بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

يَرْفَعِ اللهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوْا مِنْكُمْ

وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجاتٍ

Allāh exalts those of you who believe and those who are given knowledge to high ranks

Holy Qur'ān (58 : 11)

Aims and Objectives

1. To provide a forum for scholars to make analytical studies of Islamic topics and themes.

2. To advance the cause of better understanding of the Qur'ān and the Ahl al-Bayt's ('a) contribution to Islam.

3. To publish English translations of Arabic and Persian works of Muslim scholars.

4. To endeavour to find Islamic answers to questions relating to the contemporary social, political, and moral problems.

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Scholars and writers from all over the world are invited to contribute to this journal.

Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced on one side of the page. (Standards: A4 or 8.5″ × 11″.)

References and notes should be listed at the end of the article and should contain complete bibliographical information.

Books and other items sent to the journal for review are welcomed.

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SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION
OF ARABIC CHARACTERS

CONSONANTS:

ء	'	س	s	ل	l
ب	b	ش	sh	م	m
ت	t	ص	s	ن	n
ث	th	ض	z	هـ	h
ج	j	ط	t	و	w
ح	h	ظ	z	ى	y
خ	kh	ع	'	**Persian Letters**	
د	d	غ	gh	پ	p
ذ	dh	ف	f	چ	ch
ر	r	ق	q	ژ	zh
ز	z	ك	k	گ	g

VOWELS:

Long:	ا	ā	Short:	َ	a	Doubled	ـِى	iyy (final from î)
	و	ū		ُ	u		ُـو	uww (final from ū)
	ى	ī		ِ	i	Diphthongs:	َـو	au or aw
							َـى	ay or ai

Contents

Imam 'Alī ('a) and the Exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān

By: Dr. Muhammad 'Alī Mahdawī Rād
Translated by Sayyid 'Alī Shahbāz

The *tafsīr,* or exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān, started in the time of Prophet Muhammad (S) himself and acquired wider dimensions with his explanation of the meanings of *āyah*s and his expounding of divine injunctions. After the Prophet this trend further grew and of those of his companions who earned reputation in expounding the meanings of the *āyah*s, Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūtī, writes:

> Among the companions, ten persons stand out concerning *tafsīr:* The first four caliphs, 'Abdullah bin Mas'ūd, 'Abdullah Ibn 'Abbās, Ubayy bin Ka'b, Zayd bin Thābit, Abū Mūsā Ash'arī and 'Abdullah bin Zubayr. Among the caliphs, most of the narrations on explanation of *āyahs* are from (Imam) 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib while very little has been narrated from the other three (caliphs) concerning the meanings of *āyahs*.[2]

As is clear, among the companions of the Prophet, Imam 'Alī ('a) enjoys a special position concerning exegesis of the *āyahs* of the Holy Qur'ān. Let us try to explore in this article the pride of place that Imam 'Alī ('a) holds in this field.[3]

Imam 'Alī ('a), the Master of the Exegetes

Without the least doubt, Imam 'Alī ('a) stands at the head of all exegetes and is the most prominent face in this field. Imam 'Alī ('a) had imbibed directly from the pure spring of divine revelation since he was always at the side of the Prophet and was his constant companion from childhood. The finest illustration of this connection between the two cousins could be gauged from the words of Imam 'Alī ('a) himself:

You do know my position of close kinship and special relationship with the Messenger of Allah. When I was only a child he took me over. He used to press me to his chest and lay me beside him in his bed, touch his body with mine and make me feel his smell. He used to chew a thing and then feed me. I used to follow him like a young camel following in the footprints of its mother. Everyday he would show me in the form of a banner some of his high traits and command me to follow them. Every year he used to go in seclusion to Mount Hirā where I would see him but no one else would see him. In those days Islam did not exist in any house except that of the Messenger of Allah and Khadījah while I was the third of them. I used to see and watch the effulgence of divine revelation and message, and smelled the fragrance of Prophethood.

When the revelation descended on the Messenger of Allah I heard the moan of satan. I said: O Messenger of Allah what is this moan, and he replied, "this is satan who has lost all hope of being worshipped. O Ali you see all that I see and you hear all that I hear, except that you are not a Prophet, but you are a vicegerent."[4]

In this manner Imam 'Alī ('a) literally immersed his heart and soul in the waterfall of *wahy* (revelation), moulded his personality with the affable melody of *wahy*, waded since the start of his life in the gentle flow of *wahy* and blended every single moment of life with the lessons of *wahy*. He was thus a companion

of *wahy* and in stride with *wahy*. Scholars of *hadīth* and historians have quoted him as saying:

> Ask me whatever you want to know about the divine *āyahs*, because I have knowledge of all the divine *āyahs*, when and where they were revealed, whether on the heights or in the plains, whether during daytime or at night. God has granted me a perceptive heart and an eloquent tongue.[5]

He has also said:

> By Allah I know all divine *āyahs*, where and regarding what these were revealed. God has bestowed me a perceptive heart and an interrogative tongue.[6]

> I recited all the divine *āyahs* to the Messenger of Allah and he taught me the meanings of all *āyahs*.[7]

> Every *āyah* that God revealed to His Messenger I collected it since the Messenger of Allah recited to me each and every *āyah* and explained to me its interpretation.[8]

> From among the companions of Prophet Muhammad (S), God enabled me with the knowledge of *nāsikh wa mansūkh* (abrogator and abrogated), *muhkam wa mutashābih* (clear and allegorical) and *khāss wa 'āmm* (specific and general).[9]

> If I wish, my exegesis of *Sūrah al-Fātihah* could be loaded on 70 camels.[10]

Thus, Imam 'Alī ('a) had an exalted status among the *sahābah* (Prophet's companions) concerning the knowledge and perception of the Holy Qur'ān, and the *sahābah* in turn acknowledged his peerles position, as would be seen later in this article.

Imam 'Alī's ('a) Knowledge of the Qur'ān in the Light of *Wahy*

In his lifetime, in the eyes of his contemporaries, Imam 'Alī ('a) was the most prominent of the Prophet's companions, whose virtues, merits, selflessness, sacrifices and lofty personality were mentioned by the Holy Qur'ān. His merits, in the light of the divine *āyahs*, are so extensive and shine so brilliantly that those versed in Qur'ānic sciences have numbered around 300 *āyahs* concerning the virtues and excellence of Imam 'Alī ('a).[11] But in the context of our article what could be considered as the greatest eulogy of Imam 'Alī ('a) and his most outstanding merit in his own works,[12] is the following *āyah*:

"And those who disbelieve say 'you are not an apostle'. Say (O Prophet): Sufficient is Allah as witness between me and you and he with whom is the knowledge of the Book." (13:43)[*]

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[*]Sulaym's narration stresses this point although he placed emphasis on other *āyahs* as well. The narration in *Nūr al-Thaqalayn* and *al-Sāfī* is explicit and says no *āyah* is equal to this on Imam 'Alī's ('a) merit. The distinguished exegete, Muhammad Taqī Sharī'atī in his lecture "*'Alī the Witness to Prophethood*" has drawn attention to several important points, and assessed this virtue as the most meritorious. Following is a summary of his speech:

I often contemplated, that of the *āyahs* revealed on the merits of Imam 'Alī ('a), which one is the most important and presents a true picture of his exalted station. Several times I revised my assessment. Before realising the greatness of this *āyah* (13:43), I used to regard *āyah* 67 of *Sūrah al-Mā'idah* (*"O Prophet, proclaim what has been revealed to you from your Lord, and if you do it not, then you have not delivered his message [at all], and surely God will protect you from [the mischief of] mankind"*), as more important than all others. The tone of God's words here is not found anywhere else in the Holy Qur'ān. The warning that if

this particular message is not proclaimed then the whole prophetic mission is at stake, means that whatever the Prophet had preached concerning God's commandments is rather insignificant compared to this express order, which assumes further importance in view of its timing. It was revealed at the end of the farewell pilgrimage when the Prophet had discharged all important duties including the elaboration of the fundamental principles (*usūl al-dīn*) of monotheism, prophethood and resurrection, and the related obligations (*furū' al-dīn*) such as payment of *khums, zakāt* and the correct way of performing the *hajj* rituals. Moreover, he had practically demonstrated to Muslims the commandment of *jihad* and led them to victory in the decisive encounters of Badr, Uhud and Khandaq. Then what was this important commandment that he had not discharged because of fear of certain people? And who were these people whom the Prophet feared, when the polytheists had been overcome and the fall of Mecca to Muslims had strengthened Islam in all its dimensions? The answers are crystal clear. This important issue was the principle of *wilāyah* and the appointment of Imam 'Ali ('a) as Imam and vicegerent, which position, according to the belief of Shi'ite Muslims, is the prime condition for acceptance of all acts of worship. In other words, without *wilāyah*, all rites of religion become a futile exercise. God means to say that if *wilāyah* is not proclaimed then the duties of *risālah* (prophethood) have not been discharged at all. But what Prophet Muhammad (S) feared was the jealousy and rancour of certain Muslims towards Imam 'Ali ('a) that would lead to the weakening of the precepts of Islam. The fear was not from infidels since in the same *sūrah* God addressing Muslim says: "*This day are despaired those who disbelieve against your religion, so you fear them not...*" (5: 3). As Imam 'Ali ('a) says in sermon no. 4 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*: "Moses did not entertain fear for his ownself, rather he apprehended dominance of the ignorant and the sway of the deviated."

Yes, I believed that this was the most important *āyah* revealed on the merits of Imam 'Ali ('a), especially since it was part of *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, which in my opinion, revolves around this significant issue,

As could be crystal clear, in reply to the hostility of the impudent infidels who doubted the mission of Prophet Muhammad (S), God commanded His Messenger to say with firm conviction that God and the one who possess the knowledge of the Holy Qur'ān are enough to testify his mission.

Let us pause and contemplate on *Sūrah al-Ra'd* which was revealed in Mecca,[13] and which, in answer to the scepticism of the polytheists, emphasises that the Qur'ān is the firm proof of the mission of Prophet Muhammad (S). The fact that the opening

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although I did not find any exegete providing such an interpretation. But some years back when I was reading the Holy Qur'ān with this purpose in mind, I reflected on the events after the passing away of Prophet Muhammad (S) and the treason of some of his companions who broke their covenant in the same manner as the nations of the past had done. I thought, that in view of these facts, this *sūrah* should include the most important *āyah* which would reflect the greatness of Imam 'Ali ('a) more perfectly. I was now almost sure when I came across the *āyah* which I recited at the beginning of this speech. After contemplating for a while I felt a change in my belief, but in order not to be swayed again by my thoughts, I decided to refer to the exegesis of the Qur'ān. Fortunately, I came across the passage which says that Imam 'Ali ('a) himself has considered this *āyah* as the most important, as recorded by Fayz Kāshāni (*Tafsīr al-Sāfī*), Abū al-Futūh Rāzī (*Tafsīr Rawz al-Jinān wa Rawh al-Janān*) and several other exegetes. There was now no room for doubts and hesitation. First, we see that Imam 'Ali ('a) is placed as witness before God, and second, Prophet Muhammad's (S) assertion of the verity of his mission and the truthfulness, integrity and equity of Islam is confirmed by the testimony of Imam 'Ali ('a). That is why he has been referred to as *"he with whom is the knowledge of the Book."* It means because of his knowledge of the Holy Qur'ān, Imam 'Ali ('a) was granted by God the lofty station of a witness testifying the divine mission of his cousin Prophet Muhammad (S). Refer to *Cheshmeh-ye Kavir*, pp. 326-328.

*āyah*s of this *sūrah* refer to the signs of God which are emphasised again in the middle of the *sūrah* before it ends with the above-quoted *āyah*, removes all doubts that the Book mentioned here is the Holy Qur'ān. It means that the scholar versed in this Book should undoubtedly be a virtuous and meritorious person of the Islamic *ummah* and should be the most worthy product of the culture and teachings of the Holy Qur'ān.[14] To put it more clearly, it means that since those early days, Imam 'Alī ('a) was recognised as the corroborative manifestation of God's words: "*he with whom is the knowledge of the Book*", as clarified by the Prophet in his explanation and interpretation of this *āyah*.[15] The companions of the Prophet and those well versed in the Qur'ān such as 'Abdullah Ibn 'Abbās, Salmān Fārsī, Abū Sa'īd Khudrī, Qays bin Sa'd, Muhammad bin Hanafiyah[16] and (Martyr) Zayd bin 'Alī bin al-Husayn, are unanimous that the reference here is to Imam 'Alī ('a).

However, those envious of the merits of Imam 'Alī ('a) have tried to distort the word 'Book' as mentioned here, and have made vain attempts to give other justifications to the meaning of "*he with whom is the knowledge of the Book.*"[17] For example, they have attempted to say that Book here is a reference to the Torah and 'Abdullah bin Salām (a Jew who later accepted Islam) is the person referred to as "*he with whom is the knowledge of the Book.*" But these intrigues against truth were foiled by wardens of the marches of righteousness, such as the leading exegete of the school of Ahl al-Bayt, Sa'īd bin Jubayr[18] who when asked whether this *āyah* refers to 'Abdullah bin Salām, replied: "How could this be, when this *sūrah* was revealed during the Meccan period while 'Abdullah bin Salām accepted Islam in Medina after the Prophet's migration?"[19]

The interesting point is that in view of the theme and contents of the whole *sūrah*, any attempt to refer to 'Abdullah bin Salām is sheer absurdity and contrary to God's appointing of a testifyer for verification of the mission of His messenger, especially since

'Abdullah bin Salām is also among those who have confirmed that this *āyah* concerns Imam 'Alī ('a).[20] Moreoever, an exegete like Sha'bī has made it clear that no *āyah* of the Holy Qur'ān was revealed in favour of 'Abdullah bin Salām.[21]

The infallible Imams, as the correct interpreters of the Holy Qur'ān, have confirmed the revelation of this *āyah* in favour of Imam 'Alī ('a)[22] and have dismissed the other interpretations as sheer lies.[23] They have also practically demonstrated that only Imam 'Alī ('a) and the Household of Revelation have the proper knowledge of the boundless and fathomless ocean of the Book of God,[24] as could be gauged from the saying: *Ahl al-Bayt adrā bimā fī al-bayt* (the People of the House know what is in the house). 'Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā'ī, after analysing the different viewpoints on the meaning of this *āyah*, says:

> Some have said the Book mentioned here is the Holy Qur'ān and it means: now, since he (the Prophet) has been granted the Book of God, become aware of its teachings, and imbibed its truthfulness, he gives the testimony that "the Qur'ān is revelation and I am the Messenger of God." Accordingly, the ending of the *sūrah* is similar to its beginning, and the concluding *āyah* is an overseer for the opening *āyah*s as well as the middle ones. It opens with the words: "*Alif, Lām, Mīm. These are the verses of the Book and that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord is the Truth, but most people do not believe.*" (13:1). The *āyah* in the middle of the *sūrah* reads: "*Is then he who knows that what has been sent down unto you from your Lord is the Truth, like him who is blind (void of knowledge)? Only those possessed of understanding will bear in mind.*" (13:20). These *āyah*s are in fact the admonition of God for the denial and shallow approach of the polytheists who used to say: "*why is not a sign sent unto him.*" (10:20) and also "*you are not an apostle.*" (13:43). They belied his divine mission and treated him lightly. God sent reply to their faithlessness several times and did not simply recount the reality of

the Qur'ān being the greatest sign of God, but said: *"Sufficient is Allah as witness..."* This is the finest proof of this *āyah* being revealed in Mecca. It supports the *hadīth* of the Prophet recorded through the Ahl al-Bayt that the corroborative manifestation of this *āyah* is Imam 'Alī ('a). By the way, in those days if the sentence *"he with whom is the knowledge of the Book"* stood for a single person, was it other than Imam 'Alī ('a), who was the first believer and most knowledgeable of the Qur'ān? Numerous *āyahs* point to this manifest reality, which are sufficient to confirm our viewpoint even if there was no *Hadīth al-Thaqalayn*.[25]

Thus, without an iota of doubt this *āyah* was revealed in favour of Imam 'Alī ('a), and whatever else has been said concerning the meaning of the Book and the witness, is pure forgery of the Umayyad days in an attempt to undermine the merits of the Commander of the Faithful. This is not the only example of distortion. In fact there are several such cases as could be seen by the following narration:

Ismā'īl bin Khālid quotes Abū Sālih as saying, *"he with whom is the knowledge of the Book"* is reference to a certain Qurayshite person, but we cannot mention him clearly.[26]

Why? Because the cultural distortion of Umayyad rule did not favour the spread of truth and the speaking of truth. Another example in this regard is as follows:

Yūnus ibn 'Ubayd says he asked Hasan Basrī, "you sometimes say 'The Messenger of Allah has said', when the fact is that you have not seen the Prophet?" He answered: O son of my brother, you have asked me about a matter which no one has so far asked me about. I would never have replied if it were not for the esteem which I have for you. We are living in an era which you are aware of (Hajjāj bin Yūsuf's rule). Whenever you hear me say *"Qāla Rasūl Allah"* (the Messenger of Allah has said), you should know

that I am narrating this from (Imam) 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib ('a). The times are such that I cannot mention the name of 'Alī.[27]

This is the painful account of history and its vicissitudes. The firm testimony in this regard is the statement of Ibn 'Abbās who said:

The verifier of the *āyah* "*he with whom is the knowledge of the Book*", is Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib ('a) and no one else. He had complete knowledge of exegesis and interpretation, of the abrogator and the abrogated and the lawful and the unlawful in the Holy Qur'ān.[28]

As should be clear from our discussion of this particular *āyah*, Imam 'Alī ('a) is the most cognisant and most knowledgeable authority on the Holy Qur'ān.

Imam 'Alī's ('a) Cognisance of the Holy Qur'ān According to the Prophet

The person born in the *Ka'bah*, the blessings of God be upon him, was still a child when the Prophet took charge of him, brought him up in his house, and blended the moments of his life with his own life. In other words the Prophet groomed him in the shade of divine teachings and *wahy*, to the extent that Imam 'Alī ('a) was later to recall:

Everyday he would show me in the form of a banner some of his high traits and command me to follow them.[29]

In view of this statement, who could be more meritorious, more aware of the Prophet's words and speech, more eloquent in its description and more firm and active in its practical implementation than Imam 'Alī ('a)?[30] According to a narrative the Prophet once told Imam 'Alī ('a):

Feel proud over the people of the east and the west and over the Arabs and the non-Arabs, that you have the most honoured ancestors...are the first and foremost in Islam, and the most well-versed in the Book of Allah.[31]

On several occasions the Prophet told his companions of Imam 'Ali's ('a) vast knowledge and his awareness of the different dimensions of the teachings of the Holy Qur'ān, so that all should know to whom they should turn for divine guidance. One of the most beautiful sayings of the Prophet is as follows:

Umm Salamah quotes the Prophet as saying:

'Ali is with the Qur'ān and the Qur'ān is with 'Ali, and the two will never separate even when they return to me at the Fountain of Kawthar.[32]

It is a very lofty statement with even more greater dimensions. First it says that Imam 'Ali ('a) is with the Holy Qur'ān, and second, the holy Qur'ān is with Imam 'Ali ('a). Let us now study what lofty status the Prophet has described for his young and exemplary cousin.

Imam 'Ali ('a) is With the Qur'ān

1. The first part of the Prophet's saying "*'Ali is with the Qur'ān,*" means that Imam 'Ali ('a) as the most prominent and distinguished personality, aware of the dimensions of the Qur'ān, has imbibed its realities, fathomed its magnificent depths, and achieved success on its barometer. This is the reality to which we have referred by quoting his own words concerning questions posed to him on the dimensions of the Holy Qur'ān. He says:

On the revelation of each *āyah* the Prophet taught me its correct recitation; then he dictated it to me and I wrote it down; then he taught me its interpretation and its exegesis, about the abrogator (*nāsikh*) and the abrogated (*mansūkh*), and the clear (*muhkam*) and the allegorical (*mutashābih*). He prayed for its realities to become

clear to me and that I should memorise them. After that I never forgot whatever I received (was taught).[33]

2. "*'Alī is with the Qur'ān,*" means that Imam 'Alī ('a) is the most firm and steadfast defender of the Holy Qur'ān, who shielded with his life its sanctity, grandeur and eternal message, and who never spared any effort in order to prevent distortion in the text. He gathered the Holy Qur'ān and wrote its interpretation and exegesis. When the nascent Islamic society was exposed to the stratagems of politicians and their political ploys, he stood aloof from the intrigues of the state in order to safeguard the teachings of the Holy Qur'ān and busied himself in the collection, explanation and exegesis of the Book of God. In reply to the numerous questions posed to him on his distancing himself from the politics of the day, he used to say: "I fear the Qur'ān might be tampered with." [34]

His magnanimous self-sacrifice to safeguard the Holy Qur'ān in its entirety was foretold by Prophet Muhammad (S). Abū Sa'īd Khudrī relates, that once the companions had assembled and were waiting for the Prophet to appear when he emerged from the house of one of his wives. They immediately stood up and started following him. The heel (or strap in another version) of the Prophet's sandal was broken and Imam 'Alī ('a) stayed behind to mend it. The Prophet walked (with one sandal) for a while before stopping to wait for his cousin, and the companions also stopped with him. Then, adds Khudrī, the Prophet said:

> "There is one among you who will fight for the interpretation of the Qur'ān." Abū Bakr and 'Umar were also among us. We lifted our heads (exchanged glances in each other's direction to suggest either of these two persons). The Prophet said: "No! The person who is mending the sandal..." We gave this tiding to (Imam) 'Alī ('a) and it seemed he already knew about this.[35]

Shaykh Mufīd's account of this incident has a slight variation and reads, that pointing towards Imam 'Alī ('a), the Prophet said:

"It is the one who is repairing the sandal. He will fight for the interpretation (of the Qur'ān) when my *sunnah* is abandoned and neglected and the Book of God is distorted and when those who have no right, speak of religion. 'Alī, will fight them in order to revive the religion of God the Exalted."[36]

Imam 'Alī ('a), while fighting the khawārij (renegades), informed the people of the great responsibility of which the Prophet had given tidings:

We now had to fight our brethren in Islam because of entry (into religion) of misguidance, crookedness, doubts and (wrong) interpretation.[37]

These facts are a clear indication of his defence of the Book of God. They prove that like Prophet Muhammad (S), who spared no efforts in conveying the message of truth and divine revelation and had to take up arms in accordance with divine commandments, Imam 'Alī ('a) did not leave any stone unturned for the correct interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān, and in order to prevent any distortion of divine *āyah*s, he plunged into the thick of battle.

3. "*'Alī is with the Qur'ān*," means Imam 'Alī ('a) is firmly on the path of guidance of the Book of God. If the Qur'ān is the constitution of life, Imam 'Alī ('a) is the practical model for implementation of its teachings. If the Qur'ān contains guidelines of undeniable reality, Imam 'Alī ('a) is the best of guides on the highway of guidance. If the Qur'ān is the life-giving scripture, Imam 'Alī ('a) is the indisputable exegete of its facts and the peerless clarifier of its teachings. Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān Salmī says:

I have not seen anyone more knowledgeable about the Qur'ān than 'Alī. He used to say: "Ask me, by Allah, I will tell you whatever you ask me about the Qur'ān." [38]

Ibn Shabramah relates:

No one except 'Alī ever expressed such words from the pulpit: "Ask whatever you would like to know of the Qur'ān."[39]

In Sermon 158 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* the Imam says:

The Prophet came with (a book containing) testification of what (books) were already there and also with a light to be followed. It is the Qur'ān. If you ask it to speak, it would not do so; but I will tell you about it. Know that it contains knowledge of what is to come about, stories of the past, cure for your ills and regulation for whatever faces you...If you ask all these things, I will inform you.[40]

Among the several *hadīth* in this regard the widely quoted *Hadīth al-Thaqalayan* stands out. It is the most clear and unambiguous indication that Imam 'Alī ('a) and his illustrious descendants are on par with the Holy Qur'ān, are firmly beside it for the proper unravelling of its meanings, and throughout history their radiant teachings in harmony with its illuminationist concepts have guided mankind on the path of salvation.

Hadīth al-Thaqalayn has been cited by scholars of every Islamic denomination with slight variation of words but with the same purport. It reads:

The Prophet said: "I am leaving among you the *Thaqalayn* (two weighty things). If you hold fast to them you will not go astray after me. One of them is greater than the other. The Book of Allah and my progeny..."[41]

These immortal words of Prophet Muhammad (S) have introduced Imam 'Alī ('a) to posterity as the exegete and defender of the Holy Qur'ān. This is the finest proof in the annals of history of his lofty status in exegesis and expounding of the Revealed Word of God.

The Qur'ān is With Imam 'Alī ('a)

1. The second part of the Prophet's saying *"the Qur'ān is with 'Alī,"* means that in guiding, enlightening and directing mankind towards lofty goals, the Holy Qur'ān is inseparable from Imam 'Alī ('a). This undeniable reality is the recurring theme in numerous *hadīth* including the *Hadīth al-Thaqalayn* of which we have already spoken.

