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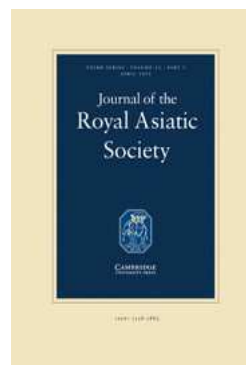
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“Only the Imam Knows Best”

The Maktab-e Tafkīk’s Attack on the Legitimacy of

Philosophy in Iran¹

SAJJAD H. RIZVI

Abstract

Philosophy, as an intellectual discipline emerging from Hellenism, had an ambiguous and disputed role in the theology and apologetics of Islam and continues to be contentious. In this article, I examine the arguments over the legitimacy of philosophy between the philosophical school of Mullā Ṣadrā (d. c. 1635), dominant in the present Shi‘i seminary in Iran, and its detractors in the maktab-i tafkīk who insist that knowledge of reality and the faith only derives from the teachings of the Shi‘i Imams and cannot be contaminated with Aristotelianism. After an introduction to this fideist school of separating religious and ‘foreign’ sciences, three questions are analysed. What is philosophy? How do we know God? How can we demonstrate the Qur’anic doctrine of the resurrection of bodies? What emerges is a more radical challenge to uṣūlī rationalism than that posed previously from the Akhbāriyya and their insistence upon a ḥadīth-based jurisprudence.

“God has created things with causes (*asbāb*), and he has designated an explication (*sharḥ*) for each cause, and for every explication there is a key (*miṣṭāḥ*), and for every key there is a science (*‘ilm*), and for every science a speaking threshold (*bāb nāṭiq*); he who knows it [the threshold] knows God and he who denies it denies God; the messenger of God (*rasūl allāh*) and we are that threshold. Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq²”

Looking at the Shi‘i seminary in Iran and the vogue for philosophy in the intellectual and learned culture of Iranian Shi‘i Islam, whether in the seminary or at the university, it might seem surprising that anyone should dispute or criticise the role of philosophy as a tool within the study of reality and as a complement to training in the religious sciences. The revival of the intellectual traditions of Islam post-1979, marked by the hegemony of the school of Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. c. 1635), the “Sadrian tradition”, as the epitome and ultimate referent of Islamic philosophy seems unchallenged and hegemonic. Historically, we know of periods in which Shi‘i ‘ulema, particularly the tradents, disputed the validity of the Neoplatonising Aristotelianism of *falsafa*; the Imams themselves were distinguished in their excellence by the very fact of their privileged knowledge of reality and even of the unseen.

¹This article was given as a lecture on 21 January 2010 in the Shi‘i Studies series at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London. I am grateful to the attendees for their valuable comments.

²Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt al-kubrā fī faḍā’il Āl Muḥammad*, ed. Mīrzā Muḥsin Kūcha-bāghī (reprinted Tehran, 1374 Shamsī/1995), juz’ I, bāb IV, ḥadīth #1, 26. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Those who came to dispute with them on matters of rational inquiry were defeated by their infallible intellect.³ The very notion of reason and knowledge in the *ḥadīth* material of the Shi'i tradition posited an alternative rationality to the *nous* of the Neoplatonists. Followers seeking knowledge and a rational understanding of themselves, the cosmos and their lord had but to refer to the threshold of the Imam or to his representatives who guarded and disseminated their teachings in their *ḥadīth*.⁴ In the earliest period, reason was, therefore, subordinated to the Imam; indeed it was the Imam who defined what was rational.⁵ The role of philosophy in the training of a religious scholar may therefore seem suspect.

