Tariq Jaffer. *Rāzī Master of Qurʾānic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. 244 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-066351-3.

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Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.606/1210) is one of the few Muslim thinkers whose significance, reputation and influence on later generations in different fields of learning are acknowledged by both classical and modern scholars of Islamic studies, and a number of studies appeared on his works on jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy. Yet despite his being one of the most famous Qurʾānic commentators, al-Rāzī's commentary has not attracted the due attention of scholars in the West. Tariq Jaffer's work, though it is partially a collection of articles, is important for bringing al-Rāzī's methodology of Qurʾānic interpretation and its application to the selected verses to the attention of the readers.

In his introduction, Jaffer describes al-Rāzī as follows:

> Imbued with the heritage of Greek learning and inculcated with an Islamic education, he was the first intellectual to exploit the rich heritage of ancient and Islamic philosophy to interpret the Qurʾān. He was also the first Sunnī theologian to develop a methodology that unified reason (ʿaql) and the scriptural canon (naql), which included the Qurʾān and prophetic traditions. (p.1)

In his work, we see Jaffer delving deep into al-Rāzī's transformative contributions to Islamic intellectual tradition that he made through his Qurʾānic commentary. For this purpose, he organised the book into five chapters. In the first three chapters, he focuses on the methodological issues and in the last two, he examines how al-Rāzī applies his methodology in his commentary on the selected verses.

In the first chapter entitled "Forging a New Methodology", Jaffer argues that al-Rāzī forges a new methodology in exegesis. Accordingly, for this

purpose, al-Rāzī fought against the uncritical acceptance of authority (*taqlīd*) not only in theology and philosophy but also in Qurʾānic commentary. He did this by discharging the methods of the preceding authoritative commentators. His new methodology includes organising all branches of knowledge, including philosophical and religious sciences, within the framework of his commentary; expatiating on the Qurʾān by exploiting all these sciences; exposing the errors and difficulties found within these sciences and offering relevant solutions. He carries out this new methodology from the very beginning of his commentary by eliciting hundreds of questions for investigation from the first verse of the first chapter of the Qurʾān. Jaffer argues that the place of the Qurʾān in al-Rāzī's thought is paradoxical: on the one hand, he affirms that the Qurʾān is a treasure house of all kinds of knowledge, and consequently, his task as a commentator is to recover that knowledge; on the other hand he affirms that every Qurʾānic verse serves as an opportunity for him to produce knowledge, and thus, his task as a commentator is to systematize the contents of these sciences according to the parameters of the Qurʾānic verses. For al-Rāzī, philosophical knowledge and scriptural wisdom do not only conform to one another but also confirm and reinforce one another.

In the second chapter entitled "Devising Rules of Exegesis", Jaffer tries to show that the basic outlook of al-Rāzī's methodology is strongly Muʿtazilites. Along the Muʿtazilites' line, al-Rāzī rearranged the sources of religious knowledge by assigning to reason authoritative role and giving it priority over the scripture. To illustrate al-Rāzī's indebtedness to Muʿtazilite methodology, Jaffer examines his adoption of Muʿtazilite theological assumptions and interpretive methods by focusing on *taʾwīl*, that is the figurative interpretation of Qurʾānic verses and prophetic traditions. Referring to al-Rāzī's *Taʾsīs al-Taqdīs*, Jaffer argues that the Muʿtazilite influence on his methodology is clear from the contents of the work. He adopted the Muʿtazilites' concept of *taʾwīl* to counter the Hanbalites. This adoption also sets al-Rāzī at odds with his Ashʿarite predecessors, for they held that the anthropomorphic names and attributes are real rather than figurative. Jaffer argues that adoption of the Muʿtazilite methodology of *taʾwīl* is only one aspect of al-Rāzī's new methodology, for he upgraded and modernised it by grounding it in Avicennian philosophical resources. Al-Rāzī was the first commentator who made the effective use of Aristotelian-Avicennian philosophy in the Qurʾānic exegesis. Although there were some earlier Ashʿarite scholars such as al-Juwaynī (d.478/1085) and al-Ghazālī

(d.505/1111) who appropriated some philosophical concepts and naturalized them into the religious sciences, al-Rāzī did more than that; he integrated philosophical concept and principles into the religious sciences by making them cornerstones of his methodology, and he applied them systematically to the Qurʾān.