2. *"The Qur'ān is with 'Alī,"* means the Qur'ān is firmly beside Imam 'Alī ('a) in shedding light on his merits, his magnanimity, his virtue, his greatness, etc. 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbās says:

In proportion to 'Alī, no such divine *āyah*s have been revealed in anyone's favour.[42]

Ibn 'Abbās adds:

Three hundred *āyah*s have been revealed in the Qur'ān concerning 'Alī.[43]

A narration from Mujāhid says:

Seventy *āyah*s have been revealed in favour of 'Alī and he stands out peerless in this regard.[44]

Ibn 'Abbās narrates:

Wherever it is mentioned in the Qur'ān *"Yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū"* (O you who believe), 'Alī is the leader (*Amīr*) and the noblest of them (believers). God has admonished the companions of the Prophet but has referred to 'Alī only in goodness.[45]

Whatever we have said is only a fragment of the reports and narratives of the companions of the Prophet and those of the first generation of Muslims. The chroniclers of *hadīth* and exegetes of the Qur'ān have referred to hundreds of *āyah*s on the merits of Imam 'Alī ('a), and these remain as the earliest extant writings in the written heritage of Islam.[46]

3. The position of the Holy Qur'ān, its pivotal role and its characteristics have striking similarity to Imam 'Alī ('a). In other words, the Imam bears identical resemblance to the Book of God. We will elaborate our discussion to present a clear picture:

a) The Holy Qur'ān is a voiceless book (*Kitāb Sāmit*) and Imam 'Alī ('a) is the vocal Qur'ān (*Qur'ān Nātiq*). The Imam himself has said: "*Ana al-Qur'ān al-Nātiq* (I am the speaking or eloquent Qur'ān)."[47] He has also said: "*Ana Kalām Allah al-Nātiq* (I am the eloquent Word of God)."[48]

'Allāmah Majlisī in his commentary on these sayings, writes:

It is from this aspect that Imam 'Alī ('a) is considered the bearer of the knowledge of the Qur'ān, the possessor of its manners, and its exact crystallisation...because, the flowering of the qualities of action in him and his perfection of deed, is actually the exact crystallisation and embodiment of the characteristics (of the Holy Qur'ān).[49]

It is obvious that these characteristics of Imam 'Alī ('a) are more transcendantal than his state of being the exegete and expounder of the Qur'ān and the reflector of its realities. His life is a mirror of, and replete with, the features of the Book of Allah. To cite an example, Imam Rizā ('a), in reply to a question posed by the Abbasid caliph, Ma'mūn, on the foundations of faith and the purity of Islam, said:

The guide of mankind, the proof for believers...and the speaker of the Qur'ān, after the Messenger of Allah (S), is (Imam) 'Alī ('a).[50]

What we have presented are clear examples of Imam 'Alī ('a) being the actual crystallisation of the teachings of the Qur'ān, with his words serving as the most illustrative, impressive and comprehensive interpretation of the Book of God. The Imam says in this regard – in answer to the contention of the khārijites who called for arbitration on the basis of the Book of God:

The Qur'ān is a book between two flaps and it does not speak. Therefore, it is necessary for it to have an interpreter.[51]

He also said:

Yes O people! Knowledge quickly folds up its hemlines. You will soon lose me. So ask me, and know that whatever you ask me about any *āyah* I will unravel its truth. Without a doubt, after me, you will never find anyone like me who speaks in this manner about the Qur'ān.[52]

Alas, it seems in those days there were no conscious and aware minds to acquire knowledge from that generous source of realities. If only they had asked Imam 'Alī ('a) about the fathomless depth and infinite wisdom of the Holy Qur'ān, he would have lifted up the curtains to reveal a multitude of facts and realities. But of the few who asked him and acquired knowledge in accordance with their capacity, they did not have the opportunity to spread them. Whatever they narrated from him the rulers and those in power tried to prevent it from reaching the future generations and ages.

b) *The Book of Allah is Furqān and so is 'Alī.* Among the attributes of the Holy Qur'ān which God has mentioned in it as the Book of Allah, is its being the *Furqān* or the distinguisher. Exegetes have discussed this characteristic and said the reason God has introduced the Qur'ān as *Furqān* is the power and ability of divine speech to sift truth from falsehood, to separate good from evil, and to help differentiate between the proper and the improper.[53] Similarly, Imam 'Alī ('a) is also the *Furqān*, with his words sifting truth from falsehood and his speech and behaviour serving as barometer to discern belief from unbelief. This characteristic of Imam 'Alī ('a) has been explained by the Prophet in several *hadīth*, one of which reads:

"Soon, sedition will raise its head after me, and in such a situation be with 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib. Without a doubt, he would be

the first person to meet me and the first to give his hand in my hand on the Day of Resurrection. He is the *Siddīq Akbar* (most truthful) and the *Fārūq* (distinguisher) of this *ummah* who will sift truth from falsehood. He is the Leader and Guide of the believers, while the leader of the hypocrites is the wealth of the world."[54]

'Abd al-Rahmān bin Samurah relates that when he requested the Prophet to guide him towards salvation, he received the answer:

"Yes O son of Samurah! The time comes when there are different purposes, and thoughts are dispersed, be with 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib and hold fast to him, since he is the leader of my *ummah* and its caliph after me. He is the *Fārūq* who separates good from bad and truth from falsehood. Whoever asks him will be given the answer, whoever seeks the way will be guided, whoever is in search of truth should know that truth is with him, and whoever seeks guidance should know that guidance is found in 'Alī.[55]

Abū Rāfi' narrates that when the Prophet's esteemed companion Abū Dhar was being banished to the wilderness of Rabadhah, he went to see him. When he bid farewell, Abū Dhar told him and the others assembled there: "Soon sedition will raise its head. Observe piety and be with the Leader of the Age, 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib, and follow him, since I heard the Prophet saying to him:

"You are the first one to believe in me and you will be the first one on the Day of Resurrection to place your hand in my hand. You are the *Siddīq Akbar* and the *Fārūq* of the *ummah* who sifts truth from falsehood..."[56]

As is clear, Imam 'Alī ('a) is undoubtedly the manifestation of truth and its axis. His practice, behaviour, manners and teachings are the exact crystallisation of truth and is the best and most appropriate factor for recognition and differentiation of truth from falsehood. Thus like the Holy Qur'ān and in stride with it, he is the barometer for recognising truth and rejecting falsehood.

c). *The Qur'ān is the Expositor of Realities and so is Imam 'Alī ('a)*. Almighty God says concerning the Holy Qur'ān: "*We have sent down upon you the Book explaining everything (tibyānan li-kulli shay')...*" (16:89).

Exegetes have been debating the meaning of *tibyān* ever since the writing of exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān began. They have gone into detail and offered different opinions, in the light of which it cannot be denied that the Book of God, which is a guidance for the human race, contains everything and is a reflector of realities.[57] It should be acknowledged with certainty that the Qur'ān, with its focus on rules and regulations for the benefit of mankind, opens up the mysteries of life and existence.[58]

Similar is the position of Imam 'Alī ('a) in religious sciences, in proper exposition of Qur'ānic realities, in unravelling the mysteries of life and creation, and in predicting the unknown. Asbagh bin Nubātah narrates that during one of his sermons, Imam 'Alī ('a), addressing the audience, said: "O people! Ask me (*salūnī*) before you loose me, ask me, I have with me the wisdom of the past and that of the future.[60]

Not once, but several times Imam 'Alī ('a) said these words and urged people to ask him about anything they wished about the realities of faith, the Holy Qur'ān and existence. Sa'īd bin Musayyib relates: "None, except 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib, has ever expressed the word *salūnī* (ask me)."[60]

He was *wahy* personified. His life brimmed with ethereal knowledge while his heart was full of infinite facts. But alas, in those days, it seems no one had the capacity to acquire what he was yearning to distribute of the facts of existence. With a sigh, he was often heard saying: "Without doubt, here (thumping his chest) is a treasure of knowledge, but very few seekers (of knowledge). Very soon you would feel regret for having lost me."[61] He meant to say that soon people would regret for failing to benefit from his vast

knowledge while he was alive and in their midst. Imam 'Alī ('a) says in this regard:

> My chest is overflowing with knowledge, which the Prophet taught me. If I find worthy persons who would do justice to it (knowledge) by transmitting exactly what they heard from me, I would entrust some of it to them so that a vast knowledge is made available...[62]

At times the Qur'ān speaks of the apparently hidden realities, of the mysteries of the infinite and of limitless knowledge beyond the immediate comprehension of human thoughts. Imam 'Alī ('a) is undoubtedly on a par with the Holy Qur'ān since his knowledge which unravels what never occurred to human minds before, has no visible limits and transcends all dimensions of existence.

d). *The Qur'ān is Truth and Imam 'Alī ('a) is Crystallization of Truth.* Among the attributes used by Almighty God to describe the Holy Qur'ān is Truth. Below we cite two of the *āyah*s in this regard:

> *"Surely, We have sent down upon you the Book with the Truth that you may judge between people by what God shows you..."* (4:105)

> *"Or they say, 'he has forged it?' Nay! it is the truth from your Lord, that you may warn people unto whom did not come any warner before you, that haply they may be guided aright."* (32:3)

In like manner, Imam 'Alī ('a) is with the truth and truth is with Imam 'Alī ('a). Nay! Imam 'Alī ('a) is the crystallisation of truth or truth verified, as is clear from the following *hadīth* of Prophet Muhammad (S):

> *"al-Haqqu ma'a 'Alī wa 'Alī ma'a al-Haqq, yadūr al-Haqq ma'a 'Alī kayfa-mā dāra ('Alī is with truth and truth is with 'Alī, truth turns whatever way he turns.)"*

In the words of the Prophet, Imam 'Alī ('a) is the manifestation of truth or truth personified. It means his words and deeds are the criterion for ascertaining truth itself as could be understood from the last part of the sentence which says: *"truth turns whatever way he turns."* In order to better understand the meaning of this *hadīth* and the lofty personality of Imam 'Alī ('a), we will cite another *hadīth* from the Prophet in favour of his companion 'Ammār bin Yāsir, and draw a comparison between the two.

> *"Inna 'Ammāran ma'a al-haqq wa al-haqq ma'ahū, yadūr 'Ammār ma'a al-haqq ayna-mā dār, wa qātilu 'Ammār fī al-nār (Indeed 'Ammār is with truth and truth is with him, 'Ammār turns the way that truth turns and the killer of 'Ammār will be in [hell] fire).*[63]

It means that 'Ammār bin Yāsir is always with the truth. In other words wherever there is a righteous stance, 'Ammār will be found there. 'Ammār was an enlightened soul, upright in behaviour, sincere of heart and clear in perspective. To highlight his righteousness the Prophet said: " *'Ammār turns the way that truth turns."* However, a closer look at the two *hadīth* reveals the difference between the words used in favour of Imam 'Alī ('a). Here, truth is the axis, with the faithful 'Ammār dutifully treading the course it takes, while in the former *hadīth*, Imam 'Alī ('a) is the axis, with truth obediently following in his footsteps. To state it more clearly, Imam 'Alī ('a) is the embodiment and barometer of truth. The companions of the Prophet, especially the loyal ones among them, who heard these words either directly or indirectly from the Almighty's Last Messenger to mankind, very well knew the criteria for truth, as is illustrated by the following account.

The Prophet's companion Hudhayfah al-Yamanī was on his deathbed when the topic of sedition was raised. Ibn Mas'ūd and others asked him whose company they should keep when there is dispute among the people, when ways are split and when there are different opinions. Hudhayfah replied: "Be with the son of Sumayyah ('Ammār). He will never part with truth."[64]

On several occasions the Prophet had often warned Muslims of sedition and also said that 'Ammār will always be with the truth. Without the least doubt what the Prophet meant by this expression was that 'Ammār will always be at the side of Imam 'Alī ('a), as was the case when seditions rocked the boat of Islam. Ibn Mas'ūd quotes the Prophet as saying:

> When people (Muslims) dispute and fight with each, without a doubt 'Ammār will remain beside the truth.[65]

As events after the Prophet proved, 'Ammār stood firmly beside the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Alī ('a) --and was martyred defending his cause in the Battle of Siffīn. Thus, as we have already noted the Holy Qur'ān is truth and Imam 'Alī ('a) whose life practically manifested the Book of God, is truth incarnate.

e). *The Qur'ān is Testimony to the Prophet's Mission and so is Imam 'Alī ('a).* It is an undisputed fact that the Book of Allah is the living miracle of Prophet Muhammad's (S) mission and a testimony to his prophethood. Likewise, it cannot be denied that Imam 'Alī ('a) is also the eternal miracle of Prophet Muhammad (S) and to quote the Holy Qur'ān, served as testifier to the mission of the Prophet, as is clear from the following *āyah* which we repeat here to stress the point:

> "*And those who disbelieve say 'you are not an apostle'. Say (O Prophet): Sufficient is Allah as witness between me and you and he with whom is the knowledge of the Book.*" (13:43)

As we discussed from different angles at the beginning of this article, "Book" is a clear reference to the Holy Qur'ān and "*he with whom is the knowledge of the Book,*" is a pointer to the person considered by God as verifier of the Prophet's mission. The intention here is not to repeat in what manner Imam 'Alī ('a) served as witness to the divine mission of his immaculate cousin,[66] but to focus on another interesting aspect. The prominent historian

of the 2nd century AH, Muhammad bin 'Umar al-Wāqidī writes:

> 'Alī ibn Talib was among the miracles of the Messenger of Allah in the same manner that the staff was the miracle of Moses and quickening of the dead was the miracle of Jesus.[67]

Whatever we have mentioned is actually a fragment of the numerous *hadith* and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (S) on the merits of Imam 'Alī ('a) concerning his parity with, and analogy to, the Holy Qur'ān. This explains the Prophet's famous saying:

> *'Ali ma'a al-Qur'ān wa al-Qur'ān ma'a 'Ali, la yaftariqān hattā yaridā 'alayya al-Hawz, fa'asaluhumā mā ikhtalaftum fīhā* ('Ali is with the Qur'ān and the Qur'ān is with 'Ali, the two will never part with each other even when they return to me at the Pool [Kawthar], so refer to them in matters of dispute).

To put it into plain and unambiguous words, the Holy Qur'ān is a reflection of the real image and personality of Imam 'Alī ('a), while Imam 'Alī ('a) is the incomparable exegete of the Book of Allah and its true exponent.

Imam 'Alī and the Holy Qur'ān in the View of the Prophet's Companions

The peerless position of Imam 'Alī ('a) in comprehending the Holy Qur'ān and his familiarity with the teachings of the Book of Allah was a byword in his own days which has drawn expressions of praise and amazement from the Prophet's companions, the first generation of Muslims, and exegetes of the Holy Book. Ibn 'Abbās says:

> Whatever (Imam) 'Alī ('a) said, I tried to grasp and after due contemplation realised that my knowledge of the Qur'ān when compared to 'Ali's knowledge is like a pond in front of a roaring sea. [68]

'Umar bin al-Khattāb used to say:

(Imam) 'Alī ('a) was more familiar with the teachings of the
Qur'ān than any of us.[69]

'Abdullah bin Mas'ūd narrates:

Among the people of Medina, (Imam) 'Alī ('a) was the most
knowledgeable of the (teachings of the) Qur'ān.[70]

'Abdullah bin 'Umar has also considered Imam 'Alī ('a) as
the most knowledgeable of the teachings of the Qur'ān.[71] 'Ayishah
regarded Imam 'Alī ('a) as the most aware among the companions
of the Prophet concerning the text of the Holy Qur'ān.[72] Abū 'Abd
al-Rahmān Salmī has said that he did not find anyone more
familiar with the teachings of the Qur'ān than Imam 'Alī ('a).[73]
When 'Atā' bin Abī Rayyāh was asked whether he knew anybody
among the Prophet's companions was more knowledgeable, he
said: "By Allah, no." Ibn Shabramah relates: "Except for (Imam)
'Alī ('a), I have not seen anyone call on the people from the pulpit
to ask him anything concerning the Book of Allah."[75] 'Amir Sha'bī
has been recorded as saying: "After the Prophet I did not find
anyone more knowledgeable about whatever is there between these
two covers (Holy Qur'ān).[76]

The 7th century AH Mu'tazalite scholar, Ibn Abī al-Hadīd,
lauds Imam 'Alī ('a) as the complete master of all branches of
Islamic sciences, and in the preface to his commentary on the *Nahj
al-Balāghah*, writes concerning his pioneering role in the field of
exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān:

The science of exegesis has its source in him and has grown as
a result of his teachings. A look at the exegeses will confirm this
statement, since the oldest quotations in the field of exegesis is
from him. 'Abdullah in Abbās who was a close companion and
student of Imam 'Alī ('a) was once asked about his knowledge in
comparison to that of his cousin (the Imam). He replied: It is like a

drop of rain in front of a roaring sea.[77]

Muhammad bin Talhah Shāfi'ī writing on the same topic , says in his book:

> Ibn 'Abbās is reputed to be a pioneer in exegesis and his pioneering role has been acknowledged by all. However, it is clear that Ibn 'Abbās was the student of (Imam) 'Alī ('a), his follower, and he learned the science of exegesis from him and vastly benefited from him.[78]

These were the opinons of some of the myriad of scholars whose statements on the matchless wisdom of the Commander of the Faithful, lie scattered in the books of history, *hadīth* and *tafsīr*. Thus, without the least doubt, Imam 'Alī ('a) is the most aware, most meritorious and most worthy companion of the Prophet and the first and foremost exegete of the Holy Qur'ān.

Notes:

1. Among these, the quotations of 'Ayishah and 'Umar bin al-Khattāb have already been published as *tafsīr*s. Refer to Mas'ūd bin 'Abdullah al-Finīsān, *Marwiyyāat Umm al-Mu'minīn 'Ayishah fī al-Tafsīr,* Riyadh, Maktabah al-Mu'bah. Some of the opinions of 'Ayishah have influenced *tafsīr*-writing of the school of caliphs, refer to al-Libī, Ibrāhīm bin Hasan; *al-Tafsīr al-Ma'thūr 'an 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb,* al-Dār al-'Arabiyyah lil-Kitāb.

2. Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūtī, *al-Itqān,* vol. 4, p. 233 (ed. Abū al-Fazl Ibrāhīm); vol. 2, p. 467 (ed. Fawwāz Ahmad Zatsharlī).

3. Extracted from the writer of this article's unpublished work *Tārīkh-e Tafsīr-e* Qur'ān-e Karīm, ch. *Tafsīr dar 'Asr-e Sahābah.*

4. *Nahj al-Balāghah,* Sermon 190 (*Qāsi'ah*)

5. Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf,* vol. 2, p. 99; Sayf al-Dīn Amudī, *Ghurar al-Hikam,* vol. 2, p. 563.

6. *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, vol. 2, p. 99; Abū Na'īm al-Isfahānī, *Hulyah al-Awliyā'*, vol. 1, p. 67; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Damishq*, vol. 42, p. 397; *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 45; Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 40, p. 157.

7. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 43.

8. *Kitāb Sulaym bin Qays*, vol. 2, p. 581; Tabrisī, *al-Ihtijāj*, vol. 1, p. 207.

9. Shaykh Sadūq, *al-Khisāl*, p. 578.

10. Al-Qundūzī, *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah*, vol. 3, p. 209; Ibn Shahr-Ashub al-Māzandarānī, *Manāqib Al-i Abī Tālib*, vol. 2, p. 43.

11. Ibn Hajar al-Haythamī, *al-Sawā'iq al-Muhriqah*, p. 127; *Kifāyat al-Tālib*, p. 231; Qāzī Sayyid Nūrullah Shūshtarī, *Ihqāq al-Haqq*, vol. 3, 480; *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah*, vol. 2, p. 406.

12. *Kitāb Sulaym bin Qays*, vol. 2, p. 903; *Nūr al-Thaqalayn*, vol. 2, 521; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 40, p. 1; Fayz Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-Sāfi*, vol. 3, p. 77.

13. Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā'ī, *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, vol. 1, pp. 284 & 396; Sayyid Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 4, p. 2039.

14. For more details refer to *al-Mīzān*, vol. 11, p. 383; *Khilāfat wa Wilāyat az Didgāh-e Qur'ān wa Sunnat* (Caliphate and Imamate from the Viewpoint of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*), Muhammad Taqī Sharī'atī, 1st edition, p. 212, ch. *'Alī Shahīd-e Risālat* ('Alī the Witness of Prophethood); Ahmad Rahmānī Hamedānī, *al-Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib*, p. 179.

15. Shaykh Sadūq, *al-Amālī,* , vol. 3, p. 453; *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1. p. 400; *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah*, vol. 1, p. 307; *Ghāyat al-Marām*, p. 358, ch. 60, *hadīth* 12; *Manāqib Al-i Abī Tālib*, vol. 2, p. 29.

16. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl,* vol. 1. p. 400; *Yanābi' al-Mawaddah,* vol. 1, p. 307; *Ihqāq al-Haqq,* vol. 3, pp. 245 & 280, vol. 14, p. 362.

17. Abū Ja'far al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* vol. 13, p. 176; Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūtī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr,* vol. 4, p. 128; *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr,* vol. 13, p. 196.

18. Sa'īd bin Jubayr is a prominent exegete of the period of the *Tābi'īn* (Muslims who had seen the companions of the Prophet).

19. *Jāmi' al-Bayān,* vol. 13, p. 178; *al-Durr al-Manthūr,* vol. 4, p. 129; *al-Mīzān,* vol. 11, p. 385.

There is no doubt about *Sūrah al-Ra'd* belonging to the Meccan period as is clear from its contents and purport, a fact also stressed by modern Sunni scholars including Sayyid Qutb (*Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān,* vol, 4, p. 2039) and 'Izzat Durūzah (*al-Tafsīr al-Hadīth,* vol. 7, p. 43).

20. *Ihqāq al-Haqq,* vol. 3, 284; *Yanābi' al-Mawaddah,* vol. 2, p. 250.

21. *Al-Durr al-Manthūr,* vol. 4, p. 128; *Fath al-Qadīr,* vol. 3, p. 110; *Dalā'il al-Sidq,* vol. 2, p. 135.

22. *Tafsīr al-Hibrī,* pp. 285 & 490; *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl,* vol. 1. p. 402; *Yanābi' al-Mawaddah,* vol. 1, p. 306; *Nūr al-Thaqalayn,* vol. 2, p. 522.

23. *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī,* vol. 2, p. 220; *Nūr al-Thaqalayn,* vol. 2, p. 522.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Tafsīr al-Mīzān,* vol. 11, p. 386.

26. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl,* vol. 1. p. 404.

27. *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl,* vol. 6, p. 124; *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* (printed on the margin), vol. 3, p. 266.

28. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl,* vol. 1. p. 405; *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah*, vol. 1, p. 307.

29. Part of Imam 'Alī's ('a) sermon which we quoted before.

30. *Ihqāq al-Haqq,* vol. 4 deals exclusively with the dynamic personality of Imam 'Alī ('a) and his merits and virtues as related by Prophet Muhammad (S).

31. *Ihqāq al-Haqq*, vol. 4, p. 331. This is part of a lengthy statement, refer to *Musnad Zayd*, p. 343.

32. Al-Tabarānī, *al-Mu'jm al-Saghīr*, vol. 1. p. 255; Hākim al-Nayshābūrī, *al-Mustadrak al-Sahīhayn*, vol. 3, p. 134. This *hadīth* has also been narrated with a slightly different variation of words in *al-Sawā'iq al-Muhriqah*, p. 75; Suyūtī, *Jāmi' al-Saghīr*, vol. 2, p.66; *Ihqāq al-Haqq*, vol. 5, p. 639 and various other sources.

33. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 48; *Tarjamah al-Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib min Tārīkh Damishq*, vol. 2, p. 467; *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 64; *al-Khisāl*, p. 257; Sadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, p. 284; *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, p. 14; Ibn Shu'bah al-Harrānī, *Tuhaf al-'Uqūl*, p. 196; *Kitāb Sulaym bin Qays*, vol. 2, p. 624. The text quoted here is from *Shawāhid*. The other sources mentioned have slightly different variation of words.

34. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 37.

35. *Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal*, vol. 3, p. 501; *al-Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 132; *Hulyah al-Awliyā'*, vol. 1, p. 67; *Ihqāq al-Haqq*, vol. 4, p. 332.

36. Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, vol. 1, p. 123.

37. *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 122.

38. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl,* vol. 1, p. 42.

39. *Ibid*, p. 47; *Tārīkh Damishq,* vol. 42, p. 399.

40. Kulaynī, *al-Usūl min al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 61; *Nahj al-Balāghah,* sermon 157; Also refer to Mullā Sadrā's *Sharh Usūl al-*

Kāfī, vol. 2, p. 346; 'Allāmah Majlisī's *Mirāt al-'Uqūl*, vol. 1, p. 208; *Fī Zilāl Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, 419.

41. *Ihqāq al-Haqq*, vol. 4, p. 436, *Nafahāt al-Azhār* (Arabicised abridgement of Mīr Hāmid Husayn Mūsawī's *'Abaqāt al-Anwār*), vols. 1-3.

42. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1. p. 52; *al-Sawā'iq al-Muhriqah*, p. 127.

43. *Ibid*; *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah*, vol. 2, p. 406.

44. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 52; Irbilī, *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, p. 314.

45. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 64-69; *Majma' al-Zawā'id*, vol. 9, p. 112.

46. *Tafsīr al-Hibrī*, introduction.

47. *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah*, vol. 1, p. 214.

48. *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 79, p. 199.

49. *Ibid*. In view of Imam 'Alī's ('a) words on this topic, it is necessary to stress the reality that the Imam is the physical manifestation of the Book of Allah. The late Dr. 'Alī Sharī'atī in his excellent work *Analysis of Hajj Rituals* , elaborating on the status of the *hajj* pilgrimage in Islam, says that *hajj* in its entirety is the manifestation of Islam and the Holy Qur'ān.

50. Sadūq, *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Rizā*, vol. 2, p. 121; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 65, p.261.

51. *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 125.

52. *Tārīkh Damisqh*, vol. 42, p. 397.

53. I have dwelt in detail on *'furqān'* being one of the attributes of the Holy Qur'ān in the Persian quarterly *Farhang-e Jihād*, no. 3, pp. 9-24. The term *'furqān'* has been mentioned seven times in the Holy Qur'ān.

54. Al-Tabarānī, a*l-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, vol. 6, 269; *Tārīkh Damishq*, vol. 42, p. 41; *al-Istī'āb*, vol. 4, p. 307; 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn

Athīr al-Jazarī, *Usud al-Ghābah*, vol. 6, p. 265; *al-Isābah fī Ma'rifah al-Sahābah*, vol. 7, p. 294; *al-Amālī lil-Tūsī*, p. 250; *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, vol. 1, p. 114.

55. Sadūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 78; *Kamāl al-Dīn*, p. 257; *Rawzah al-Wā'izīn*, p. 113.

56. *Sharh al-Akhbār*, vol. 2, p. 278; Muhib al-Dīn al-Tabarī, *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqbā*, p. 108; *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, vol. 1, p. 113; *Ihqāq al-Haqq*, vol. 4, pp. 26 & 346, vol. 15, pp. 197-308; vol. 20, pp. 340 & 348.

57. Ibn Abī al-Hadīd's *Sharh Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 13, p. 228; *Tārīkh Damishq*, vol. 42, p. 42; *al-Manāqib lil-Kūfī*, vol. 1, p. 284.