But at other times, philosophy was appropriated and naturalised in Shi'i learned culture by theologians: in the medieval period, in the first wave with the Baghdadi theologians al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022) and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 1044), and later with those who married Avicennan philosophy with the theology of Abū-l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 1044) while locating it within the Shi'i contemplation of *ḥadīth* and the five principles of divine unity, justice, prophecy, imamate and the afterlife. These included Saḍīd al-Dīn al-Ḥimmaṣī al-Rāzī (d. after 1204), the famed philosopher-scientist Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) and Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, known as al-ʿAllāma (d. 1325).⁶ A more profound and far-reaching synthesis of revelation, rational inquiry, theology and even mysticism was ushered in during the late Timurid and Safavid periods by Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī (d. after 1501) and, especially, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. c. 1635).⁷ The Akhbārī reaction of the late Safavid period shifted the balance once again and the ideological and political victory of a rational, constantly renewed jurisprudence founded upon a philosophically grounded legal theory won the day. This turn of events allowed for the possibility of teaching philosophy in the seminary.

In this article, I examine a contemporary round of the dispute over the legitimacy of philosophy in Shi'i Islamic learned culture, focusing on the arguments between the Sadrian tradition and a *ḥadīth*-based alternative rationality known as the *maktab-i tafkīk* that considers religious and non-religious (and indeed 'foreign') sciences to be mutually exclusive. After introducing the teaching of philosophy in modern Qum and the *maktab-i tafkīk*, I analyse three areas of dispute between the two schools that are critical to their disagreement: what is philosophy and how ought one to acquire knowledge of reality? How can one know God? How can one establish the Qur'anic doctrine of the resurrection of the bodies at judgement and for the afterlife? Of course, these matters of dispute are not unique to the Shi'i tradition, but the modes in which they are articulated are demonstrative of the culture and formation of the modern Shi'i seminary (*ḥawza*) tradition.

³On the pivotal issue of the Imam's knowledge and the disputes over its nature, see Tamima Bayhom-Daou, *The Imāmī Shīʿī Conception of the Knowledge of the Imām and the Sources of Religious Doctrine in the Formative Period: from Hishām b. al-Hakam to Kulīnī*, unpublished thesis (PhD), School of Oriental and African Studies, (University of London, 1996); Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin dans le Shīʿisme originel* (Paris, 1992), pp. 174–199; Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shīʿite Islam* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 27–51.

⁴This latter option was especially true of the tradent-jurists who rejected independent legal reasoning, the Akhbārīyya – see Robert Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shīʿī School* (Leiden, 2007), pp. 268–296.

⁵Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *Risāla fi-l-iʿtiqādāt* (Tehran, 1951), p. 74; A. Ghaffārī (ed.), Abū Jaʿfar al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, (Tehran, 1968), I, pp. 170–171. For discussion on this point, see also Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, pp. 109–117.

⁶Sajjad Rizvi, "The developed kalām tradition part II: later Shīʿī theology", in T. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 90–96.

⁷Sabine Schmidtke, *Theologie, Philosophie und Mystik im zwölfschichtischen Islam des 9./15. Jahrhunderts: Die Gedankenwelten des Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī (um 838/1434–35 — nach 906/1501)* (Leiden, 2000); Sajjad Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being* (London, 2009).

Teaching Philosophy in Qum

In an oft-quoted anecdote, the late philosopher-exegete 'Allāma Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981) recounted the opposition that arose to his teaching of philosophy after he migrated to the *ḥawza* in Qum in 1946, opposition that was officially expressed in the disapproval of Sayyid Ḥusayn Burūjirdī (d. 1962), the paramount Shī'ī jurist and a source of emulation (*marja'*) of his time. Burūjirdī urged him to stop teaching philosophy openly. Ṭabāṭabā'ī explained:

I came from Tabriz to Qum only in order to correct the beliefs of the students on the basis of the truth and to confront the false beliefs of materialists and others. When Ayatullāh [Burūjirdī] was studying with a small group of students with Jahāngīr Khān [Qashqā'ī, a philosopher of the school of Tehran], the students and the people in general were believers. Their beliefs were pure, and they did not need public sessions for the teaching of the *Asfār*. But today every student who comes to Qum comes with a suitcase full of doubts and problems. We must come to the aid of these students and prepare them to confront the materialists on a sound basis by teaching them authentic Islamic philosophy. I will not therefore abandon the teaching of the *Asfār*. At the same time, however, since I consider Āyatullāh Burūjirdī to be the repository of the authority of the shari'a, the matter will take on a different aspect if he commands me to abandon the teaching of the *Asfār*.⁸