Jaffer continues to clarify al-Rāzī's methodology in the third chapter by analysing the way he reconciles reason (*ʿaql*) and transmitted knowledge (*naql*). Al-Rāzī's main aim in his methodology is to demonstrate that the conclusions reached through discursive reasoning and the ideas expressed by the Qurʾān and prophetic traditions confirm and reinforce each other. He is aware that this methodology of reconciliation implies some difficulties and he tries to resolve them. For him, in case of conflict, priority must be given to reason over the plain sense of scripture. Hence, diverting the plain sense of the Qurʾān and prophetic traditions to a figurative or allegorical sense is a logical necessity. Al-Rāzī's aim here is to challenge those, including some Ashʿarites, who devalue the intellect by giving disproportionate authority to scripture. For him, the credibility of scripture is contingent upon conclusions that are reached through rational means. To validate the content of the Qurʾān and prophetic traditions, justification on entirely rationalistic grounds is needed. Prophet's credibility cannot be established on the scriptural ground. Al-Rāzī even finds the evidential value of miracles as weak; miracles fail to validate the truthfulness of the prophet. The main idea that scripture can be proven through rational means was adopted by later Sunnī theologians, but the traditionalists opposed to it. Jaffer examines how Ibn Taymiyya (d.728/1328) sought to undermine, by distorting the essentials of it, the foundations of al-Rāzī's methodology. Jaffer's evaluation of Ibn Taymiyya's criticism is that "[a]lthough it is true that Rāzī did not resolve all aspects of his rationalistic methodology, it is also true that his theory of interpretation and his practice of *taʾwīl* are more complex and varied than Ibn Taymiyya admits in his polemic" (p.130).

After examining the methodological issues in the first three chapters, in the following two chapters, Jaffer turns to the examination of how al-Rāzī applies his new theory of Qurʾānic interpretation. Hence, in the fourth chapter, Jaffer examines al-Rāzī's interpretation of the Light Verse, focusing on his theory of the intellect and epistemology, he analyses the way that al-Rāzī systematized methods and ideas from Avicennian philosophy into his *tafsīr*. In fact, in doing this, al-Rāzī continues the rational approach of al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*. Jaffer first describes how al-Rāzī appropriates

Avicenna's interpretation of the Light Verse by examining comparatively his *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* and *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. He concludes that al-Rāzī effectively imported Aristotelian-Avicennian ideas into the canon of Sunnī *tafsīr*. Jaffer claims that al-Rāzī also refines al-Ghazālī's allegorical exegesis to give unorthodox metaphysical ideas a place within Sunnī *tafsīr*. To support his claim, Jaffer turns to al-Rāzī's third text, that is his comment on the Light Verse in *Asrār al-Tanzīl wa-Anwār al-Taʾwīl*, in which he diverges from rationalistic methodologies of Avicenna and al-Ghazālī and embraces principles and ideas from classical Sufism. Here al-Rāzī argues that light, that is religious knowledge, can be bestowed upon an individual rather than attained through the intellect's self-effort. It seems that Jaffer could not clarify how al-Rāzī diverged from Avicenna and al-Ghazālī.

In the last chapter, Jaffer tries to illustrate how al-Rāzī forges his doctrine on the soul in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. He claims that al-Rāzī opposes the doctrinal positions of the philosophers and the theologians of his intellectual milieu and endorses a materialistic explanation of the soul, which has its roots in Stoicism. He further argues that this theory was already advanced by al-Naẓẓām (d.231/845). Jaffer describes al-Rāzī's explanations on the soul (*nafs*) and spirit (*rūḥ*), the soul's quiddity and its temporal origination, its relation to the body, its separability from the body and the soul of the prophet mainly through *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. He should have examined these issues by comparing the texts from *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* with his theological and philosophical works, in particular his *al-Maṭālib al-ʿĀliya*. However, he makes occasional reference to these works and generally uses them through the reading of the secondary sources.

In general, it can be said that Jaffer's work is successful in describing general characteristics of al-Rāzī's methodology and showing how he applied this methodology on some issues. Al-Rāzī's new methodology of exegesis and *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* as the best representative of this methodology needs further and more focused studies, and Jaffer's work will give fresh insight to new researchers interested in al-Rāzī.