58. Refer to the article *Jāmi'iyyat-e Dīn* in vol. 10 of Collection of Papers on the Congress on Study of Jurisprudential Fundamentals of Imam Khumaynī.

59. Mufīd, a*l-Irshād*, vol. 1, p. 35; *al-Tawhīd*, p. 304; *al-Ikhtisās*, p. 235.

60. *Al-Istī'āb*, vol. 3, p. 206.

61. Sadūq, *'Ilal al-Sharā'i'*, p. 40; *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Rizā*, vol. 1, 205.

62. Mufīd, *al-Ikhtisās*, p. 283; Sadūq, *al-Khisāl*, p. 635.

63. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqāt*, vol. 3, p. 187.

64. *Al-Istī'āb*, vol. 3, p. 230.

65. *Sharh Ibn Abī al-Hadīd*, vol. 3, p. 98.

66. Refer to the books *Cheshmeh Kavir; Khilāfat wa Wilāyat az Didgāh-e Qur'ān wa Sunnat*.

67. *Al-Fihrist*, ed. Rizā Tajaddud, vol. 11.

68. *Al-Nihāyah*, vol. 1, p. 212; Shaykh 'Abbās Qummī, *Safinah al-Bihār*, vol. 2, p. 412; al-Tustarī, *Qamūs al-Rijāl*, vol. 6, p. 447.

69. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 35.

70. *Ibid*, p. 34.

71, *Ibid*, p. 39.

72, *Ibid*, p. 47.

73, *Ibid*, p. 34.

74. *Ibid*. p. 50; *al-Istī'āb*, vol. 3, p. 40; 'Atā was a *Tābi'ī* and a prominent exegete of Mecca, refer to Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, vol, 1, p. 318.

75. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 50; 'Abdullah bin Shabramah was a *Tābi'ī* and jurisprudent of Kufah, refer to *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, vol. 15, p. 76; *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, vol. 6, p. 347.

76. *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 49; *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, vol. 3, p. 12; *Tārīkh Baghdad*, Khatīb al-Baghdādī, vol. 12, p. 227.

77. *Sharh Ibn Abī al-Hadīd*, vol. 1, p. 19.

78. *Matālib al-Su'ūl*, vol. 1, p. 135.

An Historical Approach to the Development of Shi'ite Political Thought

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One of the distinguishing characteristics of the way the School of Ahl al-Bayt ('a) encounters the various issues and challenges that constantly arise in the social life of the Islamic community is its dynamic intellectual nature. The foundation of this intellectual dynamism is *ijtihād*. Throughout history, this element has protected the Shi'ites – as the followers of the Prophet's Household are called – from being imprisoned by the chains of dogmatism and reaction, and served to harmonise religious thought with man's latest discoveries in economics, political science, sociology, technology and culture. Although in a particular period the influence of the Akhbārī group, with its extreme opposition to *ijtihād* and its claim to sole reliance on *Akhbār* or textual narrations attributed to the Prophet and Infallible Imams, was about to deprive the School of Ahl al-Bayt of its dynamic essence, this dominance did not last long and the influence of that group was brought to an end by the Usūlis, who

base the development of ration and intellect on the fundamental
principles (*usūl*) of Islam. Thus, *ijtihād* regained its supremacy in
Shi'ite religious thought.

In the course of its development in the realm of political
science, *ijtihād* gave birth to four distinct periods in the history of
Shi'ite political thought. Although until the arrival of the twentieth
century few Shi'ite works dealing exclusively with political science
could be found, the inseparable union of the *Sharī'ah* and politics,
born out of the interdependence of the fundamental concepts of
Imamate (authority of the Imam or the divinely-guided leader after
the Prophet) and the concept of justice (*'adālat*), was during these
four periods and in the light of the dominant sciences of the age
and what were perceived to be its requirements, intermittently
discussed in the framework of various fields of scholarship.

In such conditions, political phenomena and fundamental
political concepts were treated in the course of time and in the
framework of different fields of learning. Thus, in Shi'ite scholarly
works, the possibility of an independent discussion of politics, in its
particular sense, was removed. In the course of time, political
concepts were affected by theology, *fiqh*, philosophy, ethics and
other branches of *hikmat* and lost their proper place in Shi'ite
thought. In order to have a better conception of the historical
development of this issue we shall briefly discuss the four
aforementioned periods.

First Period: Theological Dominance of Politics

In this period most political questions are discussed in the
context of theological concepts. Such fundamental theological
issues as vicegerency, the Imamate, *wilāyat* (God-given authority),
justice, predestination, free will, rational goodness and evil,
essential goodness and evil are considered as significant examples
of political questions. Because of this conception, the nature of
political power is discussed within the framework of theology and

politics is looked upon as being on the same level as the fundamental principles of Islam (*usūl al-dīn*).[1]

The question as to why certain great Shi'ite scholars include politics within the scope of theology is itself one of the little-understood aspects of Shi'ite political thought. It is undoubtedly the case that in this school the fundamental principle of the Imamate, beside the spiritual and essential station of the Imam and the fact that he is the medium through which divine grace flows into the world following the passing away of the Prophet (S), is not without its political dimensions. This is so, since the notion of government and the central concept of political power in Shi'ite doctrine revolve around the institution of the Imamate, which represents rational and effective leadership of society in all fields. In the view of Shi'ite thinkers, if the epistemological origin of the manifestation of Imamate is not doubted, its political origin is not either. Thus, if we accept the idea that in the doctrine that subscribes to the concepts of *wilāyat* and the rule of the Imam, the unbreakable union of Islamic sacred law and politics is the focal point of all political interactions, and that from the Shi'ite perspective, the leadership and rule of the Imam, as the continuation of the authority and leadership of the Prophet (S) is as theologically significant as the other principles of Islam, then the theological conception of politics in Shi'ite doctrine will, for the following two reasons, seem perfectly exact.

First Reason: Such a conception of political power has a fundamental reflection in political theory: "The rule and authority of the Imam is the continuation of the authority of the Prophet (S) and that authority is established by God and not by men. Furthermore, if something is the work of God, then it belongs to the realm of theology and not to that of *fiqh*. Since man has been created by God it follows that God must also appoint the ruler and lawmaker. Thus, when one speaks of Imamate, one is speaking of a divine activity, and since the field of scholarship dealing with

divine actions is theology it follows that the issue of Imamate is a theological one.[2]

From the above description it becomes clear that the issue of *wilāyat* as the fundamental element in political power is not one of imitation (*taqlīd*) as it is understood in *fiqh*. It is, rather, a question of personal investigation and realisation (*tahqīq*). In other words, in Shi'ite political theory the issue of obeying the divinely-appointed leaders of the community must be investigated individually by each believer and settled in the light of his intelligence, and religious and political awareness; the same intelligence that leads Muslims to investigate and obey the fundamental principles of Islam.

This issue is one of the most fundamental points of the different understanding of political power and religious leadership by the Shi'ites and the Sunnis. The Shi'ite conception just pointed out is accompanied by a dynamic conclusion that differs from what we generally understand in regard to the relative positions of the Sunnis and the Shi'ites concerning the issue of leadership. Most political theorists, on the assumption of the involvement of people's vote, tend to view the Sunni perspective on political leadership to be more democratic, progressive and rational than the Shi'ite viewpoint. However, if the question is considered in the context of the totality of the respective doctrines, then the opposite conclusion becomes more convincing.

The fundamental disagreement between the Shi'ite and the Sunni schools in the realm of political thought is that the Shi'ites include politics within the confines of theology, since the station of Imamate is established by God and not by men. Thus, they consider it among the fundamental principles of Islam (*usūl al-dīn*). Undoubtedly, in order for these principles to take concrete form on the social level they must be obtained through religious understanding (*tahqīq*), not religious imitation (*taqlīd*). The Sunnis, however, not only do not include the subject of imamate

among the fundamental principles of Islam, but claim that the basis of the question belong to the category of applications of the secondary religious principles (*furū' al-dīn*). They include it in the realm of *fiqh*, claiming that it is a mater of application and can be resolved by imitation. In his *al-Iqtisād fi al-I'tiqād*, Ghazzālī says:

> The issue of Imamate is not a significant rational question. It is a legal issue that has caused certain sensitivities. If an individual avoids getting involved in this question he shall remain spiritually healthier than a man who does so and realizes the truth of the matter, not to mention he who reaches wrong conclusions.[3]

Another Sunni scholar, Sayf al-Dīn Amudī (d. 551), surmises the following in his *Ghāyat al-Marām fi 'Ilm al-Kalām*:

> The issue of Imamate is not one of the fundamental principles of Islam. It does not even belong to the category of questions that every Muslim must address himself to and understand. In fact, avoiding this subject is preferable to immersion in it. This is so because dealing with it cannot be separated from selfish opinions and prejudices. It may even give rise to quarrels and adoption of a pessimistic attitude toward one's ancestors. This is so even when the investigator follows the right path. It is obvious that his situation shall be far worse if he loses his way.[4]

In *Sharh al-Mawāqif*, Mīr Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī is of the following opinion concerning the subject of Imamate:

> The discussion concerning Imamate is not one of the fundamental principles of religion, but rather belongs to the category of applications that deal with the actions of believers. The fundamental question here is whether Imamate is both rationally and legally necessary or only legally necessary.[5]

Taking into consideration the above examples, it becomes clear that the roots of the different stations in Shi'ite and Sunni thought must be sought in the fundamental beliefs of the two

schools, especially in Shi'ite thought where the nature of political authority and its limits are considered issues of faith.

Second Reason: Another result of maintaining that politics has theological roots is that when *wilāyat* is considered as a theological issue then this theology affects *fiqh* as well, and one looks upon all aspects of Islamic law from a theological perspective and regards even minor aspects of *fiqh* to be under a certain form of *wilāyat* and authority. In this manner, then, legal issues are organised and put into the proper framework. This indisputable fact has been emphasized by several prominent *mujtahid*s including Imam Khumaynī, the founder and theoretician of the School of Qum, who has repeatedly stated, in both lectures and written works, that if one examines Islam in its totality, it becomes clear that it includes politics as well and does not ignore the issue of political authority, execution and responsibility. This is so because Islam views *fiqh* and its problems from a theological viewpoint. For it should be kept in mind that the question of the purpose and ultimate aim of *fiqh* is a theological issue and not a legal one. Nowhere in *fiqh* proper do we encounter a discussion of the ultimate aim of the study of Islamic law. The study of *fiqh* is investigation of God's work and laws, and investigation of divine law is a theological rather than a legal matter.[6]

It is from such a perspective that the late Ayatullah Shaykh Fazlullah Nūrī ,the follower of the School of Sāmarrā, with all his might opposed the anti-religious innovations of those followers of the Constitutional Movement who, in the guise of furthering freedom, justice and the rule of law, had made review and investigation of the *Sharī'ah* their topmost priority, despite the fact that they lacked the proper mandate and authority to do so. His position in this regard was that Islamic law could not be subject to a public vote, but lay within the jurisdiction of jurisprudents. In reality, his struggle was against the position that, transferring God's

prerogatives to man, first turned *wilāyat* into caliphate and then caliphate into monarchy.

Second Period: Development of Political Thought in Philosophy

This period almost begins with the Occultation of the Imam of the Age ('a). With the advent of this period, because of the oppression and massacres of the Shi'ites by the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs theological aspects of politics are less manifested in the Muslim community. This loss is intensified by the physical absence of the Imam ('a). Politics is exiled from the realm of theology, where it was discussed in the light of Revelation, reason and narration, and becomes the prisoner of reason of the fallible human mind alone. The familiarity of Muslims with Greek philosophy, and especially with the methodology of Plato and Aristotle, had considerable impact on development of political thought along philosophical lines.

Relying upon rational principles and philosophical traditions, and as an application of practical reason, Muslim philosophers engaged upon various discussions in political thought and set forth various models of the perfect state. Such Shi'ite thinkers as Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Khwājah Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī are significant examples of the philosophical treatment of political issues during this period. One can point out such works as *Arā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāzilah* and *al-Siāsāt al-Madīnah* by Abū Nasr Fārābī, the "Politics" section of Abū 'Alī Sīnā's *al-Shifā'* and Khwājah Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī's *Akhlāq-i Nāsirī* as concrete examples of the development of political thought on the basis of philosophical ideas .

This period begins around 400 AH and continues until about 600 AH. During this period, political thought is to a considerable extent emptied of the concepts of *wilāyat* and Imamate, and the notion of religious government is replaced by the concept of the rule of reason in its philosophical sense.

Plato's concept of the philosopher-king and Aristotle's notion of the government of the wise seems to had a strong impact on the thinking of Shi'ite scholars of this period. Outstanding examples of this influence are Fārābī's theory of *ra'īs 'alā al-itlāq* (the absolute ruler) and Khwājah Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī's theory of *riāsat-i 'uzmā* or *riāsat-i afāzil* (the government of the most learned):

> *Ra'īs 'alā al-itlāq* is an individual who has no need whatsoever of a superior, possesses all knowledge, science and skill and whose soul is united with the Active Intellect.[7]

Khwājah Nasīr says:

> The perfect state is made up of five classes. Members of the first class are called the state administrators. These individuals possess great knowledge and wisdom. They have superior intelligence and power of discernment and profound insight into the true nature of all creatures and things. Thus, they are called the wise. The perfect government in such a state must have four characteristics. First, the perfect ruler must be present. The sign of the perfect ruler is that he must possess four traits: first, wisdom, which is the ultimate good. Second, perfect reasoning, which serves to lead to the ultimate goal. Third, a highly developed power of imagination and persuasion, which is a condition of perfection. Fourth, the power to fight, which is necessary for the defense of the state. His rule is called the government of wisdom.[8]

It is apparent that the thinkers just quoted have to some extent been influenced by the Platonic concept of the ideal state. This does not mean, however, that they have totally accepted this notion. It means, rather, that they have adopted it and applied it to political and religious thought.

Third Period: Development of Political Thought in *Fiqh*

During this period political questions are developed within the framework of such sections of Islamic *fiqh* as *jihād, amr bi'l-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar, qazā', umūr hisbah, wilāyat, wikālat* so on. This period begins around 700 AH and continues to dominate the political life of the Shi'ites until the middle of the 13th century AH. Unlike the second period, when political thought was imprisoned within the confines of reason of the fallible human minds and searched among the teachings and theories of philosophers to find a rational system on which to establish an Islamic government, and when politics was to a certain extent removed from the *Sharī'ah*, in the third period political thought turns away from philosophy and returns to Islamic teachings and doctrines. However, this time around, instead of being treated in its rightful and original place in *kalām*, it is placed in *fiqh* and regarded as an application of fundamental religious principles. Thus, *wilāyat* or the concept of religious and political authority and leadership, which was the main pillar of Shi'ite political thought, is confined to various fields of *fiqh*. This confinement, like the preceding rational one, is not entirely beneficial to Shi'ite political thought, since basic political questions that rightfully fell within the category of fundamental principles of Islam are now downgraded to the level of applications and the Sunni political viewpoint concerning *wilāyat* in practice influences Shi'ite thought. In a word, then, we can safely assert that in this period the issue of *wilāyat* is exiled from *kalām* and buried in *fiqh*. Even though this situation leads to the flourishing of legal arguments and proofs in support of the concept of *wilāyat*, it does not enjoy the vitality and dynamism that it deserves, because it is not considered in its proper place.[9]

If the elements of development, vitality and dynamism in *kalām*, philosophy and *fiqh* provided joy and satisfaction to Shi'ites

throughout their history and were the cause of fundamental changes and transformations in religious knowledge, this joy and satisfaction did not extend to the various dimensions of political science. The reason for this was that these developments not only did not result in concrete manifestation of the exalted Shi'ite epistemological theory concerning politics, but in practice hindered the formation of social movements by entangling the Shi'ites in a web of contradictory and shallow political viewpoints. It must be added that this judgement is based on the fundamental Shi'ite belief in *wilāyat* as the essence of politics.

Following the Saqīfah Banī Sā'idah meeting and the replacement of the concept of Imamate with that of the caliphate, Islamic political thought lost its vitality and dynamism and became a hostage of the ambition, selfishness, materialism and the lust for power of the caliphs and the political elite. From the Shi'ite point of view the obsession of the ruling elite with gaining and holding on to power denied them the legitimacy to govern the Islamic community and to establish a stable political system based on religious awareness. This was so, since throughout history the principle of *wilāyat* has lain at the core of all Shi'ite political theories, and in the process of its development, whether in *kalām*, philosophy or *fiqh*, the effort has been made to adapt the concepts of human dignity and social justice to this central principle.

For examples of the treatment of politics from the perspective of *fiqh*, one can point to *Narāqī's 'Awā'id al-Ayyām*, Muhaqqiq's *Sharā'i' al-Islām*, Muhammad Hasan Najafi's valuable work *Jawāhir al-Kalām*, Aqā Rizā Hamedānī's *Misbāh al-Faqīh*, Shaykh Murtazā Ansārī's *al-Makāsib*, the thoughts of Akhūnd al-Khurāsānī, Mīrzā Muhammad Husayn Nā'inī's *Tanbīh al-Ummah wa Tanzīh al-Millah*, and even *Dirāsāt fī Wilāyah al-Faqīh wa Fiqh al-Dawlah al-Islāmiyyah*.

Although every one of the perspectives set forth in the above mentioned works is in its own way a unique effort to delineate the

position of politics in the Islamic doctrine and prove its ability to establish a strong and stable political system, they are all limited within the boundaries of *fiqh*. Thus, the arguments set forth to prove the intrinsic unity of politics and the teachings of Islam are not based on the belief that this unity is a fact that is taken for granted, but rather on the idea that this unity is a preposition that must be proved by reliance on legal judgements and decrees. The difference between the fundamental principles of Islam and its applications is because of the fact that the truth of principles is accepted beyond the shadow of a doubt. Thus, if an investigator fails in his efforts to prove such a principle, this in no way negates the correctness of the principle in question. This, however, is not the case with applications. Here we are dealing with theories, arguments, controversies and disagreements. Here the investigator is either trying to prove a theory or a particular application of that theory. It is quite possible that a particular theory may be disproved as the result of such an investigation, giving its place to an entirely new theory. *Ijtihād* in Shi'ite *fiqh* is the fruit of such investigations and interpretations.

The above discussion helps us to appreciate the significance of the fact that *wilāyat*, as the central principle in the Shi'ite conception of politics, is included in the fundamental principles of Islam. When this is the case, then, its truth is not questioned and the investigator merely aims to apply the principle to all aspects of individual and social life. When, however, the concept of *wilāyat* is regarded as one of the applications then its very reality as something self-evident is in question, and the task of the investigator is to prove this. If he succeeds in doing so, he proceeds to work out its implications. It goes without saying that he may fail to prove his theory. It is this latter possibility that illustrates the fundamental difference between the perspective that regards *wilāyat* as one of the *usūl al-dīn* and the one that places it in *fiqh* and the applications of the fundamental principles of Islam.

The difference between the viewpoints mentioned above is like the difference between necessary and self-evident concepts on the one hand, and theoretical and acquired ones on the other.[10] An even better way to delineate the difference is to consider the contrasting manner in which theologians and philosophers try to approach the rational proof of God's existence. The theologian (*mutakallim*) presupposes the contingency of the world and then relies on different arguments to prove it, while the philosopher from the beginning addresses the fact of being and then considers its qualities and characteristics, such as necessity and possibility, eternity and contingency, and finally reaches the conclusion that God's existence is a necessity and the created world is contingent.[11]

Fourth Period: Return of Politics to Its Original Place in Theology

The fourth period in the development of Shi'ite political thought is the period of tumult of political theories. In this period the teaching and study of the doctrines of Islam leaves the confines of religious seminaries and is extended to such modern scientific and scholarly environments as universities and institutions of higher learning. The ideology and thought of modern civilisation challenges and disputes religious doctrines, and in response to these developments, the guardians of religious thought, relying on the elements of *ijtihād*, produce new interpretations of political thought. This new political consciousness proposes a new range of activity for Shi'ite politics extending from carrying out a supervisory role to ensure that the political system does not transgress divine laws, to gaining power to establish a political system based on Islamic religious doctrines.

The necessity to protect the *Sharī'ah* against the devastating and merciless onslaught of new philosophical, political and economic schools of thought waged in the name of modern culture and civilisation, and most important of all, the need to respond to

the ever increasing needs and requirements of Muslims in an age of modernisation and rapid scientific and technological advance forced Shi'ite scholars, thinkers and jurisprudents to produce a new understanding and interpretation of the teachings of Islam, an interpretation capable of reconciling modern culture with the essence of Islamic religious and political doctrines. Most importantly, it was imperative to ensure that this new understanding did not distort the true nature of Islamic teachings.

In the process of its development, the element of *ijtihād*, following its triumph over sectarian and decadent Akhbārī tendency, in a short span of time proved the incapacity of political *fiqh* to harmonise Islamic doctrine with modern culture. Just as in the distant past political *fiqh* had succeeded in disproving this very ability in political philosophy, had shown the limitations of a political perspective that upheld the sovereignty of human reason alone, and shattered the theories of the ideal state of Shi'ite philosophers, it, too, had now to succumb to the vital and dynamic movement of *ijtihād*.

Relying on clear and strong theological principles, *ijtihād* was about to revive the concept of *wilāyat* the essence of politics. Political *fiqh* had merely sought a place for the *Sharī'ah* within the political realm. The perspective, however, that believed in the supremacy of theology over politics believed that *wilāyat* belongs to the fundamental principles of Islam and is the source of the secondary principles or applications, even such important ones as the obligation to perform daily ritual prayers, fast and pay *zakāt*. Although this return was not without its heavy burden on Shi'ite political thought, it nonetheless gained spectacular results for all other fields of thought.

The outcome of the interaction of Shi'ite political thought with modern culture and civilisation and the onslaught of its ideology in the 20th century can, generally speaking, be found in two fundamental tendencies. Faced by these new developments,

some Shi'ite scholars and thinkers did their best to set forth a new interpretation and understanding of religious knowledge, an interpretation capable of accounting for modern discoveries and bringing them into harmony with the teachings of Islam. They sought to prove that the *Sharī'ah* is able to satisfy all man's needs in his social life in all historical periods and ages. Thus, in the effort to harmonise Islam with modern culture, innovation in the essence of the *Sharī'ah* is not only unnecessary but would contradict the philosophy of the prophetic mission of the prophets and the belief that Prophet Muhammad (S) is the last of all divinely ordained mssengers .

What this perspective upholds is a new and fresh understanding and appreciation of the *Sharī'ah*, not tampering with the teachings themselves, since Islam is a living and unchanging reality adherence to which ensures the continued life of the Muslim community. It follows, then, that acceptance of any form of innovation in the fundamental principles of this reality would contradict belief in the perfection of divine laws and the fact that Muhammad (S) is Seal of the Prophets. It would imply acceptance of the idea that Islam is imperfect and vulnerable to degeneration and decay. Those Shi'ite scholars and thinkers who belong to this tendency we shall designate as the "revivalists" of religious thought, and their movement we shall name the "revivalist movement."

From the viewpoint of the followers of this school, only those scholarly efforts can be considered revivalist in nature that are carried out by religious experts with the aim of deepening and extending their knowledge of the decrees and commandments of the *Sharī'ah*, in order to meet the needs of the times and in proportion to their aptitude and intellectual ability. Such scholarly and intellectual disputes as may arise in the course of these efforts are all beneficial ones that ultimately lead to the exploration and conquest of different fields of knowledge. It is as reward for their

labours that the Infallible Imams ('a) have prayed for divine blessings for these revivers of Islam:

> May God bless those who revive our commandments. If people realise the goodness of our words they will obey them.[12]

What is of critical importance in this school of thought is that the concept of revival here does not refer to religion itself, but rather to religious awareness and consciousness, since "the essence of religion is a living and immortal truth, just as it is fixed and unchanging. How could it not be alive when practising it enlivens and vitalises society and adherence to it is the water of life? If something were not alive never would adherence to it ensure the life of the community".[13]

In opposition to the revivalists, there has emerged a group of Shi'ite thinkers and so-called intellectuals who are trying to interpret the issue of adaptation of Islamic law to new developments in a totally different way. In their view many of the laws, decrees and rules of the *Sharī'ah* were made under specific circumstances and in a particular cultural and historical context. These conditions, in the opinion of this group, produce a crisis in the ability of Islamic law to satisfy the requirements of modern societies. The necessity to overcome this crisis makes what they call 'reform' imperative. Thus, according to them, reform does not in any way contradict the truth of Islam. On the contrary, they claim, it is a vital measure that ensures the survival of religious faith in the face of assaults by modern Western culture. Religion has no choice but to use modern science and mix with it. In this mixture, interview of this group, the only way to solve problems faced by modern society is by reliance on a dynamic and robust *fiqh* and the epistemology and methodology produced by modern civilisation. We shall name those who follow this supposedly intellectual tendency 'reformers' and their tendency as the 'reformist movement'.

Both reformers and revivalists have existed in the Muslim world for a long time. However, their disputes and controversies, both with each other and with other schools, sects and ideologies have reached noticeably high levels of intensity in the contemporary era.

During the last few centuries, a number of significant revivalist schools have emerged in the world of Shi'ite political thought. Experts universally accept the genuineness and integrity of these schools. Without exception, these schools have emerged among Shi'ite *'ulamā'* and the guardians of traditional *fiqh*. The 'reformist' schools, in contrast, have for the most part been rooted among the so-called Shi'ite intellectuals influenced by Sunni traditionalist and reformist movements and European reformist movements. In the reformist tendency, political schools, in the exact meaning of the term and in an independent manner, do not exist. The cause of this shortcoming may be sought in the manner in which followers of this tendency attempt to adapt the *Sharī'ah* to the social life of the Muslims and also in the nature of their understanding of the issues involved.

In the adaptation discussed above, reformism is greatly influenced by the epistemology and methodology of the culture and ideology produced by modern civilisation. The level of this influence is so high that in a short time the *Sharī'ah* is emptied of its original and real content. It is obvious that there is a difference between a school of thought that believes that religion contains the whole truth and a perspective that holds that it contains only part of the truth. He who believes that religion contains the whole truth attempts to have a very precise and deep understanding of its laws, commandments and decrees, since he must apply the *Sharī'ah* to all aspects of his life. He must find the answer to many of his political, social, economic and ideological questions in religion. The person however, who believes that religion possesses only some aspect of truth does not have to be either precise or deep. He

does not look for answers to all his questions since he has already found some of them elsewhere, from perhaps, non-Islamic and secular sources. However, because he is religious, he attempts to create concord between his two idols.