The command never came and he did not desist. Ṭabāṭabā'ī was, of course, not the first person to teach philosophy in Qum. The Safavid madrasas had luminaries such as the son-in-law of Mullā Ṣadrā himself, 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī (d. 1072/1661), and even at the time when Ṭabāṭabā'ī came to Qum, figures such as Āyatullāh Muḥammad Shāhābādī (d. 1950), a commentator on the *Asfār*, the magnum opus of Mullā Ṣadrā, the author of *Rashahāt al-ḥikma: ta'līqā 'alā-l-asfār*, and his famous student Āyatullāh Khomeini (d. 1989) were teaching philosophy to small select groups of advanced students. But Ṭabāṭabā'ī moved philosophy from the elite focus of such groups to the mainstream of the *ḥawza* and therein lay the social challenge. In the face of the criticism that philosophy served no utility and merely confused the weak minds of the mass of seminary students, and given the somewhat ambiguous role of philosophy (especially of the mystical variety) in the *ḥawza*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī articulated a famous defence of philosophy as the handmaiden of theology, especially a new vigorous and dialectical theology known as *kalām-i jadīd* that emerged in Iran and Iraq in the 1950s as a response to the ideological threat of Marxist dialectical materialism.⁹ It was due to this

⁸Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Husaynī-yi Ṭihirānī, *Mihri tābān: yād-nāma va muṣāḥhibāt-i tilmiḥ va 'allāma* (Mashhad 1417/1996), pp. 105–106; cited and translated in Hamid Algar, "Allāma Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī: philosopher, exegete and gnostic", *Journal of Islamic Studies* vol. 17, no. 3 (2006), pp. 334–335; Hamid Dabashi, *The Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York, 1993), pp. 274–275, 281–284. An alternative explanation of Burūjirdī's prohibition may lie in the fact that Khomeini had been teaching philosophy since at least 1936 (succeeding Shāhābādī [d. 1950] who moved to Tehran in that year) and Burūjirdī may have been protecting his student and head of his office (from 1944) – for this information but not the interpretation, see Mahmud Davari, *The Political Thought of Murtaza Mutahhari* (London, 2005), pp. 18–19. The rivalry may be further deduced from Ṭabāṭabā'ī's words themselves when he claimed that the syllabus in Qum was deficient in the teaching of philosophy.

⁹In Iraq, it led to the famous work of Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr (executed 1980), *Falsafatunā* [Our Philosophy], first published in 1959, which was a defence of metaphysical and epistemological realism against relativism, scepticism and dialectical materialism; cf. Chibli Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr, Najaf and the Shi'ī International* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 11–12; *Our Philosophy*, tr. Shams Inati (London, 1991).

ideological challenge that Ṭabāṭabā'ī convened a series of sessions on comparative philosophy between 1953 and 1971 and composed his defence of metaphysical realism associated with the school of Mullā Ṣadrā. This was published with the commentary, entitled *Uṣūl-i falsafa va ravish-i ri'ālizm*, of his student Āyatullāh Murtaẓā Muṭahharī (d. 1979). Also published were two new textbooks for the teaching of philosophy, *Bidāyat al-ḥikma* and *Nihāyat al-ḥikma*.¹⁰ The publisher's introduction to the former makes the link clear: material progress coupled with moral and intellectual decadence requires the *ḥawza* to produce capable alumni who are well-trained in philosophy as an ideological tool to wield against the forces of atheistic materialism and hedonism.¹¹ Thus Ṭabāṭabā'ī initiated the polemical use of Islamic philosophy that is commonplace in the *ḥawza* today.

