future of intercultural dialogue and tolerance. Brague does not accept any of these explanations as complete; instead, he compares the complex character of three religions and their philosophical currencies (that still remain relevant to our modern world), for example in his reference to the representation of Averroes as the "Good Guy" in his home country of France in the last chapter.

Throughout the book, Brague discusses and compares the sources, contents, and problems of medieval (religious) philosophical traditions; however, he puts forward three specific arguments that may need further justification. First, he insists that "theology" as a rational explanation of the divine *only* exists in Christianity; "theology is

a Christian specialty" (p. 2). It would be quite legitimate to question the extent to which this statement is justifiable in comparison to Judaism and Islam. Second, he contends that there is no corpus of canonical texts in Islam that lend themselves to *disputatio* for use in educational contexts (p. 50). However, George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh University Press, 1981) and Larry B. Miller, *Islamic Disputation Theory: A Study of the Development of Dialectic in Islam from the Tenth through Fourteenth Centuries* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation Princeton University, 1984) have shown that there is a huge corpus of literature on Islamic juristic and theological *disputatio* elaborated in the genres of *'ilm al-khilâf* and *'ilm al-jadal*, and later in postclassical Islamic intellectual history as *'ilm al-munâzara* and *âdâb al-bahth*, that were being regularly studied in Islamic educational institutions. Third, Brague maintains that "you can be a perfectly competent rabbi or imam without ever having studied philosophy. In contrast, a philosophical background is a necessary part of the basic equipment of the Christian theologian" (p. 2). The choice of the everyday words "imam or rabbi" for Islamic and Jewish civilizations, but the more technical "theologian" for Christian civilization (rather than priest, father, or minister) raises some questions.

Although some of Brague's particular views are not fully convincing, one should acknowledge the fact that he has made a definitive statement on the wealth, complexity, and historicity of medieval Jewish, Christian, and Islamic philosophy. It is substantially a worthwhile and stylistically enjoyable read for anyone with an interest in medieval philosophy and the history of religions in the Middle Ages.

*Theodicy and Justice in Modern Islamic Thought: The Case of Said Nursi*. Edited by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi'. Farnham, U.K. and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010. Pp. xiii + 268. \$34.95, £17.99.

Reviewed by **Nazif Muhtaroglu** Harvard University

This book is a collection of seventeen essays written by fifteen authors on Said Nursi's ideas concerning theodicy and justice. There is a significant portion of comparative analysis of Nursi's thought with thinkers of considerable renown, such as Thomas Merton, Jürgen Moltmann, Dante, Kant, and Russell from the Western tradition and also with al-Shahid al-Thani from the Eastern. There are also papers dealing with themes in Nursi's work such as resurrection, justice, natural disasters, and animal pain. One of the main weaknesses of this book is its failure to include anything that sufficiently and systematically analyzes Nursi's ideas on metaphysical, physical, and moral evil. There is nothing pertaining to his views on human free will, a significant deficiency for a book aiming to explain Nursi's theodicy. The themes that the book mainly discusses are resurrection and justice. I would like to point out some noteworthy aspects of the analyses within the book regarding these two themes.

First of all, Nursi claimed to have proved the reality of resurrection and the Hereafter. This claim is extraordinary in the face of the orthodox trends in both Western