Such a thinker is like a man who is in love with two women. In the presence of one he acts in one way and in the presence of the other in another way. If he is unable to harmonise the two he will lose both. In the world of contemporary Islamic reformism this dualism and inconsistency is very much in evidence. During the early days of Islam also, this same inconsistency and inability to adapt the two was evident in the Sunni perspective that established the reformist tendency in Islamic religious thought. As a consequence, in a short time, the theory of caliphate, which was the first nucleus of reformist religious thought, degenerated into monarchy. The Shi'ite and Sunni intellectuals of the last century have also fallen into the trap of liberal, nationalist, socialist, secularist and even communist reformism. Concrete examples of this sort of entanglement on the part of Shi'ite intellectuals, particularly after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, can be seen in the establishment of numerous political parties, organisations and groups that, in their understanding and interpretation of religion, were highly influenced by the ideology of modern civilisation.

Notes:

1. For better understanding of this subject it should be kept in mind that, for purposes of study and investigation, Shi'ite scholars generally divide the teachings of Islam into three basic sections. The first section deals with beliefs. In this section truths that must be realised, accepted and believed in are discussed and analysed. These truths, such as the oneness of God, Prophecy, Resurrection, Imamate and Justice, must be realised and accepted by each individual independently and cannot be emulated from someone else. In the sacred law of Islam, these teachings are referred to as *usūl al-dīn* the fundamental principles of the faith. The

second section deals with ethics, and discusses man's psychological and spiritual traits and conditions, such as justice, courage, piety and so on. The third section deals with commandments and decrees and discusses such obligatory actions as ritual prayer, fasting, *hajj, khums, zakāt, jihād* and so on. In Islam these are referred to as *furū' al-dīn* or applications. The field of learning that investigates the first section is called theology, while the science dealing with the second section is called ethics, and finally the field of scholarship dealing with the third section is *fiqh* or law. Of course, this division applies to the teachings and doctrines of Islam and not what may be called Islamic sciences, such as literature, logic, etc., the pursuit of which is necessary for the study of the teachings. Moreover, this division is based on the particular dimension of man's existence that is being addressed by Islam. Thus, those teachings that relate to man's thoughts and rational faculty are categorised as 'beliefs,' those that address man's personality and psychological traits are grouped under the title of 'ethics' and those that deal with man's actions are known as *fiqh*. In other words, the total doctrine aims to guide man to true felicity by giving him instruction in three dimensions: his relationship with God, with himself and with society.

2. For further study refer to 'Abdullah Jawādī Amulī, the Role of Imam Khumaynī in the Reconstruction of the System of Imamate, Keyhan-e Andīheh, no. 24 (Khordād and Tīr 1368 S)

3. Abū Hāmid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazzālī, *al-Iqtisād fi al-I'tiqād*, Cairo, Maktabah al-Jundī, 1393AH, p. 234.

4. Sayf al-Dīn Amudī *,Ghāyah al-Marām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*, p. 363.

5. Mīr Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī, *Sharh al-Mawāqif*, Qum, Manshūrāt Sharīf al-Razī, vol. 8, p. 344.

6. Jawādī Amulī.

7. Abū Nasr Muhammad Fārābī, *Siāsāt-e Madīnah*, tr. Sayyid Ja'far Sajjādī, Tehran, Intishārāt-e Anjoman-e Falsafah Iran, 1358 S, pp. 156-157.

8. Khwājah Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī, *Akhlāq-e Nāsirī* ,Tehran, Intishārāt-e Khwārazmī, 4th print, 1369 S, pp. 285-286 .

9. This is an expression that Ayatullah Jawādī Amulī uses in the article already cited.

10. One of the reasons, unfortunately, for the confusion that has arisen in this regard is the failure of certain eminent Shi'ite scholars to distinguish two fundamental principles in political theory. In one case the issue is whether there is a need for a government at all, while in the second case the necessity for a government is accepted and the argument is about who should rule. The disagreement between the Sunni and the Shi'ites is of the latter variety. There is general consensus among reasonable and thoughtful men and the scholars and thinkers of all religions and schools of thought that government is a necessity. What is the source of disagreement among men and separates different schools of thought from each other is the question of who should govern.

11. *Mabānī-ye Fiqhī-ye Hukūmat-e Islāmī* (*Dirāsāt fī Wilāyah al-Faqīh wa Fiqh al-Dawlah al-Islamiyyah*), translated and edited by Fazlullah Salawātī, Tehran, Intishārāt-e Kayhan, 1367 S, 'Government and State,' vol. 1, pp.189-190.

12. 'Abdullah Jawādī Amulī, *Sharī'at dar Ayeneh-ye Mar'ifat*, Tehran, Markaz-e Nashr-e Farhangī Rajā', 1372 S), p. 398.

13. Ibid.,

What Is Society?
The Theory of Martyr Mutahharī

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The Four Theories on the Existence of Society from the Viewpoint of Martyr Mutahharī:

The initial part of the fifth chapter of the book *An Introduction to the Islamic Worldview* is dedicated to a discussion on society and its existence. In this discussion entitled *History and Society*, Martyr Murtazā Mutahharī has provided an answer to the question "Does society have a real existence?" This query has occupied social thinkers for a long time, to which, many of them have either implicitly or explicitly provided answers. While some of these thinkers have substantiated their answers with various kinds of reasoning and analyses, yet others have contented themselves with extracted evidences leading them to simply assume that society does have a real existence and have concluded their discussions on the basis of this assumption.

In this paper, although we do not intend to discuss the impact of the answers to this question on the science of sociology, however, we cannot ignore its vital role as the basis for further explanations of the various social issues.

The various theories regarding the existence of society are divided into two basic categories. According to the first one, society is not considered as having an existence, independent of its individual members and their actions and deeds; while the second one grants society an independent and exclusive existence of its own. In each of these two categories, one can find diverse outlooks as regards the "what" and the "how" of the existence of society.

At the onset, Martyr Mutahharī illustrates four different theories regarding the existence of society. While the first two theories fall under the initial category, the third and fourth come under the second category.

1. According to the first theory, society has no real existence and it is nothing but a web of relationships and interaction among human beings.

2. According to the second theory, society is an abstract entity or an artificial device that does not imply the formation of an actual entity that can be labelled as "society". It rather refers to the collective presence of individuals and their interaction or the responses of individuals to each other in which the common collective outcome as one single body cannot be referred to in the same breath as individual efforts, although the contribution and the overall impact of each individual cannot be disregarded. The basic assumption is that there exists in a society – as there presumably exists in a machine or an organism – a functional interdependence of the parts of the whole, all operating in a coordinated manner, seeking or maintaining an equilibrium.

3. According to the third theory, society is a true structure. What is meant by a true structure is the formation and existence of a new reality that is distinct from its formative elements. A true structure can be visualised as having various forms. In some of these structures, the various components can only be abstracted and discovered through a conceptual analysis and such structures are referred to as "exterior structures"; which means that their various

components can never actually be found separately and independently of each other. We could refer to the example of the quality of whiteness and blackness, both of which fall under a common category viz. colour, and also share a specific quality, that gives rise to the appearance of whiteness or blackness. Inorganic elements, too, fall under this genre since it is impossible to externally or independently perceive them without their manifestation within a three-dimensional structure, which in turn, is composed of the numerous source elements that give it its characteristic identity. This means that one cannot externally perceive any "thing", that according to the old natural sciences, does not fall under the categories of elements like water, earth, wind, etc., or that according to the modern sciences, is not composed of energy or which cannot be found among the 104 elements of Dmitri Mendeleev's *Periodic Table*.

Plants and animals are such true composites, the abstracted parts of which can, under certain conditions be independently perceived. For example, a tiny speck of earth that is absorbed by a plant; or a sperm that develops into a living animal, that in the course of its journey, acquiring new perfections and new inherent properties (*sui generis*) gives birth to a new reality or leads it into a new dimension of truth.

In this category, even though a dissociation of the various parts of a composite is possible under certain conditions, however, once a new entity that is comprised of these isolated parts takes form, its various components do not possess an identity or a being that is distinct and separate from the main entity and it is for this reason that some philosophers have spoken about the unity of the combination of their parts. In some other composites, despite the existing unity between the various parts, it is also possible to perceive a certain kind of independence for the individual parts. For instance, a human being who is a fusion of body and soul and is yet a true single being. The human body, prior to being infused

with the soul, traverses through various stages of perfection, and then after attaining the perfection of the soul, the body which is the material part of this being, comes under the supervision of the soul which is itself non-material, and works in unison with it, transforming with the changes and developments within the soul.

Those who advocate that the existence of society is distinct from that of its components and have yet thought of society as a true entity cannot possibly suggest that the existence of society is a type of a structure whose various components cannot be distinguished, except in a conceptual manner. This is because it cannot be denied that the independent existence of individuals, and as a matter of fact, their existence prior to the formation of society, can be recognised with objects of sense experience. The independent existence of individuals, that constitute the material element of society, is so obvious and apparent that it leaves no room for denial.

The third theory that Martyr Mutahhari illustrates, as regards the existence of society, suggests both a true as well as an independent structure for society, such that its individual members develop the capacity to acquire new properties as a result of mutual interactions and exchange, and following this fusion with the new properties, a new entity that results in a new phenomenon called society comes into being. Despite the fact that these new properties do effect a tangible change even among the individual members, however, unlike the various kinds of inorganic elements they do not undergo a physical union with the main organism, but rather merge with the lives and the souls of the people.

As regards the merging between individuals and the new properties, that gives birth to a society, Martyr Mutahhari writes:

"Just as an intercourse or association between physical elements results in the birth of a new phenomenon or in the words of philosophers, 'just as physical bodies, as a result of interaction and intermingling are endowed with the potential to give birth to a new

phenomenon, the parts of which continue their life journey with a new identity', similarly, individual human beings too, each possessing an innate potential as well as the potential they acquire from nature, enter into social life, fuse spiritually with each other, and acquire a new spiritual identity that is referred to as the collective conscience. This fusion is natural and is unique in its own kind... when we speak of the fusion between society and the individual, we are talking about a real fusion, because actual intermingling and exchange takes place, and the various constituents of this fusion that are the same individual members of the society, attain a new identity. However, by no means does the diversity transform into oneness."[1]

4. According to the fourth theory, society has a true existence. However, the difference from the third theory is that according to that viewpoint, the existence of individuals precedes that of society and it is society that finds its identity as a result of the social interaction and the responses of individuals to each other, such that whenever the social behaviour of the individuals changes, their unity with the collective conscience as well as their social identity alter. But, according to the fourth view, it is not possible for the identity of individuals to precede the identity of the society. Martyr Mutahhari explains this viewpoint in the following words:

"Prior to their social existence, individual human beings are devoid of a human identity; they are like empty bodies with the potential of receiving the collective conscience. But for their social existence, human beings are mere animals that only possess the potential for humanness. And being human involves human sentiments, human intellect and thought, human emotions, and finally all those feelings, desires, inclinations, thoughts, and emotions that are an intrinsic part and parcel of being human and are only attainable within that collective conscience. And it is this collective conscience that permeates the empty body and grants the person with a personality... As per this view, sans a social

existence and social awareness, man would not possess an individual human psyche and individual psychology."[2]

The discussion thus far has shed some light on the four theories elucidated by Martyr Mutahharī as regards the independent existence of society. The first two theories fall under the category that in fact denies the existence of society, while the next two theories come under the category of those who have accepted the existence of society. The views of the first category are referred to as "Individual-Oriented Theories" while those of the second category are referred to as "Society-Oriented Theories". However, it is possible to group these four theories within a single spectrum, as illustrated hereunder:

The first theory that looks upon the individual as being all-important, is located at one end of the spectrum and tends to drag sociology down to the level of social psychology. Conversely, the fourth theory that lies at the other extreme of the spectrum, tends to grant an all-important status to society, as a result, converting psychology into sociology. Evidently, many other divergent theories could also be formulated within the two poles of this spectrum, although they would all really be invalid. One example could be the view that society is a true structure, the composition of which can only be conceptual. These types of structures are called "exterior structures".

Evidences Proving the Existence of Society in the Opinion of Ayatullah Mutahharī

As mentioned initially in this discussion, since the approach adopted by human beings in respect to the existence of society affects their social views, and since each view in turn is affected by its owner's interpretation on the existence of society, thus, all those who have presented their opinions on social views have either

implicitly or explicitly adopted a particular viewpoint on this matter.

Classical sociology was initially based on views that considered a distinct existence for society. For example, Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim stressed on the true existence of society as being distinct from individuals. In his book *Le Suicide*, Durkheim inclines towards the fourth view and in his classification of sciences, Auguste Comte does not include psychology.[3] In the concluding years of the 19th century, Max Weber, the German sociologist, denied the existence of society as an independent reality and suggested that sociology is the study of meaningful behaviours and the attitudes of human beings.[4]

Among the Muslim scholars, too, two views either direct or indirect can be found as regards the existence of society. Some of the writings of Khwājah Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī and Ibn Khaldūn suggest an existence for society. Moreover, according to Khwājah Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī, social science basically deals with a study of the body that comes into being as a result of community living.[5] Ibn Khaldūn, too, has made reference to the study of society in his works as an independent branch of knowledge.[6] However, one cannot find an explicit and independent discussion about the existence of society in the works of these scholars, rather some of the discussions put forward by Abū Nasr Fārābī and Tūsī, clearly indicate that their focus was mainly on the actions and behaviour of individual human beings and the system arising from the commingling of their actions and behaviour.

In the works of mystics and in their theories on various historical periods, lucid references have more often been made to those theories that accept the independent existence of society as a whole.

From among the Muslim scholars who have palpably and equivocally supported the idea of the independent existence of society have been 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī and his illustrious student

Ayatullah Mutahhari. However, this theory has also confronted the criticism of some other scholars and thinkers.

This research aims at presenting the views of both sides and subsequently entering into a critical evaluation of the reasoning offered in favour of and against belief in the existence of society.

It is quite possible that those who profess an independent existence for society, as being distinct from its individual members, do not put forward any reasoning in support of their views and only through drawing comparisons between society and man, do they present their stance as a hypothesis, on the basis of which they tend to analyse social issues. In such a case, the hypothesis presented, runs parallel with the other hypotheses that do not advocate an independent existence for society. And so long as there is a lack of adequate proof and evidence for either proving or disproving any of the rival theories, it would be impossible to discuss the validness or the invalidity of any of them.

All existing phenomena and realities are either evident or theoretical and it is possible to perceive them either through reasoning or through the senses. Many of them, like colours and flavours, are perceived through the sensory organs. It is through these senses that man distinguishes, for example, the colours black and white or the flavours sweet and salty.

Man is aware of the reality of his own existence as an undeniable truth and as that being different from tastes, colours, etc. and he thinks and perceives with the help of the various senses that operate directly and without depending upon any theoretical reasoning or other mediums. On the other hand, he recognises or proves other phenomena theoretically and with the help of speculating on their signs. For this purpose, man sometimes resorts to tangible objects and proofs while at other times, he relies upon intangible and intellectual means. The quiddity of substance is from among such realities that can be proved only through intellectual means. If it is not possible to perceive the existence of society

through the senses or the intellect, it must essentially be proved through reasoning, failing which, it would remain only a hypothetical idea. The reality of society is undoubtedly imperceptible through the senses making it impossible to consider it as a sensible phenomenon. On the other hand, the human intellect cannot possibly perceive its reality in the same way that it perceives the reality of human existence, without the help of a means of perception. However, in this case, what can be observed with the physical eye are its human members, their behaviour, interactions and their social responses. The question then is: On what basis can it be claimed that besides human beings and their behaviour, there exists a reality that could be called society? And if it is not possible to perceive that reality through the external senses in a palpable manner, is there then any means through which the human intellect could possibly admit its existence and know it and describe it?

On observing various sensible realities, the intellect endorses their existence or presence only when it finds it irrefutable – like human existence – or when it finds certain indications that cannot be attributed to familiar realities. The existence of substance, which is different from derived essence, is a phenomenon that the intellect can perceive with the help of senses or through sensory organs. And the various types of substances, too, can be proved in this way. When man observes the indications of a reality that cannot be fitted among the elements and objects known to him, he confirms the existence of a new reality.

The co-ordination and homogeneity of structures and systems within diverse elements and objects bear witness to the existence of a single truth operating within the diversity. Let us refer, for example, to the body of an animal that comprises numerous organs and cells and yet there exists a constant co-ordination and homogeneity among its entire system, which is also transferred to its subsequent generations. However, this system of co-ordination

and homogeneity differs from species to species. Considering this distinction, the intellect perceives the presence of a specific reality, unique to each species and thus confers reality to each species based on its very own distinguishing feature. This reality is a unique one, and although it cannot be perceived through the senses as in the case of colour, tastes, and sounds, however, the homogeneity and co-ordination among individual species testify its existence, and through it man can get a glimpse of that reality. One of the ways of proving that society is a reality, beyond and independent of its individual members and their actions, is through presenting and proving the existence of certain characteristics in society that cannot be attributed to its individual members. This is the method that was adopted by Martyr Mutahharī and his teacher, 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī.

In his famous exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān, *al-Mīzān*, 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī organises his reasoning on this subject, in two different parts. The first part focuses on proving the possibility of the existence of society and the second part focuses on the reasoning as regards its existence. While initially elaborating on various types of structures, the 'Allāmah refers to a typical structure whose various components retain their characteristics, in spite of having the capacity to take on a new form with a new corresponding set of rules and new indications. Man, too, according to him falls under this category. Thereafter, on the basis of this similitude, the 'Allāmah deems the relationship among the individuals to be the basis for the formation of a new reality.[7]

Subsequently, on the basis of laws, rules, and characteristics that are exclusive to society and which cannot be attributed to its individual members, the 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī reasons out the independent existence of society. According to him, the presence of laws and rules that are characteristic of society are obvious and irrefutable realities. Moreover, the manifest presence of certain characteristics and rules or their prominence is quite distinct from

the evidence or the obviousness of the existence of society itself. After claiming an independent existence for society and its obvious and discernable features, the 'Allāmah resorts to certain relevant evidences from the Glorious Qur'ān and states:

> It is for this very reason that in the Qur'ān, expressions like existence, death, book, intelligence, understanding, action, obedience and sin are used in connection with the *ummah*.[8]

Ayatullah Mutahharī, too, takes the same above-mentioned course in his reasoning. As stated earlier on, by referring to various types of structures, he informs us about the possibility and probability of the existence of society as having one of the various mentioned forms; and then stresses that if society has a true existence it invariably should have its own specific laws and rules.[9]

Moreover, he too, quotes certain Qur'ānic verses that attribute a set of laws and rules to society and writes:

> The Glorious Qur'ān stresses that communities and societies, by the very virtue of being what they are (apart from their individual members) have their own laws and rules; and rise and fall on the basis of those laws and rules.[10]

After validating the possibility of the existence of society and providing reasons to prove the same, Ayatullah Mutahharī corroborates the free-will of man, his potential to withstand the forces of social trends, and the various innate aspects of man's being while refuting the theory that considers individuals as subordinate to society. In this manner, subsequent to proving the actual existence of society – the common factor between the third and the fourth theories – Martyr Mutahharī validates the third theory that also guarantees an independent existence for individuals. He elaborates on the characteristic feature of the third theory in the following words:

If we happen to accept the third theory, firstly, since society has its own existence, independent of the existence of its individual members – although this collective existence is not separable from the existence of the individual members – it has its own independent laws and rules that need to be recognised; secondly, the members of society that comprise individuals, relatively lose their independent identities and take the shape of an organised body, while at the same time maintaining their relative independence simply because individual life and man's innate predisposition as well as acquired traits do not entirely dissolve in collective existence. As a matter of fact, according to this theory, man lives a dual life, with twin souls, and a dual self: the first is the inherent human life, soul, and self, which are the offsprings of the evolution of the substance of nature; and the second is the collective life, soul, and self that are the offsprings of man's social life, which has permeated his individual self. Therefore, the laws of psychology as well as those of sociology are both applicable in respect to man."[11]

While providing Qur'ānic evidences in his *al-Mīzān*, 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī, presents the following seven verses:

"And for every people there is a term, so when their (appointed) term comes they shall not remain behind the least while, nor they shall go before." (7:34)

"...every people shall be called unto its Book" (45:28)

"Thus We have made fair seeming to every people their deeds" (6:108)

"... of them are a people who are moderate (acting upright)." (5:66)

"... of the people of the Book there is an upright party; they recite Allah's communications all along the night ..." (3: 113)

"... and every people schemed against their apostle that they may seize him, and they disputed by means of the falsehood that they might trender into nought the truth, therefore I seized them; how was then My retribution?" (40: 5)

"And for every people (was sent) an apostle; so when their apostle came, the matter was decided between them with justice..." (10: 47)

After quoting the above-mentioned verses, 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī writes:

It is for this reason that at the time when the books of history did not record anything beyond the lives and times of kings and famous nobles, the Qur'ān rendered equal importance to both, the history of nations and the life-accounts of individuals; and in fact it gave more importance to the history of nations.

He also reveals one of the characteristic features of society – which is the same as the one highlighted by Durkheim – while proving the existence of society, in these words:

It is a precondition to what we have referred to earlier, that social forces and characteristics prevail over the individual forces and characteristics; in the same way that the faculties of sense and experience prevail over those of action and reaction. When a group and group will are in question, especially as in times of social turmoil or external hostility, the personal preference of no individual member of society can afford to oppose and contradict it. Therefore, there is no choice but to move in favour of the interest of the whole, such that personal opinions and desires are superseded by that of the whole; and of course whatever befalls the whole, befalls its parts; and in this manner, the widespread panic in times of calamity like defeat in war, lack of security, earthquake, famine, cholera, or in other less important issues like customs and communal dress code, coerces the individual to move along with

the majority, in the process, stripping it off its faculties of isolated thinking and reasoning.[12]

The most important rationale presented by Durkheim as an evidence for the existence of society resembles the one stated above. According to him, the fact that society has the power to withstand isolated individual interests bears testimony to the independent existence of a reality called society. The expression of this power is sometimes external, in the form of punishments and rewards, and is at other times internal, in the forms of self-discipline or self-control, revealing itself in an overwhelming manner vis-a-vis individual desires and preferences. Durkheim believes that the duality that forms within human nature is the outcome of the process of socialisation and the presence of a collective conscience within of the individual identity of man. [13]

Durkheim employs yet another rationale to prove the independent existence of society. The previous reasoning was bolstered by resorting to those characteristics and laws of society that are not attributable to individuals; but this particular reasoning, employs the distinctiveness of laws that are prevalent within society – those statute laws and rules that are present in society and which form the social structure, like civil laws and codes of conduct. These laws, unlike the traditions that prevail over society are not integral in nature, but nevertheless, provide order and homogeneity to social behaviour. Durkheim believes that the formulation of these laws cannot be attributed to individuals because these laws exist prior to individuals. If individuals had formulated these laws, they would come into existence after the individual, whereas, every individual becomes aware of these laws, only after being born and in fact at times, even needs to consult legal experts in order to understand them.[14]

However, certain fundamental flaws within Durkheim's second rationale, have prevented 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī and Martyr Mutahharī from referring to it, because although an individual may

have gained awareness of social laws after his birth, but since they existed prior to him, they obviously had to be the products of the will, the desire, and the acceptance of the people living before him. In other words, the formulation of laws prior to the existence of an individual, or of all individuals, is no reason for implying that their formulation has taken place by some force other than that of the people living earlier.

The rationale put across by 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī and Ayatullah Mutahharī including the specific point that argued the presence of a very special feature for society, viz. its power to withstand isolated individual interests – a feature also acceptable to Durkheim – could only be refuted if it were possible to attribute such distinct social features, including the one just mentioned, to personal and individual source or sources. Interestingly, all those in disfavour of the existence of society as an independent reality have also resorted to the same line of argument. In other words, they tend to analyse expressly social characteristics and features within of the paradigm of individual action and behaviour. Max Weber and others who divert their attention from macro sociology to micro sociology fall under this category.

There are certain passages in the works of Muslim thinkers like Fārābī and Khwājah Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī that tend to reduce sociology to the level of a science that only studies the actions, responses, and the behavioural patterns of human beings. Fārābī defines civil wisdom and the knowledge of society in the following words:

> When social philosophy, investigates into issues like responses, traditions, and volition it generates general laws and also defines the boundaries of social customs and norms appropriate to different times and situations and describes them and the causes of their origin as well as the methods of measuring them.[15]

The focus of the above definition is on human responses, traditions, and volition; however, it should be noted that in the

works of thinkers like Fārābī and Khwājah Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī no more direct reference is made in this regard except hinting that the existence of society is the result of the will and awareness of human beings.

Serious discussions regarding the existence of society among Muslim thinkers began only after the initiative was taken by 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī. Although significant enquiry regarding the existence of society began in the history of Western thought only after the introduction of the philosophy of Hegel and then came to be included in the ambit of sociology - emphasised upon by the founders of classical sociology like Auguste Comte and Durkheim − it however, gradually came to lose its foundations of reasoning and rationale and turned more into a theory or hypothesis that, as a main issue, is itself either accepted or rejected. Among Western thinkers, the most serious endeavour was made by Durkheim, in order to make this issue a dialectical one among sociologists. However, his ideas were received with little rationalism, the reason to a great extent, being the decline in the presence of rational and ontological thinking in the Western schools of thought.

Owing to a powerful presence of ontological debates in the field of Islamic thought, more particularly after the attention given to ontological discussions on subjects like society in the works of 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī, it is expected that vast new fields will open up for discussions and deliberations on this subject.

Ayatullah Misbāh Yazdī's Critique on Martyr Mutahharī's Views on the Existence of Society

In his famous book, *Society & History,* and in many of his other works, Martyr Mutahharī expounded and elaborated on the views of his teacher, 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī, consequently drawing the attention of many Muslim thinkers, towards this subject. This interest also brought in a number of views, both in favour of, and against the ideas of Martyr Mutahharī and 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī.