However, the real vogue for philosophy, and indeed mysticism, came after the revolution, encouraged by Āyatullāh Khomeini's own attachment to the mysticism of Ibn 'Arabī and the school of Mullā Ṣadrā. Khomeini had taught *ḥikmat* in Qum since the 1930s and gave an infamous series of lectures televised in December 1979 and January 1980, commenting upon the open chapter of the Qur'an from the perspective of mystical philosophy.¹² The tastes of the Imam became part of the offering of state broadcasts and even today *Jām-i jam* (Iranian state broadcasting) produces and airs programmes discussing philosophy and mysticism. The study of philosophy was formally integrated into the curriculum of the *ḥawza* and practically everyone studies the basic texts of Ṭabāṭabā'ī. It coalesced rather neatly with the new political realities and ideology of the state. Khomeini seems to have encouraged the linkage of the study of philosophy and mysticism (*ḥikmat* and *'irfān* in the language of the *ḥawza*) with the political theory of *vilāyat-i faqīh*.¹³ Ṭabāṭabā'ī's own conception of juristic authority seems to have been a variant of Khomeini's and certainly his major students who have dominated Qum since his death in 1981 – including Āyatullāh 'Abdullāh Javādī Āmulī (b. 1933), Āqā Ḥasan Ḥasanẓāda Āmulī (b. 1929), Āyatullāh Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥusaynī-yi Ṭihrānī (d. 1995) and Āyatullāh Muḥammad Taqī Miṣbāh-i Yazdī (b. 1934) – have written major works defending the juristic theory in the language of philosophy and mysticism.¹⁴

But the claims made for philosophy by Ṭabāṭabā'ī and the school of Mullā Ṣadrā are far more extensive. Following Aristotle, they consider metaphysics to be the primary science and the foundation for studying the totality of knowledge. Metaphysics is also a manifestation of divine wisdom, of a rational and intuitive understanding of the faith, of a disclosure of “things as they truly are” (in response to the famous prayer of the Prophet) and an expression of the wisdom expounded as a free gift and as the great good in Qur'an 2.269: “He grants wisdom

¹⁰Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Bidāyat al-ḥikma* (Qum 1401/1981) and *Nihāyat al-ḥikma* (Qum 1362 Sh/1983); the comparative work is really a set of *taqīrāt* in philosophy penned by Muṭahharī, *Uṣūl-i falsafa va ravish-i ri'ālizm*, 5 vols. (Qum 1387 Sh/2008); cf. Davari, *Political Thought of Murtaza Mutahhari*, pp. 28–29.

¹¹Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Bidāya*, pp. 5–7.

¹²Hamid Algar, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (Berkeley, 1981), pp. 363–434.

¹³Cf. Alexander Knysh, “Irfān revisited: Khomeini and the legacy of Islamic mystical philosophy”, *Middle East Journal*, vol. 46, no. 4 (1992), pp. 631–653 1992; Hamid Algar, “The fusion of the Gnostic and the political in the personality and life of Imam Khumaynī”, *Al-Tawḥīd*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2003), pp. 3–17; Vanessa Martin, “A comparison between Khumaynī's government of the jurist and the commentary on Plato's *Republic* of Ibn Rushd”, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1996), pp. 16–31 1996; Christian Bonaud, *L'Imam khomeyni un gnostique méconnu du XXe Siècle* (Bairut, 1997).

¹⁴Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, pp. 317–322; “Abdullāh Javādī Āmulī, *Vilāyat-i faqīh: vilāyat-i faqāhat va 'adālat* (Qum 1378 Sh/1999); Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥusaynī-yi Ṭihrānī, *Vilāyat-i faqīh dar ḥukūmat-i islāmī* (Mashhad 1414/1993); Muḥammad Taqī Miṣbāh-i Yazdī, *al-Ḥukūma al-islāmīyya wa-wilāyat al-faqīh* (Beirut, 2004).

