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(review)

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Book Reviews

An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 5: From the School of Shiraz to the Twentieth Century, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi, 2015. London: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 544 pp., \$63.66. ISBN: 978-1-84885-750-6 (hbk).

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The multi-volume project *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia* (APP) is the most comprehensive anthology of 'philosophy' in the Persian world to date, filling as it does nearly twenty-five hundred pages in print. Although the series gives coverage to philosophy in pre-Islamic Persia, the bulk of it (well over ninety percent) actually documents 'Islamic philosophy', and as such the editors were careful not to call it 'Persian philosophy', thereby fuelling the sentiment of 'Iranocentrism' in the process. The result appears to be an achievement which is unprecedented in scholarship on Islamic philosophy, and somewhat analogous examples can only be found in other fields, such as that of Surendranath Dasgupta's *A History of Indian Philosophy* (in five massive volumes published by Cambridge University Press [1922-1955]) and Frederick Copleston's 11-volume *A History of Philosophy* (Western philosophy), although it should be noted that these latter studies were the fruit of individual labour. APP has been some thirty years in the making, and it brings together nearly fifty scholars, including some of the most well-known names in the field to bring to light Persia's nearly twenty-five hundred years of rich philosophical thought.

Volume V (*From the School of Shiraz to the Twentieth Century*), which is also the final volume, deals with some seven centuries of continuous Islamic philosophical activity down to the twentieth century. The book opens (Part I) with the School of Shiraz whose celebrated figures include Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī (d.1502), Ṣadr al-Dīn Dashtakī (d.1497-8),

Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dashtakī (d. 1540) and Shams al-Dīn Khafrī (d. 1550). The Dashtakis, together with Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī, are the three best-known scholars who were teaching philosophy and theology in late fifteenth century Shiraz. Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī is the author of twenty works that display his erudition of a broad range of topics, viz. logic, Peripatetic and Illuminationist philosophy, natural science, theology, lettrism (*jafr* and *'ilm al-ḥurūf*), and Qur'anic exegesis. Ghiyāth al-Dīn, the oldest son of Ṣadr al-Dīn, is the author of some eighty works that demonstrate the encyclopaedic scope of his thought, as he wrote on astronomy (e.g. *al-Ma'ārij*), logic, natural philosophy (physics), medicine (e.g. *Tarjumāt al-Shāfiyah*), ethics (e.g., *Akhlāq-i Manṣūrī*), Qur'anic exegesis, theology and philosophy. Many would consider him the foremost Islamic philosopher of the sixteenth century, preceding Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631) and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640). One of the distinctive marks of the School of Shiraz is that it not only produced important philosophers, but also gave birth to the flourishing of scientists and astronomers. Thus, philosophy in this era cannot be separated from the history of science. Among a number of scientists of this era, Shams al-Dīn Khafrī is perhaps the most important astronomer of this period whose 'planetary theories' were likely to have influenced Nicholas Copernicus.¹ At any rate, another characteristic feature of the School of Shiraz, which is also seen in schools that came after them, is its tendency to integrate Peripatetic philosophy with the doctrines of the various schools of Illuminationism, theology (*kalām*), and philosophical Sufism (*'irfān*).

Part II is devoted to the School of Isfahan in which philosophy in Persia reaches its full-flowering at the hands of Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā. Although Mullā Ṣadrā has received serious scholarly attention in the last few decades, the same is not true of some other important figures of this school such as Mīr Dāmād, 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī (d. 1662), and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1680). The selections made from Mīr Dāmād's *al-Qabasāt* (*Sparks of Fire*) introduce the reader to the interrelationship between time (*zamān*), perpetuity/recurring time (*dahr*), and eternity (*ṣarmadiyyah*); that sheds new light on the problem of the temporality and eternity of the world, which has been the topic of great debate by both the Islamic philosophers and theologians (*mutakallimūn*) over the past thousand years. Since *al-Qabasāt* is known to be one of the most difficult philosophical texts, the helpful notes appended to the translation will greatly facilitate the reader's understanding. Along with Mīr Dāmād,

both 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī and Fayḍ Kāshānī need mention, since each of them authored a number of important books. Lāhijī's *Gawhar-i Murād* (*The Desired Pearl*) and *Shawāriq al-Ilhām* (*Lights of Inspiration*) contain numerous philosophical musings that require more scholarly treatment, while Fayḍ's *Kalimāt Maknūnah* (*Hidden Words*) provides an exposition of the famous doctrine of the Universal Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) as the self-disclosure of the Absolute within the context of Shi'a mystical philosophy. It is to be noted that Fayḍ, in addition to his philosophical treatises, also composed an influential commentary on the Qur'an called *Tafsīr al-Šāfi*. The School of Isfahan also produced the likes of Mullā Rajab 'Alī Tabrizī (d. 1670) and Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī (d. 1691), both of whom sought to refute Mullā Šadrā's metaphysics since they perceived it to be extraneous to Shi'a religious teachings.