Ayatullah Misbāh Yazdī, who has been a student of Martyr
Mutahharī, is also one of his critics on this subject and has
presented his counterarguments in his classes on "Qur'ānic
Studies" *(Ma'ārif-e Qur'ān)*.[16] According to Ayatullah Misbāh, the
reasons presented thus far in favor of the independent existence of
society are incomplete; and in his opinion, the characteristic
features attributed to society are simply a segment of the
characteristic features of the responses and behaviours of the
members of society.

During the course of his classes, Ayatullah Misbāh presented
four arguments in favour of the existence of society, of which the
third and the fourth rationales can be used in reference with each
other; and that in fact, fall in line with the views of Durkheim,
asserting on the powerful impact of society on the individual as
well as the power of society to supersede individual interests. In
reality, this rationale is in a way, a proof of the existence of society
through one of its special characteristics. Ayatullah Misbāh's book,
Society & History from the Qur'ānic Viewpoint, refutes the views
of Marty Mutahharī, in the following words:

> There is no doubt that in the course of social life every
> individual more or less encounters certain forces and pressures and
> is therefore compelled to act in ways, contrary to his innate desires.
> But the question is: Where do these forces and pressures originate
> from? Thus, employing one's energies in proving the existence of
> these elements and resorting to relentless rhetorics on its
> characteristics are not any answer. The fact is that these forceful
> elements do not belong to some monstrous being called society.[17]

> "It is true that social phenomena cannot be changed easily and
> with mere will power, but the very fact that they hold the power to
> resist the will of the individual only implies that they are, in turn,
> influenced by the will of the rest of the members of society. In no
> way does this allude that there is something called 'society' that
> does not comply with the will of the individual and resists it...

What this kind of reasoning can prove is only the effects of mutual responses and interactions of the members of society, which is an undeniable fact. The impact and influence of the members of society on an individual, no matter how strong or deep, does not grant us the permission to consider the common body of individuals as real.[18]

The above-mentioned refutation nullifies the discussion which talks about the effects, laws, and rules that are specific to society. When these specifics are proved to be unacceptable, the rationale that argues the existence of society, too, collapses. On this basis, if the supporters of the theory validating the existence of society could present some social features that could not be attributable to individuals, or if they could through some other means, prove the independent existence of society, they would then remain immune from this objection.

Ayatullah Misbāh, under his third and fourth arguments that are in line with the views of Durkheim, forwards yet another objection. According to this objection, one can never claim that life in a society strips the individual of his free-will and choice and compels him to act against his free-will. In contrast with the previous objection, this second one does not negate the actual argument of Martyr Mutahharī, and in fact, it merely invalidates the view that considers the individual to be under the whole and complete influence of society. In other words, this objection can only be valid in case of the fourth view but does not nullify the third view that concedes some independence to the individual.

A third objection can be inferred from some of the passages of Ayatullah Misbāh's above-mentioned book, which if validated, nullifies the third theory presented at the onset of this discussion. Moreover, not only does it nullify the theory of the independent existence of society, but it also refutes the very possibility of the existence of society as an independent reality. This third objection is that according to Ayatullah Misbāh, it is impossible for there to

exist for man, a dual life, with twin souls, and a dual self, viz. individual and social. In his own words:

> If these claims are only metaphorical or allegorical, as in poetic usage, then there is no objection to them... But if these kinds of claims are supposed to imply that every individual literally has twin souls and a dual self then they are completely unacceptable. Man's self is an absolute indivisible unit that, in spite of its complete indivisibility, has numerous stages, powers, and potentials. Therefore, the belief in the actuality of two souls and two identities for an individual is completely absurd and invalid.[19]

A Critical Evaluation of the Objections

If we hold the above objection as valid, then the first part of the argument of 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī and Martyr Mutahharī, regarding the possibility of the existence of society becomes invalid; and consequently, it proves that the independent existence of society as argued in the third theory is an impossibility.

Three objections have been explained thus far and each one of them has its own impact. The first objection eliminates the rationale that takes the support of some exclusive features for society, like social influence on the individual, to prove its point. The second objection is against the transformation of the existence of society as claimed through the fourth theory; while the third objection is against the third theory. Since even 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī and Martyr Mutahharī do not accept the fourth theory, the second objection does not involve them; rather, Martyr Mutahharī, too, employs a similar objection to refute the fourth theory.[20] Thus, it is important at this point to assess the validity of the first and the third objections. The first objection cannot be taken very lightly since what is mentioned as the influence that society tends to hold over the individual, could also be attributed to the collective beliefs and behaviours of the other members of society and could partly be attributed to the beliefs and thoughts held by

the individual himself. Therefore, first of all, it becomes difficult to prove that the above-mentioned collective beliefs and behaviours possess an identity over and above that of the individual as well as the members of a society; and secondly, to bear out that, that identity belongs to the same reality which is referred to as 'society' or the 'collective conscience'. Thus, until there is lack of sufficient evidence to substantiate the claim it would not be possible to make a categorical statement, basing it on mere conjecture.

The important point is that the first objection, despite its strength, has quite a limited impact because this objection only negates the prologue to one of the rationales put forward to prove the existence of society. It does not, however, eliminate the other rationales, and if fresh arguments were to be presented, it would become possible to defend the claim for the existence of society.

However, the third objection considers the existence of society as a reality commingled with that of the individual to be an absurd and indefensible theory. And thus, it deems any argument in favour of the existence of society as inconsistent and flawed. Despite its general and comprehensive effect, this objection is not as powerful as the first one. The third objection is actually aimed towards the explanation presented by Martyr Mutahharī of the third theory. In that explanation, Martyr Mutahharī goes on to refer to the presence of two souls and two identities (self) in man, which is similar to Durkheim's argument about the presence of two consciences within of man.[21] According to the third objection, the presence of two souls or two identities in a single person is impossible. This objection would hold valid only if the argument were regarding the presence of two independent souls and two independent identities, distinct from each other; however, if "two identities" mean "two stages of a single reality", then the objection would dissolve. The point of the matter is that a similar objection is also raised against the belief in the presence of the "human soul"

(*nafs insānī*) as comprising the mineral/vegetative (*nafs nabātī*) *and the* animal souls (*nafs haywānī*).

In his book, *al-Asfār al-Arba'ah* (The Four-Fold Journeys), Mullā Sadrā – the great Islamic philosopher and thinker -- quotes four views as regards the human soul and its inclusion of organic forms, the mineral/vegetative soul, and the animal soul[22]; as presented hereunder:

1. Mullā Sadrā attributes the first view to the myopics and the short-sighted. According to this view, man comprises a natural form and three souls – mineral/vegetative, animal, and human. This view cannot possibly maintain the oneness of the personality of man and thus contains many flaws.

2. According to this view, the reality of man is the same as his rational soul while the other stages of the soul only serve as its tools and faculties, without any share in its reality. This view is mainly held by the peripatetic philosophers but is rejected by Mullā Sadrā.

3. According to this third view, man possesses a single identity that, on the basis of: a) the actual existence of the self; b) skepticism in the existence of the self; and c) the evolution in the substance of the self - travels upwards from the lowest point and after acquiring organic, mineral/vegetative, and animal forms; reaches the rational and intelligent stage of man.

On the basis of this view, the human soul is a unique reality that, with it own efforts and endeavour, gains supremacy over all the lower stages that reveal themselves as his manifestations. This view means that the soul, by retaining its uniqueness, includes all the other faculties; but it does not imply that these faculties are external to his being, so as to serve as tools and instruments, nor does it mean that these faculties are realities other than man's own.

4. Mullā Sadrā is of the opinion that the fourth view comes from the tradition of the men of insight. This view is discussed within the purview of theoretical mysticism (*'irfān-i nazarī*). We

shall, however, refrain from entering into further details regarding this view, lest our discussion gets too lengthy.

It is possible to discuss other views, similar to the views given above, regarding the social identity and the "I" of man and its relationship with the individual identity. Man, who traverses the path of perfection with a new movement commencing from the lowest point, on gaining to perfections in the animal stage and with the acquisition of personal and individual distinctions, can attain other perfections which also cover his social identity. It is at this stage that he attains to the level of the collective self or conscience. In the same manner as the different parts of the body, on receiving their partial and personal identity yet retaining their distinctive features, come under the wrap of the soul and gain a single unique identity called man; different people, too, in this same manner, after obtaining a common collective spirit or identity, while still retaining their personal and individual characteristics, unite into a bigger reality and play their own special role at various levels of that unique reality.

If the relation between the individual self and the social self is supposed to resemble the relation between the animal self and the human self – as stated in the first view - the third objection would be applicable, because in this case two diverse realities are put besides each other, and in spite of the lack of any unity between them, are one. But if the relation between the individual self and the collective self is as stated in the third view, in this case, they would be considered as two stages of the same reality and thus, the third objection would not be applicable. In such a case, the third objection is only applicable to some discussions about the relationship between the individual and the society while other discussions remain immune from it.

With the elimination of the third objection, the path would be paved for defending the views of 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī and Martyr Mutahharī, because although the rationale that relies on the impact

and influence of society over the individual in order to prove the validity of the independent existence of society gets flawed by the first objection, the horizon still remains clear for other rationales.

A Critical Evaluation of the Qur'ānic Evidences Indicating the Existence of Society

Besides putting forward his own rationales as regards the existence of society, in his *al-Mīzān*, 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī has also sought the support of some Qur'ānic verses that grant certain laws and rules to society. Similarly, Martyr Mutahhari, too, has followed in his example and has taken the help of some verses from the Divine Book in order to prove his argument.

In his book, *Society & History from the Qur'ānic Viewpoint,* Ayatullah Misbāh has also critically evaluated these Qur'ānic evidences. However, before entering into a discussion on this evaluation, it is necessary to make a brief reference to the method of using referential evidences and the limits of their implications.

Referential evidences are sometimes used to validate practical laws and regulations, and are also employed for gaining an understanding of objective realities. While arguing the validity of practical laws and in the absence of conclusive evidence, hypothetical conclusions may be resorted to, because it is possible to act upon hypothesis or inference; and rather, a major portion of human behaviour is based on inference and supposition that is reinforced by intellectual and hypothetical evidence. However, the use of referential evidences for the purpose of understanding objective realities and their practical laws is only valid when the quoted references open up the way for a certain level of conviction, failing which, the contents of the evidence will not provide anything more than a mere hypothetical understanding; and resorting to hypothetical proof for gaining an understanding of the world has no real value.

Verses from the Glorious Qur'ān that are presented as proof for indicating laws and rules pertaining to society, fall under the category of referential evidences; and the inferences obtained from these evidences - in this case, despite their doubtless origin – are not textual but are only ostensible. When we use the term "textual" we are implying to the kind of unanimous verbal evidence, the interpretation of which does not leave room for dispute; whereas the word "ostensible" connotes that there is scope for difference of opinion. Metaphorical terms or phrases could be considered as "ostensible". Thus, with reference to our discussion, in such case that there is a possibility for dispute over the meaning of the contents of a verse or verses, it could be said that these verses have been used metaphorically. The verses of the Glorious Qur'ān that concern society and the nation/community *(ummah)* and their corresponding laws, find their true meaning in their manifestation; thus, as long as there is the possibility of providing intellectual and referential evidence as proof of the metaphorical nature of their meaning, their sense can be considered as being of a metaphorical nature. Therefore, so long as the verses are not proved to be metaphorical, their reality is based on their initial manifestation. And when this manifestation conveys a message that commands some action, it makes action obligatory; but in such cases that it lacks a practical message, only a hypothetical and an inferential message can be extracted from it.

From the above discussion, one of the important impacts of the third objection to the existence of society, as quoted earlier, is revealed. If this objection holds true, i.e. if society is proved to be prone to a rational transformation, then as a logical proof, the objection prevents the manifest interpretation of the verses to imply the existence of society and its laws, rules, and characteristic features. However, since this objection holds valid only in the case of some of the discussions regarding the existence of society, and only applies to that form of society, which does not guarantee a real

union between the personal "I" and the social "I", and moreover since some of the other discussions on the existence of society are immune from this objection, therefore, there can be no objection to the manifest interpretation of the verses and even to the Prophetic Traditions that have been quoted on this subject.

In the book, *Society & History from the Qur'ānic Viewpoint,* Ayatullah Misbāh divides the verses that can be interpreted as an evidence for the existence of society into six categories. Of course, with the explanation that: "some of the verses contain matters that perhaps in their initial appearance allude that the nation has effects and laws, independent and distinct from those of its members; and besides, there are special laws applicable to every individual, and each nation, too, has its own specific laws and rules; which makes it imperative that from the Qur'ānic point of view, the nation should have a true reality."[23]

The first category contains those verses that attribute a specific action and behaviour to each *ummah.* For example: *"And of those whom We have created are a people who guide with the truth and thereby they do justice."* (7: 181)

The second category includes verses that prove the presence of intelligence, understanding, perception, a specific mode of thinking, and a scale of judgment in different nations/communities; an example being: *"Thus have We made fair-seeming to every people their deeds..."*(6: 108)

The third category comprises verses that regard nations/communities as being deserving of reward and punishment, just like individuals. The example: *"And for every people (was sent) apostle; so when their apostle came, the matter was decided between them with justice and they shall not be dealt with unjustly."* (10: 47)

The fourth category consists of the verses that assert a specific "life" and "death" for each nation. One of those verses is:

"*No people can hasten their (fixed) term nor can they postpone (it).*"(23: 43)

According to Ayatullah Misbāh, this fourth category of verses, includes the most explicit powerful reasons employed by the Muslim advocates of the independent existence of society.

The fifth category includes the verses that affirm the presence of resurrection and the calling to account of every *ummah*. The Qur'ān states: "...*Every people shall be called unto its book...*"(45: 28)

The sixth and final category comprises those verses that attribute the behaviour of an individual member of society or the action of a generation to the entire society, as if there existed a general thinking and a common will and a collective conscience. An example is the attribution of the responsibility of the slaying of the camel, collectively, to the *Thamūd*; the verse: "...*And hamstrong her, therefore their Lord crushed them for their sin and levelled them (to the ground).*"(91: 14)

The biggest objection that has been raised against the interpretation of most of the above verses is:

> According to us, the best point to verify that the *ummah* has no objective existence and that it is in fact nothing but the coming together of individual human beings, is that in these verses all the actions have been attributed to the plural masculine subjects and not to the feminine singular subject, thus indicating that the actions are done by each and every member of the *Ummah* and not the *ummah* itself, as an independent real entity.[24]

The explanation for this objection is that although in these verses, reference has been made to the *ummah*, however, when the characteristic features, actions, or the effects of the *ummah* are mentioned, they are attributed to the members of the *ummah*, by virtue of the use of the plural pronoun. Thus, in the Glorious Qur'ān, no action or feature has been directly attributed to society, so as to be able to surmise that it has an independent existence;

therefore, we could say that society can be regarded as a subjective concept, the idea of which has been inferred from the total presence of its individual members, the unified structure of which has no actual reality so as to create a new entity called society.

To contradict this objection, it could well be argued that although in some of the verses, characteristic features, actions, or effects have been attributed to the members of the society by virtue of the use of the plural pronoun, however, in the same verses as well as in other verses, the same features or other features too, have been attributed to the *ummah*. For example, the verse: "*And of those whom We have created are a people who guide with the truth and thereby they do justice* (7: 181), initially, talks about the creation of the *ummah* by Allah and then attributes "guiding towards the truth" to the members of the *ummah* by virtue of the use of the plural pronoun. Similarly, verse 47 of *Sūrah Yūnus*, makes a reference to "apostle sent to the people" and in the same verse, gives the news of the arrival of the "messenger for the members of the *ummah*". Also in the verse: "*No people can hasten their (fixed) term nor can they postpone (it)*" (23: 43), "term" has been addressed to the *ummah* by employing the feminine pronoun as also the lack of being able to "hasten" it, which too has been attributed to the *ummah*, while "nor can they postpone it" has been addressed to the members of the *ummah*. Similarly, in the verse: "*And for every people there is a term, so when their (appointed) term is comes they shall not remain behind the least while, nor shall they go before*", (7: 34) "the term" has been attributed to the *ummah* and then "remain behind the least while", has been directed at the members of the *ummah*.

Therefore, in these verses, just as some realities like "creation" and "not being able to hasten their term" are attributed to the members of the society, they are simultaneously also attributed to society itself, thereby proving the existence of a reality called society.

An explanation of the objection raised by Ayatullah Misbāh would be that the Qur'ānic attribution of some of the actions and effects to society and the *ummah,* is not literal but is in fact of a metaphorical nature, the reason being that after attributing an effect or feature to society, the same effect or feature has also been attributed to the members of the society, whereas one feature or action cannot be attributed simultaneously to two entities. Thus, the attribution of these features and effects to society and its members bears witness that those features and effects are in reality related to the people and the individuals that give rise to a subjective concept called society; and since the existence of society is merely abstract, the attribution of features and effects to it, in reality, refers to its members and its individuals.

An Answer to the Critical Evaluation of the Qur'ānic Evidences

The answer to the above objection is that the attribution of an action or effect to the members of society can be inferred as being metaphorical only when the simultaneous attribution of an action or effect to both, society and its individual members, is not rationally possible. It is not possible to attribute the same action or effect to two different subjects or things only when they are completely independent of each other and are parallel to each other. However, if those two subjects or things are in alignment with each other or when they are in a real amalgam, or when they have emerged as different stages and manifestations of a single, unique reality; in these cases, it is possible to consider both of them as the effects of the same cause, without the causality of one being a barrier to the causality of the other. Similarly, the effect can be truly attributed to both of them, just as the actions, the powers, and the various stages of the human soul, can be attributed to the soul itself and the actions and the effects of the creations, can at the same time, be attributed to Allah Almighty. In some of the verses of the Glorious

Qur'ān, Allah attributes an act to His creation, while in some other verses, He attributes the same act or effect to Himself, without implying that the attribution of that act to His creation, makes the act metaphorical, in relation with Allah.

If there is no rationale against the attribution of features and effects to things that are in alignment with each other, then there is no reason to infer that the attribution of actions and effects to society in the Qur'ānic verses is simply metaphorical. And the referential evidence, that made use of the second part of the above-mentioned verses, that has been referred to in the objection, too, cannot provide a reason to ignore the evident meaning of the first part of the verses. Rather, the initial manifestation of the verses cannot be ignored or refuted and the apparent meaning of the verses indicates the reality of the independent existence of society and life, death, and resurrection for it; in the same manner as it does for the members of the society.

Although the *ummah* that comes into being as a result of the commingling of its members has its own unique and specific reality, however, its existence and reality is not separable from the existence of the individuals that give rise to its existence, and its effects and actions in the natural world does not become manifest in the absence of peoples and individuals. For this very reason, while its actions and effects are attributed to it, they are actually performed at the hands of the individuals who, with their own desire and free-will, give rise to those actions and effects. In his *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Imam 'Alī ('a) says:

> "They have made Satan the master of their affairs, and he has taken them as partners. He has laid eggs and hatched them in their bosoms. He creeps and crawls in their laps. He sees through their eyes and speaks with their tongues. In this way he has lead them to sinfulness and adorned for them foul things like the action of one whom Satan has made partner in his domain and speaks untruth through his tongue."[25]

If it is possible for Satan to gain dominance and authority over people who make his commands the criteria for their lives, such that he sees through their eyes and speaks through their tongues, then it is possible to attribute the action of those who have willingly accepted the *wilāyat* and guardianship of Satan, simultaneously to Satan too; without in the least implying that the attribution of the acts to Satan, dissolves the individual's responsibility and willing participation. Moreover, those who submit themselves completely to the will and guardianship of Allah, attain to such divine proximity that Allah attributes their actions to Himself; and for this reason, in many cases when an action takes place at the hands of man, it could be attributed to the realities that are associated with his existence and that have found a kind of union and oneness with him.

With the elimination of the aforementioned objection, the evidence of the existence of a reality called the *ummah* as inferred from the Qur'ānic verses, remains valid, so long as there is no logical rationale to prove otherwise.

In the book, *Society & History from the Qur'ānic Viewpoint*, after enumerating the six categories of the Qur'ānic verses, Ayatullah Misbāh, also raises objections other than the one already discussed; all of which, too, are not reliable as logical rationales to refute the third theory on the independent existence of society. Rather, some of these objections are improbable and some of them are applicable only to certain assumed forms for the existence of society. For example, after enumerating the first category of the Qur'ānic verses, besides raising a common objection, Ayatullah Misbāh also raises a second objection, in these words:

> How can one accept that, for example, a group of Christians and Jews who, simply because they spend nights in vigil, offer supplications, enjoin good and forbid from evil (*al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*), and do good deeds, have commingled and united with each other in spite of being scattered throughout

the world; and in spite of the lack any kind of connection and relationship in their daily affairs, although they are not even aware of the existence of one another? How can it be possible to accept that a single, personal soul rules over the assortment of such peoples, having them all under its control and management?[26]

As stated earlier, this objection is, firstly, very improbable and is no reason for proving the existence of some sort of unity among the *ummah* of Prophet Moses ('a), or the *ummah* of Prophet Jesus ('a), or the *ummah* of the other prophets ('a); secondly, this objection would hold true only in the case that the oneness and the commingling happens at the physical level of the human beings; but if, as stated by Martyr Mutahharī while explaining the third theory, this oneness and commingling takes place at the level of the soul, thought, and ideals, then this objection would weaken out still further.

Thirdly, a true integration is not subject to self-awareness and an acquired knowledge about the elements that serve as the substance for the presence of a new form.

Conclusion

From what has been discussed, we learn that although the logical and the empirical rationales that have been presented by 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī regarding the independent existence of society lack the required strength and power and are subject to objections, however, whatever they have stated about the possibility of the formation of society is immune from any objection. And the referential evidences presented by employing the verses in their literal sense, generally, prove the very existence of society. Notwithstanding the fact that this kind of reasoning does not go beyond the literal meaning of the verses, and as long as there is no independent rationale to refute the existence of society, there is no reason to refrain from accepting their apparent meanings.

In the recent years, other discussions have been presented on the views of 'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī and Martyr Mutahharī, that have to be dealt under another conversation. In some other works, further criticisms have been dealt out to Martyr Mutahharī's argument, all of which can be proved to have fundamental and basic flaws. Through some of his discussions, Ayatullah Jawādī Amulī, too, has endeavoured to traverse a new path for proving the validity of the independent existence of society. Moreover, transcendental philosophy, too, has the potential to present logical rationales as regards the existence of society. In case it is possible to present an independent rationale in favour of the existence of society, the Qur'ānic verses in their apparent sense, will support such a rationale.

Notes:

1. Murtazā Mutahharī, *History & Society*, pp. 18, 19.

2. *Ibid*. pp. 19, 20.

3. Rosck, Joseph and Daren, Roland, *An Introduction to Sociology*, Translated into Persian by Behruz Nabavī, and Ahmad Karīmī, p. 334.

4. Ferund Jolin, *Max Weber's Sociology*, Translated into Persian by Abdul Husain Nīkgohar, p. 121.

5. Khwājah Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī, *Akhlāq-e Nāsirī*, p. 255.

6. Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, Vol. 1, p. 69.

7. Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, Vol. 4, p.96.

8. *Ibid*.

9. Murtazā Mutahharī, op. cite., p. 26.

10. *Ibid*. p. 29.

11. *Ibid*. p. 27.

12. *Al-Mīzān*, vol. 4, p. 47.

13. Emile Durkheim, *The Dualism of Human and its Social Conditions*, tr. by Charles Blend, ed. By Curt H. Wolff.

14. Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method.*

15. Abū Nasr Fārābī, *Ihsā' al-'Ulūm*, 5th Chapter, *'Ilm Madanī.*

16. Classes on Society and History held in the year 1985.

17. Muhammad Taqi Misbāh Yazdi, *Society and History from the Qur'ānic Viewpoint*, p. 77.

18. *Ibid.*, p.79.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

20. Murtazā Mutahharī, op., cite., p. 33.

21. Emile Durkheim, *Distribution of Social Work*, pp. 151-152.

22. Muhammad ibn Ibrāhim Shirāzi (Mullā Sadrā), *al-Asfār al-Arba'ah fī al-Hikmah al-Muta'īliyah*, Vol. 9, pp. 13-143.

23. Misbāh Yazdi, op. cite., p. 91.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

25. *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon No. 7.

26. Misbāh Yazdi, op. cite., pp. 93-94.

Theology of Environment

By: Dr. Sayyid Mustafā Muhaqqiq Dāmād

Among the fundamental teachings of divine religions is to ensure the health and safety of the natural environment. It is part of belief that on the eve of creation, the Lord had taken pledge from man not to wrought corruption and ruin in the earth for which he had forsaken the heaven. Man pledged not to betray this trust, i.e. the proper maintenance of this pure and pristine earth. He was forewarned by God against the repercussions of not upholding this trust. However, it seems mankind in its insatiable greed for exploitation of the nature went back on its pledge, oblivious of the disaster that was about to unfold.

Humanity's attention to this matter and the insidious calamity that has befallen it, seems to be an entirely modern issue. The crisis of the natural environment is the main issue that preoccupies us today. The rapacious and cruel approach of the modern man towards nature in his wanton quest for raw materials has caused pollution on land and in the sea because of such factors as oil spill

and the cutting down of forests. First it was hunting for trophies and then followed commercial exploitation of wildlife and sea animals, factors which have made even the melodious chirping of beautifully feathered birds a rare sight today. In the seas a variety of colourful fish as well as the largest living creatures on our planet, the whales, are being pushed to the point of extinction. The result of this unsystematic technological progress, which has released hazardous greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, has been global warming and thinning of the Ozone layer which keeps away the sun's dangerous ultra violet rays from the earth.

The consequences, it seems, have finally roused man from the stupor of dereliction and opened eyes and ears to the task of environmental protection. Hopefully, it has moved stony hearts and thawed frozen consciences in order to find solutions to the price which humanity is paying for this untenable lifestyle and the domineering and monopolistic attitude of those who run the big governments and who consider any other form of life on earth other than themselves as quite insignificant. If serious measures are not taken, mankind, and that includes the exploiters themselves, will reach the point of no return.