to whom he wills, and whoever is granted wisdom has truly received great good (*khayr kathīr*).” This convergence of religion and philosophy is quite clear in the introduction of the *Four Journeys* (*al-Asfār al-arbaʿa*), the text of Mullā Ṣadrā that Ṭabāṭabāʾī taught in Qum.¹⁵ Knowledge derived from revelation and from intellectual inquiry are entirely homogenous and substitutable.¹⁶ The same complementarity and interpenetration of Islam and Islamic philosophy is articulated in two other works of Ṭabāṭabāʾī and one of Javādī Āmulī that links the teachings of the Imams with the study of *ḥikmat*.¹⁷ Ṭabāṭabāʾī favoured the philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā as the best example of an Islamic philosophy that provided demonstrative approaches and solutions to questions of existence, knowledge and the cosmos. He did not consider issues of philosophy to be separate from exegesis of either the Qurʾan or the sayings of the Shiʿi Imams, and, like Mullā Ṣadrā, encouraged a holistic approach to knowledge.¹⁸ This may not amount to an explicit statement that such an intellectual and hermeneutical enterprise entails Shiʿi philosophy, but the concern with the twin poles of *wujūd* and *walāya* are what I have previously characterised as Shiʿi philosophy.¹⁹

So there are political and ideological reasons as well for the dominance of the *ḥawza* by Sadrian philosophy. The dominance of the school reflects an approach to philosophy as a rationalisation of the faith and as a natural theology in which the dictates of reason and revelation are entirely transparent and commensurate. The famous proof of the veracious (*burhān al-ṣiddiqīn*) for the existence of God is considered to be the ultimate ontological argument, and the argument about certain knowledge obtained through immediate experiences of epistemic objects is preferred as the best antidote to scepticism and relativism. Comparative studies abound juxtaposing Mullā Ṣadrā with Whitehead, Kant, Leibniz, Spinoza, Heidegger and others; Mullā Ṣadrā has become Islamic philosophy writ large, the highest form of intellectual expression for the faith.²⁰ Yet, despite the cultural and intellectual hegemony and the large number of students, increasingly, and especially from Shiʿi diasporas in Europe and North America attracted to Qum for its philosophy, all is not well in this idyll.

In recent years, the hegemony of the philosophical school of Mullā Ṣadrā in the *ḥawza* has been challenged from two intersecting directions, both now associated with the *maktab-i tafkeik*: first, there remains a traditional hesitation and distrust of philosophy associated with

¹⁵Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿaliya fi-l-asfār al-ʿaqliyya al-arbaʿa*, G. Aʿvānī et al. (eds) (Tehran 1382–1386 Sh/2003–2007), I: pp. 17–18. One also notices the complementarity of philosophy, the pursuit of knowledge and Shiʿi *ḥadīth* in an important work of the Mullā Ṣadrā’s student, Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt-i makhnūna*, Ṣādiq Ḥasanẓāda (ed.) (Qum 1386 Sh/2007), pp. 211–216.

¹⁶Fātima Ṣādiq-zāda Qamsārī, “Hamāhangī-yi ‘aql u maʿārif-i vahyānī dar ḥikmat-i Ṣadrāʾī”, *Maqālāt wa barrasi-hā*, (summer 1380 Sh/2001), no. 69, pp. 203–220.

¹⁷Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *ʿAlī wa-l-falsafa al-ilāhiyya* (Beirut, 1980), and *Risālat al-walāya* (Kuwait, 1987), now translated as *The Return to Being* by F. Asadi and M. Dasht-Bozorgi (London, 2009); ʿAbdullāh Javādī Āmulī, *ʿAlī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā wa-l-falsafa al-ilāhiyya* (Qum, 1415/1994).

¹⁸Ḥusaynī-yi Tīhrānī, *Mihṛ-i tābān*, pp. 42–56. However, he did make a distinction between the language, discourse and practice of mysticism and philosophy, opposing Mullā Ṣadrā on this point and supporting his student Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī; cf. Algar, “Allāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī”, p. 336.

¹⁹Sajjad Rizvi, “Towards a Typology of philosophical Inquiry in the Ithnā ʿAshariyy tradition” *International Journal of Shiʿi Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2006), pp. 189–206, and “Being and sanctity: two poles of intellectual and mystical inquiry in Qajar Iran”, in R. Gleave (ed.), *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran* (London, 2005), pp. 113–126.