Part III of *APP* takes up philosophy in the Qajar period (1794-1925) and the School of Tehran, and contains some of the most intellectually stimulating texts authored by philosophers such as Mullā Hādī Sabzawarī (d. 1873) and Muḥammad Riḍā Qumsha'ī (d. 1888). Sabzawarī is perhaps the most important philosopher between Mullā Šadrā and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981). The present anthology features selections from Sabzawarī's most famous work *Sharḥ al-Manzūmah*. Another philosopher who would be of interest to the reader from this period is Aqā 'Alī Mudarris Zunūzī (d. 1889). He is perhaps the first Persian philosopher to have encountered modern European philosophy. His masterpiece *Badāyi' al-Hikam* (*Marvels of Wisdom*) contains sections which respond to a number of questions addressed to him concerning the philosophy of Kant. This work expounds the nature of the various 'conditionings' of being (*wujūd*) as it developed in the School of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240). Aqā 'Alī often disagrees with the followers of Ibn 'Arabī on key issues in ontology. For instance, his notion of the negatively conditioned being (*wujūd bi-sharḥ lā*) differs from the usual interpretation given to it by the followers of Ibn 'Arabī. We also find here selections from Riḍā Qumsha'ī's various treatises, all dealing with seminal issues in philosophical Sufism such as *waḥdat al-wujūd* (oneness of being) and *wilāyah* (friendship/sanctity). In his exposition of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, Qumsha'ī clarifies the distinction between the concept of 'being' that is *lā bi-sharḥ* (unconditional), or not having any conditions, and one that is *bi-sharḥ lā* (negatively conditioned). This highly technical discussion of *wujūd* forms the backbone of later philosophical Sufism, which

continues to this day. It is also striking that although Qumsha'ī was a follower of Ibn 'Arabī and concurs with him on most issues, he departs from the latter regarding the issue of *wilāyah*, which he treats in the context of Twelver Shi'ism. In doing so, Qumsha'ī follows the footsteps of an earlier Shi'a mystic, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 1385).

Given its wide-ranging scope, *APP* is indeed a monumental scholarly undertaking. It also drives the final nail in the coffin of Ernest Renan's (d. 1892) infamous thesis that philosophy in the Islamic lands disappeared after Averroes. However, it is noteworthy that just as Renan's study asserts a false myth concerning the fate of philosophy in the Islamic world, some contemporary scholars tend to give the impression that after Averroes (or gradually after al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111) famous attack on *falsafah*) Islamic philosophy had *only* continued in Persia. This seems like the beginning of another 'myth' that is flatly contradicted by the facts on the ground, as the studies of many contemporary scholars, such as Robert Wisnovsky, Khaled al-Rouayheb, Sajjad Rizvi, and Asad Ahmed have shown, demonstrating how philosophical activity continued in various Islamic lands such as Egypt, Ottoman Turkey and Muslim India up to the twentieth century.

Despite *APP*'s encyclopaedic scope, some may see the lack of a uniform translation and annotation system amongst the texts presented as problematic. Some of the translations and glosses such as those of Dawānī, Mīr Damād, Rajab 'Alī Tabrīzī, Fayḍ Kāshānī, and Qumsha'ī (and a handful of others) are exemplary, while that of others are of intermediate quality containing only a few (or none at all) notes/glosses. On the question of explanatory materials alone, it is indeed important that sophisticated philosophical texts such as those that are translated in this anthology be always accompanied by extensive glosses, since they are saturated with technical terms and, for most non-specialists, a host of other unfamiliar references.

This minor issue aside, *From the School of Shiraz to the Twentieth Century* has been edited meticulously and marks a significant contribution to the study of Islamic philosophy in Persia. It will be of benefit to students and scholars interested in *'irfān*, *falsafah*, *kalām*, and Islamic intellectual history, as it provides an entry into the previously unknown territories of Islamic philosophy. Above all, it will advance our understanding of the scope of 'post-classical philosophy' in Islamic civilization.

Notes

¹ See, for instance, George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2011), ch. 6.