The crisis of the environment is the result of turning a deaf ear to the call of divine messengers and religious leaders. For centuries the voracious nature in the human made him oblivious of his pledge to God. He failed to rein in his animal instincts or tame his cruel heart in the blind pursuit of pleasures, joys and exploitation of others. The Holy Qur'ān drawing the picture of erring humanity, says in this regard:

"...*they have hearts wherewith they understand not, and they have eyes wherewith they hear not. They are as cattle; nay, they are more astray...*" (7:179)

Man finally fell victim to his own folly and saw his life turn miserable as a result of his misdeeds. To quote the Holy Qur'ān:

"Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of that which man's hands have wrought..." (30:41)

Now it seems humanity is going through the first moments of awakening from slumber. It is still rubbing its drowsy eyes, the very eyes that had been closed in heedlessness for centuries. Fortunately, today, environment scientists and experts are not the only one recognising the enormity of the situation. There is a kind of growing public reaction and popular protest all over Planet Earth. This should be considered promising; for I believe that until this important issue is understood by all and the dangers threatening humanity are not publicly discernible, the cries of a handful of people such as the 'green groups' will not reach anywhere and will not result in the ultimate solution, i.e. a popular mobilisation of humanity. Otherwise the issue will remain buried within conference halls and academic papers. In solving the problem, what is of paramount importance on which everything else depends, is to make the masses of humanity aware of the magnitude of the crisis. Then all that remains is to find the root cause and to pinpoint the aching nerve in order to devise a sound and logical solution in conformity with the natural and pure disposition of human beings.

Fortunately, individuals and groups campaigning for protection of the environment have sprung throughout the world. Green groups have significant presence everywhere these days. Thousands of articles and books are being written and numerous screenplays and films are being produced. Yet the sheer enormity and gravity of the situation is such that these efforts might go to nought if practical steps are not taken to find the remedy for this cancerous ailment. What is the mystery behind this? It seems that the riddle of the failure lies in ignoring the causes and pursuing the consequences. The need of the hour is to tackle the issue in a

fundamental way and reach its roots instead of providing tranquillisers to a patient suffering from a chronic and infectious cyst. A Persian poet best illustrates the condition:

'*Elāji namā kaz delam khun nayāyad,*
                    Sereshk az rokham pāk kardan cheh hāsel?

(Find me a cure for no blood comes forth from my heart,
What is the use of wiping tears from my face?)

A major portion of the efforts by environmental activists is merely in the form of environmental engineering. Instead of solving the problem they are merely maintaining the problem itself. One group claims that if we could completely transform our means of transportation and eliminate fossil fuel as a source of energy, the problem would be totally solved. Another group states that there are parts of the earth that are still untouched and man must abandon the polluted areas and move into virgin areas to breath free of corruption and pollution. While appreciating the efforts made towards better care of the environment through use of more rational means of production, transportation and similar matters, and acknowledging the fact that there should be a constant and thoughtful drive towards more useful and appropriate alternate forms of technologies, we believe that in spite of their scientific nature these accomplishments alone do not hold the key to the final solution to this problem.

The question still remains that why the living habitat of humanity has become so unpleasant? Why the situation has reached a point that a group of persons – now that they have polluted a part of Planet Earth – wish to leave that place and go somewhere else so that they repeat the same catastrophic experiment in that place? What is the primary solution? Could an alternative be conceived that could reconcile man with his natural

environment, so that he would refrain from merciless exploitation and live peacefully by embracing nature and its clean and pure air and listen to the refreshing hymns of birds and fish?

The reality is that the root cause of the crisis in the modern times should be sought in man's view and interpretation of his natural environment. In other words, the main problem is in the epistemology and worldview of mankind itself. We hold the view that the one-eyed or blind track scientific approach which is devoid of any spiritual perspective of the world, is the main factor for the destruction, ruin and pollution of the environment. In the modern lexicon, science has replaced faith and has become the object of worship of human beings. It was the French scientist Auguste Comte who first said that the course of human knowledge has three stages: 1) Divine or Godly, 2) Philosophical or Dialectic, and 3) Scientific. He said, at the divine stage the human being attributed all affairs to the Will of God and the supernatural. At the philosophical stage, he claimed the human mind became capable of experimentation and abstraction and attributed the natural affairs to the powers that were unseen but their effects were visible. At this stage, according to Comte, man sought the actual cause or the final cause for natural events. In the third or the scientific and investigative stage, surmised Comte, imagination and rationality became means of observation and experience, and existence of a thing was accepted only when it could be sensed and observed. He believed that humanity has passed through the first two stages and has now reached the third stage. In his opinion, no longer would man fruitlessly pursue things that are of no use for him, and would only deal with matters that would benefit life.

In the last years of his life, Auguste Comte felt a sort of tenderness in his heart and upon the basis of his philosophical ideas established a creed called Religion de l'Humanite (Religion of

Humanity). He accordingly built a house of worship and devised a series of rites, saying that nowadays no creed would be acceptable and followed unless the scientists of the age accept it. The scientists, he said, have left behind the divine and metaphysical stage, and any creed that they could accept on the basis of conviction and faith must inevitably conform with empirical science. In another words, science is the future religion of human beings. Comte then added that modern science could only accept and worship a unified being, and that being is humanity which is above all things and creatures, and in which all individuals, of both the past and the future, are members, and have contributed to the progress and prosperity of the human kind. This entity, he named Le Grand Etre (The Grand Entity) and considered it the object of worship. He then appointed himself as Le Grande Pretre (The Grand Preacher) of his creed. In Comte's 'religion of humanity', worship does not mean servitude, rather it means nurturing and nursing.[1] At any rate, the gist of his ideas was that the future religion of human beings should conform to science.

Auguste Comte's prediction was not so whimsical as it appears, for in recent centuries, science has become the great icon and the absolute object of veneration for human beings. No, not even an object of veneration, but a jealous deity who wants to stand aloof in the modern pantheon with suspicion and disregard for the smaller deities which are at times considered sacred by its worshippers. Science is thus a lifeless, soulless icon which mercilessly cuts down, spirituality and ethical values, without bothering to ponder on their convictions, because of the reason that they do not bow before it in abject submission. In other words, in this weird world, spirituality, ethics, philosophy whether natural or metaphysical, have no place unless they carried the seal of approval by science. Modern science is not a peculiar method of

knowledge about nature, but rather a thorough and encompassing philosophy that reduces all realities to the material level of functions and phenomena, and under no conditions it is willing to acknowledge the existence of what it likes to call 'unscientific viewpoints'.

The truth is rather different than the phenomena of modern science and the miseries it has brought for mankind. The views of time-tested and time-honoured doctrines are much broader. While not denying the legitimacy of science as a limited matter confined to the material dimension of realities, they maintain the existence of a network of inner relationships, that link the material nature to the realm of the divine, and connect the outward appearances of the visible objects to an inner and invisible reality. The confinement of the realities of the universe to their material scope by modern science has caused scholars, especially in the West, to ignore the more important inner causes, thus resulting in the environmental crisis that we are experiencing today. Humanity sought refuge in science in order to escape from hardships and to attain a better and more comfortable life; but the very science that came to interpret the natural habitat of humanity by totally ignoring the spirit and the soul, made man to make his world more constrictive and painful, and estranged him from the inner and spiritual concepts of the natural world. According to the Holy Qur'ān:

"And whoever turns away from my reminder, for him is surely a straitened life..." (20:124)

Science that was supposed to be man's companion and sympathiser, became his nemesis and according to the famous Persian poet Shaykh Muslih al-Dīn Sa'dī of Shīrāz:

Shod gholāmi keh āb-e juy ārad;

Ab-e juy āmad wa gholām bebord

(A servant went to fetch water from the stream;
The water of the stream took the servant away)

For the urban man, modern science has made the realm of nature into an object devoid of meaning. It has secularised the existence and separated it from the Divine Splendour. It is not a mirror whose beauties reflect the beauty of righteousness. Moreover, the natural world has come to lack any kind of cohesion and harmony with the human being. Man considers himself apart from nature and is estranged from it, thereby becoming a stranger that lacks any kind of sanctity. If there is any sanctity, the modern man maintains it solely for himself. Thus modern man does not look compassionately at nature. He simply has a material and exploitative view. Nature is not his beloved nor does it have any meaning for him. It is no longer seen as his life companion towards whom he feels responsible while enjoying its company. Rather to the modern man, nature has become a harlot who should submit to his carnal desires but towards whom he feels no responsibility or duty. The result of such wanton exploitation has gradually robbed nature of its beauty and reduced it to the position of a hag eking out its final days at the mercy of its exploiters. It has become so old and impaired that it has fallen from grace and seems no longer deserving of a face-lift.

However, through its interpretation of nature, modern science has unwittingly helped to unlock the secret and the mystery buried within the environment as well as within the inherent nature of man. By nature, human being is an entity that seeks to dominate and control all around him. He wants to dominate and transgress the world of nature as well. Many western philosophers and even some Muslim scholars, are of the opinion that man, unlike what the ancient Greeks said, is not civilised by nature. Rather he is an aggressor by nature and exploiter of nature. The English

Philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was convinced that man is by nature always at war and that he maintains the right of preservation only for his own self.[2] He said:

> By nature man is selfish and egotistical. He is motivated by selfish desires that need to be satiated and fulfilled. In its natural state, man's life is an arena, ugly, horrid, cruel, savage and short.[3]

Among present day Islamic philosophers, 'Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā'ī believes:

> Man has a relationship with his own faculties and parts. This relationship was brought into existence and is real. Hands, feet, eyes and other parts of his body are undeniably controlled and used by him. Man has the very same relationship with nature outside his being; essentially considering all external objects and even other human beings for his own, i.e. he considers them as his tools. He looks at all external matters, whether inanimate, animals, and even plants with a view towards their employment (or application).[4]

'Allāmah Tabātabā'ī believes that man is by nature an aggressor and exploiter, and that ethics is a secondary tenet for him. In another words, man is not civilised by nature, rather he is civilised by circumstances and imitation of others. What Aristotle meant by "man is civilised by nature", is that it is the secondary nature and not his primary nature to become civilised. In short, the human being is naturally disposed to confront nature and dominate it to the best of his ability and to exploit it for his own selfish goals and enjoyments. In fact, modern science has totally justified this concept for him by de-sanctifying nature, and as a result there remains no spiritual attachment for him to the high mountain ranges, boundless oceans and the heavens. Rather, it seems their majesty and grandeur annoys his domineering and arrogant

disposition and by scaling and conquering them, he merely wants to deprive them of their awe and make them lie prostrate at his feet.

No longer does the modern man in the Christian World who worships at the altar of science aspires for the spiritual flight towards the 'Kingdom of the Heavens' as illustrated in the Italian poet Alighieri Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The same is true of the worshipper of science in the Muslim culture, whose spirit is devoid of the nightly flights to the heaven as examplified by the physical Ascension (*Mi'rāj*) of Prophet Muhammad (S) to the pinnacle of the heavens. In contrast what has made him proud is the conquest of the mountain peaks, the journey into outer space and the dream to set foot on other planets. He sings the hymn of victory over nature and celebrates over its ruins. So successfully has modern science de-sanctified nature, that regrettably even the religious persons too have lost their divine and sublime feeling towards nature and its importance. Eliade wrote:

> The cosmic exhibition and the mystery of nature's involvement as in the 'Drama of Christianity', has become unattainable for Christians living in a modern city. Religious experience is no longer applicable to existence, since in the final analysis this experience is totally private and personal. Salvation is an issue concerning only man and his God. At the most, man might feel that he is responsible not only towards God, but also to history. However, in this (Man-God-History) association there remains no place for the universe and the creatures within it. From this perspective, even to a true Christian, it appears that the world is no longer the work of God.[5]

We must admit the fact that a striking neglect about this factor is visible among the custodians of religions in general, including Christian theologians, and especially Protestants. In the recent centuries, most of them while discussing important

theological points on the subject of man and history, have focused on the issue of salvation and emancipation of man as a separate and single entity. For instance what is seen in the works of the contemporary theologian, P. Tilich, is merely apprehension before God about the human being as an individual who is detached and disconnected from the world around him. Works by Barth and Bruner suggest as if an Iron Curtain has been laid around the natural world. They believe that nature cannot teach man anything about God, and therefore is of no theological or spiritual value. R. Bultman's works have generally ignored the importance of the spiritual and divine dimension of nature, and have brought it to the level of a synthesised and artificial entity necessary for the life of the progressive man.

Unfortunately the Christian churches and religious institutes of the West as well as the Islamic seminaries in Muslim countries, did not show much reaction to this vital issue in the recent decades. In spite of the abundance of sources on this subject in both Christianity and Islam, they did not embark on compiling separate books entitled Environmental Divinity [or Theology] in order to direct man towards the spiritual aspects of the world of nature around him. The silence of religious centres and the lack of serious scholarly works in this field had deteriorated the situation to the point that during the 20th century, the teachings of divine religions, instead of showing the lead took a back seat and borrowed the ideas of others. As a result they are being reprimanded as the accused party.

In the works of certain modern day non-religious writers who seem to be obsessed with the environmental crisis, a major portion of the blame for the ruin of nature and environmental pollution has been laid at the doors of Unitarian religions, instead of holding responsible for this crime against humanity the internal

developments of the Western civilisation itself that had started after the Renaissance and culminated in the unethical exploitation of the natural resources in the farthest corners of the globe by colonialism. For instance, British historian and philosopher of the last century, Arnold Toynbee, has come up with a weird and controversial hypothesis on the philosophy of history, and the periodic rise and fall of civilisations. He says that the Unitarian religions have unwarrantedly spoiled man more than he deserves, by teaching him that God has created the world for him and that everything in it belongs to him including mountains, seas and plains which are the means of achieving a better life, and that he can do whatever he desires. This way of thought, Toynbee claims, has led mankind to wantonly exploit nature.[6]

Such thinkers ignore the fact that Islam which like Christianity and Judasim, belongs to the Unitary creed of the Abrahamic faith, has never lost its mindfulness towards the sacred character of nature. Later on, we will focus on *āyah*s of the Holy Qur'ān which express the sanctity of nature. We shall also see how Christianity and Judaism in the East, unlike what we see later in the West, had never taught nor promulgated the exploitation and ruin of nature. The statements of Toynbee and other western scholars are thus pure allegation. The teachings of Unitary religions are not the cause of the environmental crisis, rather these teachings are the only way out of the present quagmire in which modern civilisation seems to have been trapped.

At any rate, in the closing decades of the 20th century, amid the joy and rapture of conquering and controlling the nature, mankind has awakened from its false pride, and begun to realise that its victory, has in fact vanquished humanity which is gasping for breath in the ruins surrounding it. Fortunately, at least the majority of thinkers today believe that the very essence of the

existence of man is under threat because of his misuse of science and technology in the blind pursuit of power and authority. It is now time for mankind to revise its general view of the world of nature. According to Schoen:

> It is no longer human reason that determines what is man? What is reason? What is Truth. Rather it is the machine that determines these subjects using physics, chemistry and biology. Under these conditions, man's mind and thought is more than ever dependent upon the 'space' that has been created by his knowledge, and made him in turn the creation of science and machines.[7]

Yet, in spite of the consciousness and alertness of world scientific centres, the voice of protest regrettably does not go beyond the limited confines of environmental supporters and authorities who have understood the depth of tragedy. As a result the collective conscience of humanity is still in the state of slumber, when the ultimate solution requires unanimous efforts and dedication by humanity as a whole. The environmental crisis will not subside as long as the feeling of kindness and compassion towards the outer world has not replaced the sense of domination and arrogance in the depth of the hearts of all humanity living on Planet Earth.

In our opinion, the right alternative and solution at this juncture, is return to the perception of religions. More than in the past, today man has shown readiness and sincerity to accept the teachings of religions, if explained in a rational manner. That is to say, in as much as his understanding and intelligence has grown, he has shown better capability to understand and accept religious concepts. This is especially so, given the fact that the modern man has experienced the futility of atheistic beliefs and has tasted the bitter fruits of his forced separation from spirituality and the blessings of the natural environment.

Modern man, is repentant of his sin and penitent before the Lord. He seemed to have found recourse to Almighty God and is seeking forgiveness for past transgressions. This is a critical and invaluable opportunity for religious institutions and scholars to present religion in a way which is appropriate with the march of time, so as to embrace with kindness the penitent who has confessed to his sin. This requires the restoring of sanctity to nature by citing original religious sources and scriptures. Certainly, should man look at the world around him through the insight of religious beliefs, no such devastation of the environment would ever take place. What we mean by religion, in its widest and universal sense, includes all the beliefs and worldviews that have been expressed, studied and investigated under this subject. Thus our view here is not solely confined to religion which is defined as "submission of man before a superior force" that would inevitably lead to the Lord and the great monotheistic religions. Religion in its formal sense is a collection of principles, precepts and deeds that are undertaken with an aim of linking man to a sublime power particular to a society or a community. Our intent in the present discussion is, however, linked to all tenets, words and deeds that have a direct or indirect impact on preservation and safeguarding of the environment. In another words, religion in this context, applies to any system of beliefs that impart meaning to the world, transform man's view, and call for application of conscience and ethics, i.e. an inner strength and a sound physical way of life based on enjoining good and abstaining from evil.

A worldview coupled with spirituality and uprightness, is the original core of all beliefs that we mean by religion in the widest sense of the word. The proof is the fact that all religions play this role in this general sense, and this is not something particular only to the Abrahamic religions. When we look up the Hindu creed, we

would encounter a metaphysical belief about nature. It is thus that
we see the growth and blossoming of many sciences within
Hinduism, some of which have come to influence the west, through
Islam. In the Hindu creed, our attention is drawn to Vedantic belief
of *atman* or *maya*. It is a belief where existence is considered not as
an absolute reality, but as a veil that covers the transcendental self.[8]
This view is very similar to Divine Names and Attributes in
Islamic Gnosticism. In Islamic Gnosticism, the world and whatever
it holds, is manifestation of the Names and Attributes of the
Ultimate Truth (God), which we would deal with later on.

In the so-called Eastern Religions, especially in Taoism as
well as the Confucian doctrine, we observe a form of devotion
towards nature and understanding its metaphysical significance,
which is of utmost importance. The same respectful attitude
towards nature, coupled with a strong sense of symbolism and a
form of awareness about the clarity and focus of universe and its
transparency from the standpoint of metaphysical truths, can also
be found in Buddhism as it is practised in Japan. Shintoism
strongly reinforces this perception. Thus in Eastern art, most
notably in Taoist and Zen Buddhist traditions, drawings of natural
landscapes are true portraits of nature. They do not stir up an
aesthetic feeling of delight in the spectator, but rather convey the
benefaction, compassion and beauty, and serve as means of union
and oneness with the transcendental truth.[9] This is the very essence
that a Muslim Gnostic such as Sa'dī Shīrāzī expresses:

Tang cheshmān nazar beh miveh konand;

Mā tamāshā garān-e bustānim

(The short-sighted look at the fruit;
While we behold the [entire] orchard.)

Within divine religions, if we study the history of Christianity in the light of eastern metaphysical and cosmological principles, we will succeed in discovering a tradition of respect for nature that could help the quest of new Christian theology in establishing a link with the environment. In the Old Testament, there are certain references made to nature's participation in the religious view of life. In the Book of Joshua, there is mention of Lord's covenant to ensure peace with animals and plants. Or when Prophet Noah ('a) is commanded to preserve all species of animals, whether hallowed or not, and regardless of their benefit to human beings.[10] In the same manner, the untouched nature or desert is visualised as a place of trial and punishment, as well as a refuge for contemplation, or even a reflection of paradise. This very tradition of contemplative view of nature, lives later on in Judaism in the "Kabala" and "Hasidim" schools of thought. In the New Testament, the assumed death and resurrection of Prophet Jesus ('a) is accompanied with the withering and blossoming of nature that bespeak of the cosmic quality of the Son of Mary ('a). St. Paul --the man who is considered the real founder of Christianity-- believes that all forms of creation partake in the redemption of sin.

In the West, as a reaction to the profound influence of polytheism and idolatry, the original Church gradually distanced itself from the surrounding world and was completely severed from it. Even words such as paradise and desert, in their positive sense, were associated solely with the Church and later with monasteries as separate and distinct institutions.[11] In contrast, in the Eastern Church, reflection in nature was still approved and become more pivotal. Nature was regarded as a support for spiritual life and the belief was formed that all nature partakes in deliverance and salvation, and that the world would be revived and restored with the second coming of Prophet Jesus ('a).

For the writer of this article, Origen[12] and Irnaus, the early fathers of the Greek Orthodox Church who created "Divinity of Nature", are of high importance. They did not restrict the term Logos, or the Word or Expression of Allah, to man and religion only, but also used it for the whole nature and all creatures. In his book titled *Hexaemeron*,[13] St. Basil[14] who was a follower of Origen, has written:

> "When you think about grass or a herb yielding seed…that seed is the word that would come to occupy your whole mind."[15]

This view is in complete compliance with the Islamic perception. In the Holy Qur'ān, the whole universe and its every component are *Kalimātullah* (Words of Allah), just as Prophet Jesus ('a) and the Holy Qur'ān that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (S) are the Word of Allah.

> *"And if all the trees in the earth were pen, and the sea added to seven (more) seas (be ink), yet will not exhaust not the Words of Allah; Surely Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise."* (31:27)

> *"When the angels said: O Mary, surely Allah gives good news of a Word from Him (of one) whose name shall be Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary…"* (3:44)

Gradually as Christianity spread into Eastern Europe, new groups who had a deep insight about the spiritual value of nature devoid of any signs of European Mediterranean polytheism, embraced it. A perfect example were the Celts, who had a strong cognisance and awareness of the balance and harmony between man and nature. Celtic monks sought divine epiphany and went on quests, hoping to discover the harmony of the Lord's Creation.[16] They claimed they saw the presence of the Lord in the mysterious cosmos. Pilgrimage, quest and study of creativeness in nature have been repeatedly mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān:

"Say (O Messenger): Travel in the earth and see how He has originated the creation…" (29:20)

"And We caused between them and the towns which we had blessed, (other) towns easy to be seen, and We have made easy the journey therein; travel through them nights and days, secure." (34:18)[17].

In any case, in the ninth century, an Irish thinker named Johannes Scotus Erigena[18] wrote a commentary on the Bible in which he attempted to establish an intimate link between God, cosmos and the human being. In this respect, he strongly defied some of the theologians and philosophers who due to lack of precise understanding of metaphysical and cosmological concepts of nature were inclined to accuse any such speculation as pantheism, naturalism and polytheism. Erigena thus stated:

"The cosmos has a transcendental origin, and all creatures are from the Lord, but created through Jesus ('a)."[19]

Finally in the person of St. Francis of Assisi[20] we see the most respectful attitude towards nature within the framework of a Christian saintly life. His life among the birds and animals is a firm example of this Christian conviction that the human being cannot relate to nature through consecration. In his *Canticle of the Sun* as well as several other canticles, he displays a deep and penetrating insight, free of any human gainfulness. In his address to the animals he displays the inner connection and sincerity that a saint attempts by connecting with the divine essence what has been breathed into the nature.[21] Dante's *Divine Comedy* teachers the fact that the human being must really trek throughout the universe so that he would recognise that the force that surrounds all beings is:

"Love and kindness that moves the suns and stars."[22]

While this way of thinking, that is the observation of nature based on post-medieval teachings, faced fluctuations and challenges, yet it continued until the end of nineteenth century. People like John Ray still searched the nature for signs and indications of God. In his work, *Our Farbenlehre*, Goethe [23] dealt with the existing symmetry in nature and called people to seek out a proper perception of this pure and eternal nature.

After what we have discussed about the relationship of Judaism and Christianity with nature, it will be appropriate to shed light on Islamic teachings concerning the environment. The Holy Qur'ān — as the last revealed Word of God to mankind — has a very interesting and penetrative view of nature. It does not allow man to bow and prostrate before the natural phenomena because of its greatness and magnificence, nor does it consider nature as an entity without any sanctity, meaning or essence. The Holy Qur'ān presents the natural phenomena as the creation of Allah and directs mankind that instead of worshipping these manifestations – as the polytheists do – to worship the Almighty Creator:

"And of His signs are the night and the day and the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate in obeisance to the sun nor to the moon; but prostrate you in obeisance to Allah (alone) Who created them..."(41:37).

Although the entire universe, including the animate and inanimate, is the creation of Allah, nature itself is not a soulless and lifeless entity. It is living. The human being could enter into an intimate relationship with nature, converse with it and express love for it. Due to their manner of relationship to the Lord, the Holy Qur'ān grants to them an aura of sanctity which is inseparable from their essence. From the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'ān, all parts of nature are always glorifying God and supplicating to Him in their own peculiar manner.

"Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth glorifies Allah, the Ruler, the Most Holy, the Almighty, The All-Wise." (62:1)

It is interesting to note that according to the Holy Qur'ān, the glorification of Allah by the entire creation, could be understood, perceived and recognised by the human being. It says:

"Seest thou not, that Allah is He, Whom do glorify all those who are in the heavens and the earth and the birds with wings outspread? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise; And Allah is Knower of what they do." (24:41)

As is clear, the above *āyah* calls upon human beings to make proper use of their intellect and comprehend the glorification and invocations of all forms of creation, even that of the birds in the sky. In the lives of Muslim sages, it is not something extraordinary to hear the sound of supplications in the world of nature. Sa'dī says:

Dush morghi bā subh mi nālid;
> *'Aql o sabram bebord o tāqat o hush;*
Yeki az dustān-e mukhlis rā;
> *Magar āwāz man rasid beh gush;*
Guft bāwar nadāshtam keh torā;
> *Bāng-e morghi chunin konad madhush;*
Goftam in shart ādmiyyat nist;
> *Morgh tasbih-gu o man khāmush.*

(Last night a bird was singing a dirge, that robbed me of reason, patience, stamina and consciousness;

Until hearing my chant, one of my true friends;

Said: I could not believe that the sound of a bird could make one so senseless.

I answered: It would not have been human to remain silent while the bird glorified the Lord.)