²⁰For example, Muḥammad Fanāʾī Ashkivarī, *Maʿqūl-i thānī: taḥlīlī az anvāʿ-i mafāhīm-i kullī dar falsafa-yi islāmī va gharbī* (Qum 1387 Sh/2008); ʿAlī-Akbar Zakavī, *Basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa az dīdgāh-i Mullā Ṣadrā va monādashināstī-yi Leibniz* (Qum, 1384 Sh/2005).

the *hawza* of Najaf which has been imported into Qum and Mashhad – the teachings of the Household of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) are far more significant than alien ‘Greek’ learning. Given the centrality of the privileged and infallible knowledge of the Imams as the primary criterion of their status, it is difficult indeed for someone to seek knowledge elsewhere, especially in modes of reasoning whose cultural context was originally alien to the world of Islam. Knowledge and understanding are bestowed by God and revelatory experience.²¹ Second, there is a critical attitude towards the Sadrian School reflecting the need to engage with a new method of philosophy that is more authentically derived from scriptural reasoning within the Shi‘i tradition.²² Both of these tendencies have important precursors in the Imāmī intellectual tradition, at least in the Safavid and Qajar periods: one may cite Qāḍī Sa‘īd Qummī (d. 1696) and Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā‘ī (d. 1826) as examples of critics of the school of Mullā Ṣadrā who struck an independent path of intellectual inquiry often focusing upon a meditation of the sayings of the Imams.

Maktab-i tafkīk

In the early period, the *maktab-i tafkīk* was known as the school of the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (*ma‘ārif-i ahl-i bayt*) and was founded by a triumvirate of scholars; the first two were both trained in Najaf but never met and the third was an important student of theirs: Sayyid Mūsā Zarābādī (d. 1353/1934), Mīrzā Mahdī Gharavī Iṣfahānī (d. 1365/1946) and Shaykh Muḥtabā Qazvīnī Khurāsānī (d. 1386/1966).²³ Zarābādī and Iṣfahānī had studied in Najaf and were closely associated with the major jurists of the period such as Ākhund Muḥammad Kāẓim Khurāsānī (d. 1329/1911), Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā‘īnī (d. 1355/1936), Sayyid Muḥammad Kāẓim Ṭabāṭabā‘ī Yazdī (d. 1337/1919) and Shaykh Faḡlullāh Nūrī (d. 1327/1909). Zarābādī entertained an interest in philosophy and studied with prominent students of Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī (d. 1289/1873) among the philosophers of Tehran, namely Mīrzā Ḥasan Kirmānshāhī (d. 1336/1918), Sayyid Shihāb al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 1320/1902) and Shaykh ‘Alī Nūrī Ḥakamī (d. 1335/1917); he also wrote glosses on the famous philosophical text of Sabzavārī, *Sharḥ-i manẓūma*.²⁴ Later he settled in his hometown

²¹ Muḥammad ‘Alī Raḥīmīyān, *Muta‘allih-i Qur‘ān: Shaykh Muḥtabā Qazvīnī Khurāsānī* (Qum, 1383/2005), pp. 29–36.

²² For one important academic tendency critical of Mullā Ṣadrā and the uncritical perpetuation of his school, see Sayyid Yaḥyā Yathribī, *‘Ayyār-i naqd*, 2 vols., (Qum 1384–1387/2005–2008).

²³ For a historical account of the major figures, see Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥakīmī, *Maktab-i tafkīk* (2nd edn., Tehran 1376 Sh/1997), pp. 187–317; “Vīza-yi maktab-i tafkīk” *Kayhān-i Farhangī* 95 (Isfand 1371 Sh/1993). The only work in English on the school thus far is Robert Gleave, “Continuity and originality in Shī‘ī thought: the relationship between the Akhbārīyya and the Maktab-i tafkīk”, in D. Hermann and S. Mervin (eds), *Shī‘ī Trends and Dynamics in Modern Times (1800–1925)* (Beirut/Frankfurt, 2010), pp. 71–92. For a preliminary bibliography, see Ghulām-Ḥusayn Ḥujjatī-nīyā, “Kitābshīnāsī-yi Maktab-i tafkīk”, *Andīsha-yi Ḥawza*, (Ādhar va Dīh 1378 Sh/1999–2000), no. 19, pp. 198–216.

