

***Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran: Najm al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Nayrīzī and His Writings***, by Reza Pourjavady (Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science; Texts and Studies: 82) (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2011), xii + 224 pp., ISBN: 978-90-04-19173-0, €96.00 (hb)

The book under review here is an admirable piece of scholarship that will be of help to many scholars and students interested in late medieval Islamic intellectual history. In this review, I will discuss the book in such a way that prospective readers may make economical use of the book. The book can be approached from two angles, as indicated by the two-part title: “Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran” on the one hand, and “Najm al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Nayrīzī and His Writings” on the other hand. Thus, the book actually is comprised of one part discussing late 15<sup>th</sup> century philosophical activity in Shīrāz and another part detailing the life and works of one of these philosophers, al-Nayrīzī.

The first part, “Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran,” consists of two chapters: the ‘Introduction’ and Chapter 2. The introduction is an excellent read on the background story of the philosophical quarrels that went on between the major philosophers of the generation before al-Nayrīzī, namely, father and son al-Dashtakī on the one hand (the son being al-Nayrīzī’s teacher) and al-Dawānī on the other hand. This is undoubtedly one of the more exciting episodes of Islamic philosophy, for which barely any attention has been paid to date. Pourjavady does not seem to have spared any effort in putting the story of this crucial period on paper, often citing unpublished sources. Chapter 2 gives details on these quarrels themselves, thereby giving us an insight into what was actually discussed and at what level. For this purpose, Pourjavady selects five issues that, in his view, were the most significant issues discussed at that time in Shīrāz: the liar paradox, the distinction between *wujūd* and *mawjūd*, mental existence (*wujūd dbibnī*), God’s knowledge (especially, of course, of particulars), and the relationship between the body and the soul.

The second part, “Najm al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Nayrīzī and His Writings,” consists of three chapters: chapters 1, 3, and 4. This part will mainly be of interest to those who want to study al-Nayrīzī’s writings for themselves, perhaps to prepare a text as an edition. For others,

this microscopic approach will provide unique insight into what occupied this intellectual and what corpus of literature was at his disposal. The chapters consist of a biography and a list of all of al-Nayrīzī's works that Pourjavady could find, including a short description of each work and references to manuscript copies. One drawback of this study is the disappearance of the "Nayrīzī-codex," a collection of 57 manuscripts supposedly copied by al-Nayrīzī himself that went missing some time after Āghā Buzurg saw them in the early 1930s (p. 193, though Āghā Buzurg only mentions the title of 19 manuscripts in his *al-Dharī'a*). When the codex re-emerges (if ever), it will surely prove to be a treasure-trove of information on al-Nayrīzī.

Chapter 4, the last chapter of the book, offers some of the philosophical reflections of al-Nayrīzī, more specifically, his studies of al-Suhrawardī's philosophy. With the absence of (critical) editions of al-Nayrīzī's works and with only a few works by either of the Dashtakīs or by al-Dawānī available in print, an in-depth analysis and comparison proves difficult. Pourjavady proceeds cautiously, almost hesitantly, doing his best not to attribute originality to ideas that al-Nayrīzī most likely picked up from his predecessors. He seems to have erred on the safe side in this matter, as it remains unclear (at least to this reviewer) exactly how original a thinker al-Nayrīzī was and, by extension, how deserving al-Nayrīzī is of further study. This issue could have been corrected in a concluding chapter, but the reader will be hard-pressed to find one. Instead, chapter four is followed by four appendices that detail manuscripts of al-Nayrīzī's works, a list of works he copied himself, a typed-out version of an *ijāza* given by Ghiyāth al-Dīn al-Dashtakī, and typed-out passages Pourjavady used in the book. A conclusion could also have been a good place to reflect on the theological dimensions of al-Nayrīzī's career, as the author introduces al-Nayrīzī explicitly as a philosopher *and* theologian, in fact, as one of the first Shī'ī theologians of the Safavids (p. x). Pourjavady does not pursue this other dimension of al-Nayrīzī's career much, at least not to the same extent as with al-Nayrīzī's philosophical activities. Then, again, no matter what the book *could* have been, it is up to the author to decide what the book *should* be, and Pourjavady chooses to end with a brief analysis of al-Nayrīzī's commentaries on some of al-Suhrawardī's works and detailed appendices. In a way, this open-endedness has a charm of its own, as a silent remark on the current state of the field of the history of Islamic philosophy. Indeed, Pourjavady's outstanding book as a whole bears

witness to the later medieval period of Islamic philosophy as being anything but a closed book.

The following typographical errors are noteworthy. Ghiyāth al-Dīn al-Dashtakī was born in 866, not 966 (p. 24), and he wrote his *Isbrāq bayākil al-nūr* before 1490 and not 1491 or 1495, as may be understood from page 25. Şadr al-Dīn al-Dashtakī wrote his second set of glosses in 1482-1483, not 1487 (p. 82). Footnote 12 on p. 110 should refer to pp. 643-644, not pp. 985-987 (an odd misprint indeed).

**L. W. C. van Lit**

*Utrecht University, Utrecht-The Netherlands*