According to the great Islamic theosophist Sadr al-Muta'alihhīn Shīrāzī every being has been bestowed with understanding to the extent of its essence. Thus all beings in the world of nature have awareness and understanding in as much as they are entitled to. He says:

All beings, even the solid matter which is seemingly inanimate, are in reality alive, aware and glorify the Almighty Creator. They gaze upon the majesty and magnificence of Allah, having total awareness about the Source of all existence, as the Holy Qur'ān points out: "... *and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him, but you do not understand their glorification...*" (17: 44)[24]

Mullā Sadrā has not interpreted the holy *āyah* (*you do not understand*) in an active form, rather he considers it passive, thus suggesting that the beings themselves are not aware of their power of glorification although they are consciously glorifying. To prove this point, he adds:

Because this kind of science, that is knowledge about knowledge (which in Islamic philosophy is called compound knowledge) is particular to beings that are purely abstract and physically transcendental.[25]

According to the Holy Qur'ān, the world of nature, similar to the human beings, has its share of salvation and deliverance, and therefore, whether animate or inanimate, would be gathered on the Day of Resurrection. About animals the Holy Qur'ān says:

"And when the wild animals are gathered together." (81:5)

It means that similar to mankind, all beings of the earth will be resurrected and assembled and will be provided a voice of their own.

"When the earth shall quake with her (terrible) quaking, and the earth brings forth her burdens, and man shall say: What has befallen her? On that day she will relate her news (about all that happened on her), that thy Lord had revealed to her. (99:1-4)

In Islamic teachings, the link between mankind and nature in deliverance and salvation, as well as in ruin and corruption is so intertwined that the human beings' obedience and disobedience of the commandments of God and violation of divine precepts, directly affect nature. In other words, nature, as a part of the manifestation of Truth, is kind and compassionate towards the upright and God-fearing human beings, but is contemptuous and uncompromising with the wrongdoers and cruel persons. The Glorious Qur'ān says in this regard:

"And if people of the towns had believed and guarded (themselves against evil), We would certainly have opened up for them blessings from the heavens and the earth..." (7:96)

In another *āyah*, it quotes Prophet Noah ('a) appealing to those who sin:

"...Ask forgiveness of your Lord; surely He is the Most Forgiving; He will send down upon you rain, pouring in abundance." (71:10-11)

In the *hadīth* or sayings of the Prophet and the Infallible Imams, the wrath of nature has often been viewed as divine wrath against the deeds and actions of human beings:

"When the rulers tell lies to the people, no rain shall fall."[26]

The Holy Qur'ān presents the account of the nations of the past who because of committing sin and deviating from divine precepts, were subjected to punishment by God through the fury of the natural phenomena. The nations unto whom the Prophet Noah

('a) and Prophet Lot ('a) were sent, as well as the tribes of 'Ad and Thamūd to whom God had sent the Prophet Shu'ayb ('a) and Prophet Sālih ('a) respectively, were destroyed through natural disasters.

According to the teachings of Islam, all beings in the world are signs and indications of Almighty Allah, or in the terminology of Islamic gnosticism, it is Divine Names and Attributes, which mean that the entire universe is a manifestation of God's glory and points out to the Ultimate Truth. In other words, wherever one looks, he sees the Lord, as the Holy Qur'ān says:

"And Allah's is the east and the west, so whither you turn thither is Allah's purpose."(2:115)

Along with this perception which bestows sanctity to the environment and should make it totally immune against any transgression committed in the name of scientific experiments, there is the conception of Divine Vicegerency that has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān in explicit terms and which exalts the station of the human being as the best of creation entrusted with a great responsibility:

"And when thy Lord said to the angels: Indeed I am going to place a vicegerent in the earth..."(2:30)

In the conversation between God and the angels at the dawn of creation, the angels expressed concern over possible corruption and defilement of the earth by the human being. But the Lord indicated to *'ilm* or knowledge that He would grant this intelligent being he was about to create.

"...they (angels) said: Wilt Thou place in it such as make mischief in it...?" (2:30)

In reply to them, God says:

"...surely I know what you know not." (2:30)

That is you shall discover the secret of this later. The Lord then announces:

"And He taught Adam the Names, all of them, then presented them to the angels and said: Tell Me the names of these if you are right. They said: Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge but that which Thou has taught us. Surely Thou art the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. He said: O Adam, inform them of their names, and when he had informed them of their names; Said (the Lord): Did I not say to you that I know what is unseen in the heavens and the earth, and I know what you manifest and what you hide?" (2:31-33)

From this conversation which took place in the celestial heavens, it is clear that on beholding the knowledge and science of Adam, the angels were convinced and admitted that such a being merits divine vicegerency, and as a sign of humbleness they prostrated to him when commanded by Allah. The questions which arise here and which should jolt the conscience of the modern descendants of Adam, are: What kind of a science is this knowledge? Is it the very science that in the recent centuries devastated the environment and ruined earth? Did God teach this knowledge to Father Adam so that his children would break the covenant and wrought corruption on earth?

Indeed no. The knowledge taught by God to Adam, is a sacred science that sees the world as a manifestation of the Lord and the reflection of the Essence of Truth. The best rendition of this knowledge is that of the Holy Qur'ān which mentions that Allah taught Man the Divine Names and Attributes, i.e. He taught him the world. Therefore, to know the world properly, is to the Almighty Creator, and to transgress upon the world and the environment, is to violate the manifestation of Truth. The Persian poet Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār says in this regard:

Cho Adam rā ferestādim birun;
                    Jamāl-e khwish bar sahrā nahādim.

(When We sent Adam out [into the world];
We covered the earth with Our Splendour)

Thus, a truly devout and sincere human being will use the gifts of nature towards proper progress and development of the planet, for the Lord has announced:

"He raised you from the earth and has given you to flourish there in?" (11: 61)

A God-fearing person will not take any step other than making the earth flourish, otherwise he will be known as a profligate.   According to the Holy Qur'ān profligacy and waste of resources, is the handiwork of Satan, and those who indulge in such wanton destruction of the environment, are the brothers of satans:

"Surely the squanderers are the brethren of the satans; and the Satan is ever ungrateful to his Lord." (17:27)

Conclusion and Suggestions

To sum up, during the past few centuries, modern science by distancing itself from the spiritual perception of nature, has armed mankind with a self-destructive knowledge which first inflates the ego and then drives it to transgress nature on the assumption of satisfying his satanic desires. Unfortunately, the theologians, philosophers and religious scholars have also contributed to the crisis of the environment by secularising nature. By not focusing on efforts towards writing works in the field of environmental theology, they left the field open for the total secularisation of nature by Industrial Revolution and the dubious application of modern science. Many theologians and religious thinkers completely ignored the issue of nature and pursued man's salvation

with utter disregard to the rest of God's creation. Under the present circumstances, due to this heartless indifference to the right of the environment and other living beings, the existence of the human race itself on Planet Earth has become a hazardous issue. The time has now come for all those who are truly concerned with the human condition and are looking for a serious solution to this grave crisis, to once again turn to the time-honoured tenets of religions. They should use religious texts and metaphysical sources to arouse man's conscience in this regard and give the message that only through the revival of a spiritual and divine conception and cognition about nature, humanity can neutralise the destruction of the environment at the hands of modern science. In addition to religious values, the cultural beliefs and customs of many indigenous people in different parts of the world could be applied, after careful study, to stem the rot.

Whatever reforms are mooted they should lead to practical answers in the field of environmental protection. One of the practical and tangible strategies in the Dialogue of Civilisations, should be spread of religious values and promotion of healthy cultural beliefs. Solutions are possible along with other methodologies, as long as these are not imposed by an outside agency with ulterior motives. Societies that are considered cultured and have more respect for religious and ethical principles could take the lead and show to others the dangers threatening the globe. The author suggests that scholars should focus on the following points:

1. The role of public beliefs and convictions in resolving this crisis, and it means that cultural figures and religious scholars have a heavy responsibility in this regard. They should educate the masses and revive spiritual values in society in order to create a sense of sanctity towards the environment.

2. An international association of scholars and authorities of various religions should be formed and its secretariat should co-ordinate efforts to convene scientific meetings and should actively follow up the practicability of measures taken.

3. The mode and manner of inculcating the young generation with spiritual values should be revolutionised on the basis of modern technology, since using the old methods could prove counter-productive.

The author welcomes any other dynamic that concerned authorities and scholars can come up with to protect the environment and help avert the catastrophe than mankind is facing.

Notes:

1. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Paul Edward Comte, vol. 2, pp. 496-505. See also *Sair-e Hekmat dar Orupā* (A View of Philosophy in Europe), Muhammad 'Ali Forughi, p. 113, Tehran, Safi 'Ali Shāh Publications, 1360 AH.

2. M. McDonald, *Natural Rights: Theories on Rights*, Oxford, Ed. J. Waldron, pp. 21-40.

3. H. Popkin & A. Stroll, *Philosophy Made Simple – Hobbes*.

4. Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, p. 113, interpretation of the verse *"Mankind was but one nation"* (2: 213). Also refer to *Usūl-e Falsafah* (Principles of Philosophy), 6th chap. by the same author.

5. M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane, The Nature of Religion*, p. 179, New York, 1959.

6. Sayyid Mustafā Muhqqiq Dāmād, *A Discourse on Nature and Environment from an Islamic Perspective*, Dept. of Environment, Tehran, Iran 2000.

7. *Understanding Islam*, trans. By, D.M. Matheon, London, 1963, pp. 32-33.

8. Guenon, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Beliefs*, trans. By M. Pallis, London 1954; also see his other book, *Man and His Becoming to Vedanta*, trans. By Reynolds Nicholson, London, 1945.

9. Matgioni, La Voie Metaphysic, Paris, 1956.

10. George Huntston Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought: the Biblical Experience of the Desert in the History of Christianity and the Paradise Theme in the Theological Idea of the University*; (1st ed.) New York, Harper (1962); Prologue, p, 10.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Oregenes Adamantius, or Origen the most important theologian and biblical scholar of the early Greek Church. His greatest work is the *Hexapla*, which is a synopsis of six versions of the Old Testament. Born 185 CE, probably in Alexandria, Egypt, he died in Tyre, Phoenicia (present day Lebanon), in 254 CE.

13. Hexaemeron or Hexaemeron (Six Days), nine Lenten sermons on the days of creation, signifies a term of six days, or, technically, the history of the supposed six day's work of creation, as
contained in the first chapter of Genesis.

14. (Latin Basilius); born 329 CE, Caesarea Mazaca, Cappadoecia; died January 1, 379 CE, Caesarea. Although an opponent of the monotheistic doctrine of Arius, as Bishop of Caesarea he wrote several works on monasticism, theology, and canon law.

15. Charles E. Raven, *Natural Religion and Christian Theology,* Cambridge University Press, UK, 1953.

16. George Huntston Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought: the Biblical Experience of the Desert in the History of Christianity and the Paradise Theme in the Theological Idea of the University*; (1st ed.) New York, Harper (1962), p. 46.

17. The title of this *sūrah* is taken from the city of the same name, i.e. Saba' or Sheba, which was situated in Yemen and was destroyed by flood as a result of the bursting of Ma'arib Dam.

18. Erigena, John Scotus; Irish teacher, theologian, philosopher and poet, who lived in the ninth century CE.

19. Henr Betty, *Johannes Scotus Erigena: A Study in Medieval Philosophy,* pp. 204. University Press, Cambridge, 1925.

20. Founder of the Franciscan Order; born at Assisi in Umbria in 1181 or 1182 CE and died in his hometown, October 1226.

21. George Huntston Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought: the Biblical Experience of the Desert in the History of Christianity and the Paradise Theme in the Theological Idea of the University*; (1st ed.), New York, Harper (1962), p. 42.

22. The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Dante,* vol. 16, pp. 971-976, 15th Edition.

23. German poet, novelist, playwright, and natural philosopher, who was fond of oriental studies and greatly impressed by the Holy Qur'ān. The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 20, pp. 133-140, 15th Edition.

24. Sadr al-Din Muhammad Shīrāzī (Mullā Sadrā), *al-Asfār al-Arba'ah fī al-Hikmah al-Muta'āliyah* (The Four Journeys in the Realm of Transcendental Philosophy), vol. 6, chapter 12.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Bihār al-Anwār,* vol. 73, p. 373 & vol. 96, p. 84.

The Ethics of Authenticity

Charles Taylor, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Reviewed by Dr. Hājj Muhammad Legenhausen

Charles Taylor (1931-) is a native of Montreal, Canada and although he is professor emeritus at McGill University (having taught there from 1961-1997), he has recently accepted a part time position at Chicago's Northwestern University. He established his reputation in philosophy with his monumental introduction to the philosophy of G. W. F. Hegel,[1] but in the 1960's he also ran for political office on several occasions as a leftist advocate of greater autonomy for Quebec. Much of his philosophical work is concerned with cultural criticism and political philosophy, and he is one of the seminal thinkers in the communitarian movement, which is critical of liberalism for its over-emphasis on individual rights. He is the author of eighteen volumes written in English, French and German, which have been translated into Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish, and his latest work is *The Varieties of Religion Today* (Harvard University Press, forthcoming Spring 2002).

For more than thirty years, Charles Taylor has been warning us that the methods of the natural sciences are not appropriate for

an understanding of humanity. This is a theme prominent in the works of German thinkers from Dilthey to Gadamer, and Taylor's work displays a vast knowledge of "Continental" as well as "Analytic" philosophy, as well as a deep appreciation of the poetry of the German and English languages. Although Taylor has drawn much inspiration for his own philosophy from Hegel, he has also aimed criticisms at Hegel's philosophy, and has concluded that crucial departures from Hegel are necessary in metaphysics, philosophical anthropology and social criticism. If Hegel argued that reality itself is intersubjective and that man can only be understood as a participant in this reality, Taylor has argued that man can only be understood as a participant in the intersubjective reality of his linguistic community, but he stops well short of absolute idealism.

Taylor shows how the fact/value dichotomy arose from the epistemological dualism that developed after the seventeenth century, when teleological explanations were rejected in the natural sciences in favour of more mechanistic views of nature. Human action, however, is essentially teleological, and so behaviouristic theories of psychology are bound to be inadequate and misleading. It is a mistake to attempt to extend the gains made in modern natural science to the *Geisteswissenschaften.* The inadequacy of behaviourism and the need for an appropriately intentional account of human agency were major themes of Taylor's early work.[2]

His magnum opus, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*[3] builds upon Taylor's earlier work with an exploration of the changes that have taken place in Western man's sense of identity and the role this self understanding plays in practical reasoning and in the shaping of morals. The book focuses on three features of the modern identity: inwardness, the affirmation of ordinary life, and the Romantic notion of nature as an inner moral source. Taylor's book is a philosophical reflection on the history of some important themes in Western culture since

the end of the seventeenth century, but Taylor does not make the mistake of viewing the modern self as a construction of philosophers; rather, he sees the changing concepts of the self as contributing to the construction of the philosophies in which they are reflected. Nevertheless, the major focus of the book is on philosophical thought. There is no discussion of how it relates to urbanisation or industrialisation, and Taylor pays scant attention to the vast sociological literature about his topic. Oh well, no treatment of such a broad topic can be expected to be comprehensive. The book is a history of ideas, and in it Taylor has important things to say, and he says them in an interesting way. He is fair-minded, neither condemning nor praising all the major elements of the modern identity, although he does find much to merit both praise and condemnation.

His *The Ethics of Authenticity* was first published in Canada under the title *The Malaise of Modernity*.[4] The discussions contained in this work elaborate themes introduced in *Sources of the Self*. In what follows, I present a brief summary and criticism of each chapter.

I. Three Malaises

Taylor wants to discuss widespread dissatisfactions with modernity, whether since the '50's or since the seventeenth century. He picks on three themes about which these discontents seem to gravitate: excessive individualism, the domination of instrumental rationality, and "soft" despotism. He claims that they are not well understood—despite their familiarity.

Individualism leads to loss of meaning, the fading of moral horizons. Modern freedom is based on discrediting orders and hierarchies that determined roles and duties. The democratic focus on the individual makes one lose sight of broader vistas. Individualism breeds selfishness.

The dominance of instrumental reason comes about when society no longer has a sacred structure, when social arrangements and modes of action are no longer grounded in the order of things or the will of God. The demands of economic growth are used to justify inequalities, rape of the environment and other forms of injustice not even mentioned by Taylor. Quality is sacrificed for efficiency. This is the eclipse of ends, a tendency that seems to be intrinsic to the market, the state, the modern bureaucracy, the mode of production. Weber called it the "iron cage". Taylor wants to argue that change here is possible, but it is not simply voluntary, not just a battle of hearts and minds—institutional reform is also required.

Soft despotism takes over as consumer citizens are too self-absorbed to bother about government. Tocqueville thinks that the answer to this is a vigorous political culture in which participation is valued in various levels of government and voluntary associations.

Conservatives and liberals battle over such issues. Liberals accuse conservatives of being reactionary or obscurantist, of hearkening back to a golden age that never was and never will be. Taylor tries to steer clear of boosters and knockers of modernity. There is no way to trade off the benefits and harms. He wants to find out how to "steer these developments towards their greatest promise and avoid the slide into the debased forms." (12)

He proposes to concentrate on the first of these three themes, although in the concluding chapters, he does address the other two.

II. The Inarticulate Debate

Taylor claims that the popular contemporary stance condemned by conservatives as facile relativism or subjectivism is really a vulgarisation of the ethics of authenticity. Taylor sees relativism as a misguided attempt at mutual respect. Allan Bloom expresses contempt for contemporary culture of self-fulfilment

because he only sees the travesties of the powerful moral ideal of being true to oneself. The culture of tolerance for different forms of individual self-fulfilment shies away from any absolute claims even if it presupposes that some forms of life (the more authentic) are absolutely higher in value than others. The espousal of authenticity takes the form of a soft relativism that makes it impossible to mount a vigorous defence of any moral ideal.

> This means, as has often been pointed out, that there is something contradictory and self-defeating in their position, since the relativism itself is powered (at least partly) by a moral ideal. But consistently or not, this is the position usually adopted. The ideal sinks to the level of an axiom, something one doesn't challenge but also never expounds. (17)

The ethics of authenticity also gives support to the liberalism of neutrality. This liberalism, whether espoused by relativists or opponents of relativism like Dworkin and Kymlicka, silences debate about the good life. (This is also one of Beiner's criticisms of liberalism, a criticism also found in MacIntyre.)

The silencing of debate about the good is also fostered by widespread moral subjectivism, "the view that moral positions are not in any way grounded in reason or the nature of things but are ultimately just adopted by each of us because we find ourselves drawn to them."(18) Those who uphold the standards of moral reason, such as MacIntyre, tend to be Aristotelians, who see the ideal of authenticity as a part of a mistaken departure from the standards rooted in human nature, and therefore have no reason to articulate this ideal.

The third factor that fosters silence about the good is the sort of explanation common in the social sciences, which are purposefully neutral about moral ideals because this is seen as required by their stature as science.

The result of all this has been to thicken the darkness around the moral ideal of authenticity. Critics of contemporary culture tend to disparage it as an ideal, even to confound it with a non-moral desire to do what one wants without interference. The defenders of this culture are pushed into inarticulacy about it by their own outlook. The general force of subjectivism in our philosophical world and the power of neutral liberalism intensify the sense that these issues can't and shouldn't be talked about. And then on top of it all, social science seems to be telling us that to understand such phenomena as the contemporary culture of authenticity, we shouldn't have recourse in our explanations to such things as moral ideals but should see it all in terms of, say, recent changes in the mode of production, or new patterns of youth consumption, or the security of affluence.(21)

Taylor rejects the positions of both boosters and knockers of contemporary culture. Instead, he sees a need to retrieve the ideal of authenticity from its perversions. He holds that (1) authenticity is a valid ideal; (2) you can argue rationally about ideals and the conformity of practices to ideals; and (3) these arguments can make a difference, that we are not imprisoned by the system.

Contrary to Taylor, I would urge that (1) authenticity is not a valid ideal as it has been developed in the modern Western tradition, although it might have valid analogues in religious systems of value; that (2) arguments about the rationality of ideals and practices always draw upon the resources of one or more traditions that may themselves be subject to question among those to whom such arguments are presented. Specifically, I do not think that the arguments Taylor presents for the version of the ideal of authenticity he favours are successful. With regard to (3), I agree with Taylor that argumentation can be an effective catalyst for change, although I do not think that the sort of argumentation he suggests can play this role. It also seems to me that Taylor neglects

the importance of other steps that can be taken to bring about changes in the system.

III. The Sources of Authenticity

The ethics of authenticity was born in the late 18th century. As a child of the Romantic period, it drew on the subjectivity of Descartes and the political individualism of Locke even though it was also critical of disengaged rationality and atomism that are blind to the ties of community.

In ethics, it arose from the moral sense theory in opposition to consequentialism. [Can this be true? I thought that consequentialist theories came much later with utilitarianism. Taylor tries to push it back to a theological consequentialism—but this doesn't seem very convincing. I suspect that he is projecting his own anti-consequentialism into the formation of the early ethics of authenticity he is trying to retrieve.] On earlier views, the moral voice, the voice within of conscience, was a messenger from God. The sense for the ring of Truth was a way of reaching or being reached by God or the Good. With the Romantics the source is no longer external, but is in the depths within.

The most important writer to bring about the new view was Rousseau. He spoke of following the voice of nature within us, "*le sentiment de l'existence*". He also helped establish the idea of freedom as self-determination, deciding for oneself alone without interference of external mores, customs, prejudices. It is the idea of moral and political autonomy developed by Jacobins, Kant, Hegel and Marx. But this is autonomy rather than authenticity per se.

Taylor finds the ideal of authenticity first most explicitly articulated by Herder (1744-1803). Each man has his own measure according to which he must live. Each of our unique voices has its own special something to say. This is the moral background to the ethics and culture of authenticity, even its degraded forms, and this is what Taylor wants to defend as giving real value to modernity

itself. However, Taylor doesn't really argue for this. He does not try to show how Herder's vision of authenticity is grounded in a philosophical anthropology superior to its rivals, for instance.

To a certain extent, Taylor's work is continued by Corey Anton in his *Selfhood and Authenticity*.[5] Like Taylor, Anton defends an ethics of authenticity while deploring its shallower forms. Anton suggests that an appropriate ethics of authenticity can be founded on a phenomenological analysis of the self. Anton rejects materialistic views of the self in favour of a more Heideggerian approach, unfortunately marred by the obscure language so often favoured by self-proclaimed existentialists:

> We are places and moments of Earth which, negating its very non-existence, upsurge into that supremely meaningful care-taking called being-in-the-world.[6]

To his credit, Anton does attempt to found authenticity on a metaphysical theory of the self. More to his credit, he tries to show the inadequacy of numerous popular misconceptions of the self on the basis of his metaphysical vision. He rejects views of the self that are overly subjectivist as well as those that posit the self as an entirely social phenomenon. He rejects views of authenticity that equate it with originality or mere autonomy. The main weakness of Anton's position is that despite all the careful nuances, an existential theory of the self lacks the substantive content to provide any real orientation. The care that figures so prominently in being-in-the-world is left without direction.

One of the main problems with an ethics of authenticity is that in some of its guises, at least, it is opposed to religious values. So, if Taylor and Anton really want to defend the value of authenticity, they need to show why we should consider it superior to the religious values with which it appears to conflict, or how the apparent conflict can be resolved. The stress on autonomy found in many Enlightenment thinkers, for example, was pointedly directed

against submissiveness to the ecclesiastic authorities. Perhaps their struggle against the authority of the Church was justified, given the history of the Church in Europe at that time, but this is no excuse for taking the rejection of external moral authority and direction as having been decided and demonstrated for all places and future times.

Having cut themselves off from religious moorings, post-Enlightenment theories of ethics drift aimlessly, whether these theories are deontological, contractarian, Romantic or existentialist.[7] Although Taylor does not have anything to say about religion in *The Ethics of Authenticity*, he does address the topic directly in his Marianist Award Lecture, *A Catholic Modernity?* [8] which is published along with responses by four other Catholic thinkers and Taylor's comments on them. There he affirms his Catholicism, and tries to explain that he has not advertised his Catholicism in his other works because of the secular nature of the culture he addresses. At the same time, he admits that important "facets of modern culture strive to define the Christian faith as the other, as what needs to be overcome and set firmly in the past, if Enlightenment, liberalism, humanism is to flourish."[9] Taylor admits his Catholicism, admits that modernity and Christianity are in important ways in opposition, and yet defends modernity. Paradoxically, he claims that the development of certain aspects of a truly Christian life required the modernist break with Christianity for their development. The example he underscores is that of human rights. While Taylor admits to there being problems with human rights culture, he argues that it was only through the process of the secularisation of Western culture that this "great advance in the practical penetration of the gospel in human life" became possible.[10]

According to Taylor, this development of Christian morals had to be carried out in Western culture without any acknowledgement of its religious roots because of the moral

opposition to the excessive otherworldliness of medieval Catholicism. More extreme humanists advanced this Protestant critique of Catholicism against religion in its entirety as they championed the worldly goods of human flourishing, welfare and ending suffering. Taylor claims that this moral critique of religion has had much more motivational force than any epistemological difficulties in erecting obstacles to belief in Western modernity.

Be this as it may, Taylor claims that at this point in history, the dominant humanism of the West needs the corrective of religious values in order to maintain its own moral character. A good dose of the transcendent is needed to keep Western humanist culture from the disease of fascism, despotism, cruelty and hatred. Of course, Taylor grants that mere acceptance of religion is no guarantee of a cure. He claims that there must be sincere Christian love founded in a view of the self as made in the image of God. Here Taylor becomes somewhat preachy and sentimental, as he seems to get distracted from the real issue. The real issue is how modern Western culture is to find any sort of moral orientation given that modernity has cut itself off from the religious roots that provided its values in the first place. Taylor responds with a defence of modernity in the twentieth century, saying that although it has given us the evils of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, it has also produced *Amnesty International* and *Medecins sans Frontieres*. We could criticise Taylor's choice of organisations here, but regardless of that, the unfortunate impression is given that the goods of such organisations can somehow be put in the balance against the evils of mass murder in a moral justification of Western modernity as a whole. The only thing that Taylor proposes to keep the evil from becoming dominant is some behind-the-scenes religious sincerity, a turn toward the transcendent that cannot be allowed to become too public because that would threaten the universality of modernity's moral appeal or would otherwise be too discordant with its culture.

This is where Taylor's *rationale* for modernity unravels. Taylor's attempt to be consummately reasonable leads him to recognise the inherent failings in the Enlightenment project as well as its most worthy achievements, but then he appears to become lost in admiration for the ideals of the early moderns and vainly hopes that their combination of religious background and secularism can be maintained indefinitely. An ethics of authenticity is bound to slide into degenerate forms unless grounded in a more substantial system of values, whether religious or otherwise. The sort of authenticity Taylor favours is grounded in his Catholicism just as much as it originates in German philosophy, yet his defence of a retrieval of an ethics of authenticity refuses to make any explicit reference to the faith that makes this retrieval possible for him in the first place. It certainly has no part in Anton's attempt to sustain the ideal of authenticity on the basis of an existentialist phenomenology of the self. Taylor's musings on Catholic modernity in his Marianist lecture might provide personal insight into how a Catholic might appreciate the moral force of modernity, but they do not show that modernity has the resources within itself to support the values and ideals of a retrieved modernity, nor do they show how to adjudicate the conflicts that do arise between modernity and religion. Because of these failings, one would have to conclude that Taylor is unsuccessful in his attempt to demonstrate the worthiness of the ethics of authenticity.

IV. Inescapable Horizons

Taylor wants to argue against the narcissistic forms of the culture of authenticity on its own terms. He thinks that moral reasoning can be applied to show that according to the principles of the ethics of authenticity even the soft forms of moral relativism used to justify self-indulgence can be shown to be self-defeating. The strategy is a familiar one. Like Nagel,[11] Dworkin[12] and others, Taylor wants to find some outer limits of morality that are not set

by human choice. He believes that he can find these limits by asking two questions:

1.   What conditions of human life are necessary for realising the ideal of authenticity?

2.   When properly understood, what does the ideal of authenticity really call for?

In answering these questions, Taylor refers to the *dialogical* character of human life. Our identities are shaped and maintained through our concerns and interactions with 'significant others'. Taylor then tries to show that setting one's goal as "self-fulfilment without regard (a) to the demands of our ties with others or (b) to demands of any kind emanating from something more or other than human desires or aspirations are self-defeating." (35)

With regard to (b) Taylor argues that authenticity requires that we each develop certain of our own unique characteristics, but these characteristics must be important, and what to count as important is not a matter of arbitrary choice or desire. Importance requires some sort of connection to something beyond and larger than mere human choice and desire.

The cultural, religious, traditional, etc., background against which things become important is called a *horizon*.

It follows that one of the things we can't do, if we are to define ourselves significantly, is suppress or deny the horizons against which things take on significance for us. This is the kind of self-defeating move frequently being carried out in our subjectivist civilisation. (37)

Taylor also points out that this sort of move is used to justify homosexuality. He claims that this makes sexual orientation a matter of arbitrary preference, and therefore insignificant, contrary to the intentions of those who assert the equal value of their orientation.

Taylor's argument here seems confused. The subjectivists are claiming that all significance comes from human choice, while Taylor assumes that what is a matter of mere arbitrary choice must be insignificant. Taylor needs to provide an argument that really important things cannot be determined to be so by arbitrary choice or human desire, but all he does is give a few examples of insignificant things that are a matter of arbitrary preference, like flavour of ice cream, and then he universalises this to claim without argument that whatever is determined by preference must likewise be insignificant. It would not seem difficult for anyone enthralled with Hume's moral theory, for example, to rebut Taylor here. The point is that by now there is a whole tradition of moral philosophy according to which value is conferred upon things by human desires and choices and is not intrinsic to things. Taylor and I disagree with this tradition, but this disagreement must be sustained by argument that Taylor fails to provide.

Another problem with Taylor's approach to the foibles of modern culture is that he assumes that it is wedded to the principles of Romantic authenticity. Even if the Romantic ideal of authenticity has had a significant influence on contemporary culture, it seems that the ideals of authenticity floating around in popular culture have taken on a character of their own, and cannot be demonstrated to be invalid or self-defeating because they do not measure up to their Romantic progenitors.

Taylor argues, "authenticity can't be defended in ways that collapse horizons of significance.... Horizons are given." (38-39) It is not difficult to imagine the response of the serious soft-relativist: horizons are given to be broken, transformed, transmuted by human choice and will. It can almost sound like Nietzsche. Taylor responds that how we choose to make ourselves cannot focus on insignificant preferences:

Which issues are significant, I do not determine. If I did, no
issue would be significant. But then the very ideal of self-choosing
as a moral ideal would be impossible. (39)

Here we are back to question-begging against the entire
Humean tradition. Subjectivists will argue that the difference
between insignificant choices and weighty ones is due to the sort of
attitude and concern with which we approach them, not due to any
intrinsic moral worth.

Taylor ends this chapter with a real howler:

Otherwise put, I can define my identity only against the
background of things that matter. But to bracket out history, nature,
society, the demands of solidarity, everything but what I find in
myself, would be to eliminate all candidates for what matters. (40)

The subjectivist reply is obvious: what matters is determined
by my attitude toward it. My attitudes determine that certain events
in history, features of nature, social relations etc., are important.
The fact that I determine their importance by an act of will or
desire or whatever does not mean that everything else is eliminated
as a candidate for what matters. There seems to be a confusion in
Taylor's reasoning between what determines significance and what
has significance.

Following this logical blunder, Taylor pronounces that he has
shown that reason is not powerless! Taylor is a great philosopher
and deserves respect, but this is plainly a logical oversight. Taylor's
argument by no means shows what is wrong with moral
subjectivism, and it does not show that reason has the power to
grasp objective values. What is wanted here is a general theory of
value that Taylor never provides. Furthermore, to succeed in his
argument against subjectivist relativism, Taylor should show the
superiority of his own theory of value to that advanced in the
Humean tradition. Taylor's task is even more difficult, because he
wants to claim that reason and the ethics of authenticity themselves

have at their disposal the resources to demonstrate the untenability of subjectivist accounts of authenticity. It would seem that the resources needed for any such demonstration lie beyond the admissions of secular or humanist philosophies.

V. The Need for Recognition

In contemporary cyberspace, a community is a group of people with an interest in some topic or commodity and that exchanges money and goods, conversation, photographs, audio files and other information over the internet and through various co-ordinated delivery systems. This paradigm of community is coming to dominate contemporary culture. It is a paradigm for which strong ties of loyalty and solidarity don't make much sense. If modernity has fostered an excessive sense of individualisation, cyberculture pushes this beyond anything previously imagined. The web connects everyone, but with very flimsy threads that are established and broken at will. Many traditional ideals will not be sustained in such an environment, but if any has a chance, it is authenticity. Only authenticity is centred on the self in a way that allows a distancing of the self from others that corresponds to the condition of the self in cyberspace. One preserves the authentic self by hiding it behind masks of pseudonyms and aliases. Taylor never gets this far into contemporary culture. He is more concerned with the roots of political individualism in people like Locke and Rousseau. He is looking for some noble ideal there to which large blocks of contemporary culture has been untrue. That way he can defend the original ethic of authenticity against those who castigate it because of its deformations. But so what? Other than a few university professors and theologians, who cares whether Herder or Hegel had a defensible morality that has made a mark whose traces can be seen to this day? People bought Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*[13] because of dissatisfaction with the way things are turning out in contemporary culture and because of a sense of

nostalgia that always accompanies conservatism, whether in the ancient world or in our own.

There are various forms of individualism: Cartesian individualism that requires each person to reason things out for himself; Locke's political individualism that puts the person and his desires, will and obligations prior to and more fundamental than social needs, will or obligations; then there is the individualism of the Romantics that places individual self-realisation prior to human relationships. Taylor is mostly concerned with Romantic individualism. He claims that proper self-realisation must respect human relationships and that it is a perversion of the ethics of authenticity to use self-realisation to trounce on relationships. Debased individualism leaves no room for strong commitments to community. Taylor uses Durkheim's term *anomie* for the perverted form of individualism. Other forms of individualism each contain their own moral visions of society, in addition to calling for personal freedom. So, liberal individualism (as in Locke) gives us social contract theory and human rights.

Romantic individualism places a strong emphasis on the privacy and importance of romantic relationships, as the romantic identity requires recognition by one's lover. Recognition in traditional societies was provided according to one's position in the social hierarchy and through the achievement of honour in that framework. In the modern world, honour is displaced by universal dignity. The station in which one would have won honour is marginalized in favour of social mobility. Modern recognition is given to those who work out original modes of their own authenticity. Its most influential early treatment is in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit,* chapter 4. Today, feminists and theorists of gender, multiculturalism, race and ethnicity consider denied recognition a form of oppression. Equality is interpreted to mean that various lifestyles are of equal value. There is a relationship of

mutual support between this view of equality and the liberalism of neutrality.

Taylor objects here that persons can only have the equal value commensurate with human dignity and the demand for recognition if each of them has value absolutely, for the champions of equal value do not mean to claim that all are equally zero. He concludes:

> There must be some substantive agreement on value, or else the formal principle of equality will be empty and a sham.... Recognising difference, like self-choosing, requires a horizon of significance, in this case a shared one. (52)

This is Taylor's argument against procedural concepts of justice: substantive values are required for the recognition of difference itself. Taylor also uses the need for recognition in the formation of identity to argue for lasting romantic relationships. Relationships for self-gratification are not the stuff on which one can build a satisfying sense of self, an identity deserving equal value to others.

> If my self-exploration takes the form of such serial and in principle temporary relationships, then it is not my identity that I am exploring, but some modality of enjoyment.

> In the light of the ideal of authenticity, it would seem that having merely instrumental relationships is to act in a self-stultifying way. The notion that one can pursue one's fulfilment in this way seems illusory, in somewhat the same way as the idea that one can choose oneself without recognising a horizon of significance beyond choice. (53)

Taylor seems to underestimate the illusions of contemporary culture's mix of romanticism and cynicism to subvert this sort of argument, or render it inaudible.

The culture of self-realisation does not have within itself sufficient resources to generate substantive agreement on value. As the myths that held societies together lose hold on the collective imagination, fragmentation increases. The fact that the resulting lifestyle is ultimately unsatisfying, even to those who wholeheartedly accept the norms of contemporary culture, is not sufficient to provide contemporary culture with the shared values necessary to avoid such a fate.

VI. The Slide to Subjectivism

Taylor presents his view as one of moderation. He neither endorses nor rejects contemporary culture; rather he finds it to have deviated from its own noble ideals. He does admit, however, that the ethic of authenticity is prone to this kind of deviation. When he tries to answer why, Taylor admits that sociology may help more than philosophy:

> While I think any simple one-way explanation can't hold water, it is clear that social change has had a great deal to do with the shape of modern culture. Certain ways of thinking and feeling may themselves facilitate social change, but when this comes about on a massive scale, it can entrench these ways and make them appear inescapable.
>
> This is undoubtedly the case for the different forms of modern individualism. (58)

The deviant forms of authenticity push toward social *atomism* and to make social relations purely instrumental. This slide is augmented by the mobility and anonymity of the contemporary metropolis. Our social relations with companies, merchants, co-workers, etc., become more and more impersonal.

Taylor admits that there are also reasons internal to the ideal of authenticity that facilitate the slide, particularly the movement of "high" culture towards nihilism in the form of postmodernism, as

in Derrida and Foucault. This brings us to the expressivist element of modern individualism, in which self-discovery is associated with artistic creativity. It is here that the romantics came to view morality as an obstacle to self-realisation, for morality was seen as social conformity. Authenticity struggles against the rules. This is exaggerated in the idea that all self-discovery involves *poiesis*. Hence, self-definition comes to be contrasted to morality. In art, this leads away from all forms of realism and naturalism and toward an art of inner expression. For Kant, beauty involves a satisfaction distinct from the fulfilment of any desire, and likewise authenticity comes to be understood as being "for its own sake". Schiller claims that aesthetic wholeness is an independent goal with its own *telos*.

Taylor claims that it is this tradition that has been perverted by Derrida, Foucault and their followers. They focus on one set of demands of authenticity:

(A)　　(i) creativity as well as discovery

　　　　(ii) originality

　　　　(iii) opposition to conventions even extending to morality at the expense of another:

(B)　　(i) openness to the horizons of significance

　　　　(ii) self-definition in dialogue.

From the beginning, the ethics of authenticity have been associated with a conception of freedom as self-determination. Taylor argues that this must be restrained, for otherwise it results in an anthropocentrism which, by abolishing all horizons of significance, threatens us with a loss of meaning and hence a trivialization of our predicament. At first, postmodernism seems an advocate of tolerance for all kinds of difference, but ultimately, it allows for an extremely self-centred view of authenticity as nothing has any real significance anyway. If nothing matters, why not indulge? This is why Foucault is seen as a leftist in America, but not in France or Germany.

The lesson Taylor wants to draw from all this is that the (A) set of demands must be balanced by the (B) set. However, the motivation for responding to the (B) demands, demands to recognise values whose source lies beyond human choice and demands to enter into meaningful dialogue with others, is undercut by the factors that motivate a response to the (A) set. In other words, the desires to which iconoclasm and anti-conventionalism appeal, and that in turn motivate the idealisation of creativity, originality and independence are precisely the sorts of feelings that dull one to the ideals of absolute value and genuine dialogue. It is not enough to point out that (A) in the absence of (B) is disappointing. Some framework of values, ideology or religion is needed to shore up motivation for (B). On its own, modernity does not have what it takes. If it was ever successful, it was because of surreptitious dependence on the earlier religious traditions, as in the case of Taylor himself.

VII. La Lotta Continu[14]

Despite the tendency inherent in the culture of authenticity toward degeneracy, Taylor thinks that we ought not to be arguing against it, but trying to persuade people that self-fulfilment actually requires unconditional relationships and moral demands beyond the self. Taylor's position depends on three claims:

(1)   authenticity is a worthy ideal,

(2)   we can reason about what the ideal of authenticity requires,

(3) reasoning and argumentation can make a difference.

I would offer the following reservations.

With regard to (1), the worthiness of authenticity as an ideal needs to be placed in context. Authenticity may be a worthy ideal if developed in an appropriate context of values. It is not clear to me

that Taylor does this. The European Romantic tradition certainly has a number of attractive features, but I doubt that it is capable of sustaining a hierarchy of values in terms of which its own conception of authenticity can be defended. Not only do we need to place authenticity in context, but we need to understand the background against which ideals may be judged as worthy or not. Taylor never makes it quite clear where his ultimate values originate. Is it religion, reason, intuition, or something else? As Muslims, we should ask whether there is anything like the ideal of authenticity to be found in the teachings of Islam. Then we could proceed to compare and contrast the Islamic analogue with the Romantic ideal.

Taylor defends (1) with the claim that "authenticity points us towards a more self-responsible form of life" and that it "allows a richer mode of existence". (74) Surely an authentic life is better than an inauthentic life, but the question is whether viewing what is important about the course of our lives in terms of that dichotomy is really helpful, or whether it skews our moral reasoning in ways that contribute to the erosion of higher values in modern culture. Taylor also appeals to the fact that "everybody in our culture feels the force of this ideal." (74) This merely testifies to widespread influence, not to any intrinsic worth, and Taylor admits as much.[15] Taylor's point is that the culture of authenticity is so entrenched in modern Western culture that it seems a folly to try to replace it by anything else. He proposes that we do better to accept the ideal, but to bring it into its best form. We do this by showing how the vulgar variety does not measure up to the highest forms of the ideal of authenticity as developed in idealist philosophies. Now it seems to me that if it is a folly to think that the culture of authenticity can be displaced by a return to religion or by the rise of some other set of moral ideals, it is at least just as foolish to think that the tide can be turned against the deterioration of the noble ideal of authenticity that Taylor would champion. It seems more likely to me that

inroads might be made against the domination of the vulgarisation of the ethics of authenticity by reassertions of religious ethics in widening enclaves of believers than by appeals to "the inherent thrust and requirements of this ideal" (77) in Schiller or Herder.

Regarding (2), certainly some reasoning about this is possible, but it seems to me that the culture of authenticity is too intellectually thin to sustain the sort of argumentation that Taylor offers. Some background of values is needed to get the thing off the ground. Taylor seems to want to start from authenticity itself with no additional premises. His argument is that logic is sufficient to show that the degenerate forms of authenticity are unworthy of allegiance. It seems to me that more profound sources are needed to reach this insight. This leads to doubts about (3). The sorts of arguments Taylor offers cannot be expected to have much practical effect given the current state of Western culture. Taylor's own defence of (3) displays either conceit or lack of imagination:

> As to (3), while everyone must recognise how powerfully we are conditioned by our industrial technological civilisation, those views that portray us as totally locked in and unable to change our behaviour short of smashing the whole "system" have always seemed to me wildly exaggerated. (73)

This statement seems to imply that Taylor thinks that the only alternative to smashing the whole system is the sort of argumentation that he himself has presented! He does not even consider the possibility that other forms of persuasion might be more effective means of changing behaviour. For example, one might argue that before popular Western culture can be expected to shift away from degenerate forms of authenticity, spiritual values need to be recovered as small-scale religious communities become stronger and more assertive.

Western culture today, as Taylor sees it, is in the grip of a struggle between higher and lower forms of freedom. He claims

that although the US is in danger of slipping into "alienation and bureaucratic rigidity" and losing its "quasi-imperial status", there is more hope for the rest of the Western world. He thinks that the alliance against the culture of authenticity, including those with a scientistic outlook, those with more traditional ethical views and proponents of an outraged high culture, cannot help the situation. The richness of the ideal of authenticity at its best gets lost in the attack on contemporary culture. To me it seems rather preposterous to imagine that the most noble versions of this ideal could ever again take hold in Western culture at large.

VIII. Subtler Languages

The "subjectivization" of modern culture has two aspects: manner and content. Taylor claims that authenticity requires the former but not the latter, and claims to have demonstrated this in his "horizons" argument. Confusion of these two leads to decadence. Taylor claims that this is what happened in modern art's shift from *mimésis* to the emphasis on creativity. In the past artists could draw on generally accepted doctrines, symbols, myths, etc. Now the symbols all take on a more personal meaning, as with Rilke's angels.

> What could never be recovered is the public understanding that angels are part of a human-independent ontic order, having their angelic natures quite independently of human articulation, and hence accessible through languages of description (theology, philosophy) that are not at all those of articulated sensibility. (86)

This, however, does not mean that modern poetry can only be about the self. Rilke tries to say something about the human situation, not just about his own feelings. As the sense of community based on a publicly defined order breaks down, the need is felt to establish some stronger more inward linkage. Taylor

suggests that much of modern poetry has been an attempt to articulate precisely this.

Taylor seems to think that we can regain the modernism of the Romantics and relinquish the more self-centred forms of modernism, as are exhibited in so much contemporary poetry. The hope is something like that expressed by members of the *derriere guard*, the group of contemporary artists who hope for a return to the sensibilities of an earlier age. Certainly, this wishfulness is the very essence of romanticism itself. It seems unlikely, however, that we could ever just back up, and even if we could, whether past experience would be enough to keep us from falling again into the same predicament in which we find ourselves. It would seem that a reorientation is needed. This reorientation seems hopeless in the context of the culture at large, and so must be founded on the establishment and growth of communities in which the recovery of value is supported. In this, religious communities in the West, whether Christian, Muslim or whatever, can play a crucial role. Only religion has the force and vitality to win hearts and minds to a recovery of value with a real social impact. Secular ideologies such as humanism and Marxism have spent themselves. They are no longer capable of inspiring people to great self-sacrifice or nobility. It certainly seems far-fetched to imagine that some renewed interest in the ideals of early modernity could catch on in contemporary culture.

IX. An Iron Cage

As Taylor surveys those "who look on the coming of technological civilisation as a kind of unmitigated decline," he finds that they are often on the left, while the knockers of authenticity are often right wing. In other words, both leftists and rightists find elements of contemporary culture inherited from modernity that they don't like. Taylor thinks that we need the same sort of compromising approach to technology and instrumental

rationality as the one he defends regarding authenticity. Our common affairs are bound to be managed by the principles of bureaucratic rationality.

> So whether we leave our society to "invisible hand" mechanisms like the market or try to manage it collectively, we are forced to operate to some degree according to the demands of modern rationality, whether or not it suits our own moral outlook. The only alternative seems to be a kind of inner exile, a self-marginalization. (97)

Taylor admits that his position is untenable if we are not really free to change or limit the effects of instrumental rationality. If we are locked into a Weberian "iron cage" just by being members of modern society, and if as such we are inevitably drawn into a whirlwind of technological development and bureaucracy, what use is there arguing about what directions it should take? Taylor takes a very sensible stance against this objection. The interaction between culture, thought and technology are much more complicated than Marx or Weber imagined. We should not exaggerate the degrees of freedom, but they are not zero. Taylor sees the Romantic movement (an offshoot of which he takes the ecology movement to be) as resisting the pull of instrumental reason.

So, how are we to resist the tendency of instrumental reason to become an oppressive reign of quantity? Once again, Taylor recommends that we turn to the moral ideals from which the ascendancy of instrumental reason originates: (1) rationality, freedom, autonomy; (2) the affirmation of ordinary life and the desire to relieve the suffering of mankind (as emphasised in the writings of Bacon). In themselves, these are good ideals, but they have been perverted into (1) the extreme individualism called "atomism," demanding freedoms to trounce upon traditional social ties; and (2) worldliness, materialism and consumerism. Taylor's unrealistic remedy is to turn back to the true and worthy ideals,

dust them off, and bring them to the centre of public discourse by considering what their realisation would really mean and the conditions under which they could be realised. This approach seems unrealistic, not because of Weber's iron cage, but because Taylor offers no more general moral framework, ideology, religious outlook or vision that could keep the true ideals on course and prevent the slide he condemns from recurring.

The oppression of instrumental reason has been subject to attack from various quarters throughout the twentieth century. Rene Guenon calls it the reign of quantity. The traditionalists who follow Guenon *do* offer an alternative moral framework that they find shared by the "authentic traditions" of the world. However, they seem no more realistic than Taylor. There is no way to simply turn the clock back, and there is no way to return to traditional worldviews as if modernity never happened. Taylor and Guenon both seem victims of nostalgic fantasy, one for the eighteenth century and the other for the middle ages. To my mind, what is needed is a fresh synthesis, one in which religious tradition is reasserted, not by ignoring modernity, nor by going back to its pristine roots, but by drawing upon the resources of religious tradition to enter into a dialectic or dialogic engagement with modernity. This is a gradual process that has already begun to take place in movements as diverse as the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the Society of Christian Philosophers. Just as the Islamic Revolution makes use of the apparatus of the modern constitutional state to reassert the ideals of Islamic governance, members of the Society of Christian Philosophers make use of the apparatus of contemporary secular philosophy to reassert Christian philosophical ideals. The danger in this approach is superficiality. One cannot simply adopt elements of modernity and call them Islamic or Christian. Some aspects of modern culture are flatly incompatible with a religious worldview. Other elements of modern culture need to be kneaded, worked, remoulded and

reshaped before they can really take a form that reflects the religious values and ideas into which they must be integrated.

Consider modern physical science. There seems to be an unwritten rule that allows no mention of God in any scientific text. The implicit atheism in modern science is not compatible with the religious worldview. The solution is not to throw out modern science or to reject it as evil, as the school of *sophia perennis* seems to suggest. Nor can we return science to the sort of piety to be found in Newton's writings, claiming, like Taylor, that to understand the true ideals of modern science, we need to retrieve the piety of its founders. Nor can we simply take modern scientific texts and sprinkle references to God over them like holy water to sanctify them. What is needed is a reappraisal and further development of modern science from a religious point of view.

X. Against Fragmentation

In Taylor's final chapter he turns to the issue of Tocqueville's "soft" despotism, the third of the three malaises mentioned in the opening chapter. He calls for a balance of the forces of the market and the state with needs for welfare, individual rights, and effective democratic initiative and control. He does not tell us how he arrived at this list, but seems to think of them as givens. The collapse of the Soviet Union teaches us that the market cannot be abolished. An unrestricted market, however, threatens even freedom itself, "with its uncompensated inequalities and exploitations." Taylor's solution is the humanistic balance of elements mentioned above.

There is much to criticize here. Exactly which theory of human rights would Taylor defend? Does the currently dominant concept of human rights itself not reflect a "slide" toward vulgarization, similar to what Taylor explores with regard to authenticity and instrumental reason? What about community rights? Taylor is famous for being a *communitarian*, but there is no

indication of that in his list. Similarly, questions may be raised about the other elements on Taylor's list, and further questions may be raised about whether other elements should be included in whatever list we might prefer. The very idea of a competition of forces suggested by Taylor's list should also be questioned. Market forces are varied, and the different elements of bureaucracy are often in competition among themselves. Rights claims need to be balanced against one another, as well. Regardless of all these questions, objections and outstanding issues, however, Taylor is certainly right in his insistence that the forces at play in modern society cannot simply be wished away.

Although democratic initiative and action are on the list of forces to be balanced with others, it soon becomes clear that Taylor sees democratic action as the chief hero in the struggle against the forces of darkness. Effective democratic action is threatened by political apathy, and by the fragmentation brought about by the general retreat to individual and communitarian concerns. As despair about being able to do anything about government becomes widespread, participation in political life declines, and Tocqueville's soft despotism is strengthened. The capacity to build politically effective majorities is lost. Taylor makes the reasonable suggestion that some decentralisation of power to more local communities can help motivate people to get involved. (Here is Taylor's communitarianism, which seems to be a form of federalism). However, what is needed for the formation of politically effective majorities is a set of common values, a vision for the future, religious belief or ideology. Dividing a country into federal districts based on linguistic or nationalistic affinities does not provide these. I would argue that effective majorities will be formed when smaller ideologically founded communities find common cause, not when more people become involved in provincial government.

I agree with Taylor that we have to understand what is great as well as what is miserable about modernity in order to rise to its challenge, and we are indebted to Taylor for the great contribution he has made to this understanding, but I would insist that this sort of evaluation can only take place in the context of a moral tradition. As Muslims, we need to understand modernity in the context of the moral and religious traditions founded on the teachings of Islam. Instead of dwelling on the attractions of the ideals of early modernity and bemoaning its decline, we need to engage and struggle with modernity as it actually pervades our lives, and in that struggle and engagement we will only be successful by following the guidance Allah has given us and relying upon Him alone, *In Shā' Allah*.

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6. Anton, 150.

7. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 36-78.

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9. Heft, 15-16.

10. Heft, 18.

11. Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

12. Ronald Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 25/2 (1966).

13. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

14. Slogan of the Italian Red Brigades, "The struggle continues."

15. See page 75.

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