²⁴ To my knowledge, none of his works have been published. On jurisprudence and legal theory, he wrote glosses on the major school texts: namely, *Farā‘id al-uṣūl/Rasā‘il* of Shaykh Murtaẓā Anṣārī (d. 1846) and *Kifāyat al-uṣūl* of Ākhund Khurāsānī (d. 1911), and sets of lecture notes based on the classes that he attended in Najaf. On philosophy, he wrote two sets of glosses on *Sharḥ-i manẓūma*, a gloss on the metaphysics of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī’s commentary on *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt* of Avicenna, a gloss on the logic of *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, a commentary on the allegory of *Salamān va Absāl* of Avicenna, a series of treatises on the occult (*‘ulūm gharība*), a series of treatises on ethics, a Persian treatise on fundamentals of the faith and an Arabic treatise on it, and a commentary on the famous *ḥadīth* attributed to Imam ‘Alī on the nature of reality (*mā-l-ḥaqīqa?*).

where he taught until his death and was much appreciated by well-known philosophers such as his townsman Sayyid Abū-l-Ḥasan Rafīʿ Qazvīnī (d. 1975).

Iṣfahānī was more mystically inclined and associated with the teachers of ethics and mysticism such as Sayyid Aḥmad Karbalāʾī (d. 1332/1914), Shaykh Muḥammad Bahārī Hamadānī (a student of the famous Ḥusayn-Qulī Hamadānī) and the renowned Sayyid ʿAlī Qāḍī Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1366/1947).²⁵ He settled in Mashhad where he taught and established the centre at the school, perpetuated by Mujtabā Qazvīnī. The latter, after some years in Najaf studying with Yazdī and Nāʾinī, moved back to Iran, studying with Zarābādī and Iṣfahānī and settling in Mashhad to teach.²⁶ The work of Iṣfahānī, particularly his *Abwāb al-hudā*, and Qazvīnī's compendious set of intellectual meditations upon the Qurʾān, established the foundations of the school.²⁶ These were then developed by their students such as Shaykh ʿAlī Akbar Ilāhiyān Tunkābunī (d. 1380/1960), Sayyid Abū-l-Ḥasan Ḥāfiẓiyān (d. 1360 Sh/1981), Mīrzā ʿAlī Akbar Nawqānī (d. 1370/1950), Shaykh ʿAlī Namāzī Shāhrūdī (d. 1405/1985), Shaykh Muḥammad Bāqir Malakī Miyānjī (d. 1377 Sh/1998), Mīrzā Javād Āqā Tīhrānī (d. 1368 Sh/1989), Sayyid Kāẓim al-Mudarrissī (d. 1414/1994), Mīrzā Ḥasan ʿAlī Marvārīd (d. 1425/2004) and Shaykh Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥakīmī.²⁷ It was the last, Ḥakīmī, who supposedly coined the term "*maktab-i tafkīk*" and his book of that name which has undergone over eight printings and editions remains the manifesto of the school.²⁸ In the contemporary *hawza* both the students of the *marjaʿ* Shaykh Vaḥīd Khurāsānī (who had apparently studied with Iṣfahānī) and the Shīrāziyya (followers of the late Sayyid Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī [d. 2004] and his brother Sayyid Ṣādiq) have allied themselves in Iran with the *maktab-i tafkīk* to express their distaste for philosophy.²⁹ Prominent contemporary polemicists and thinkers of the school include Sayyid Jaʿfar Sayyidān, a student of Qazvīnī, who is based in Mashhad.

Tafkīk

One approach to understanding *tafkīk* is to appreciate it as a fideist movement. Fideism has a venerable history, going back at least to the church father Tertullian (d. 230) and articulates the view that the intellectual jurisdictions of faith and reason are quite distinct and can even

²⁵ Most of Iṣfahānī's works are in manuscript in Mashhad: only *Abwāb al-hudā* has been published a few times, including a recent reprint of the early 1980s edition as well as a new one – *Abwāb al-hudā fī bayān tariq al-hidāya al-ilāhiyya wa-mukhlāṣat al-maʿāl-ʾul al-ʾulūm al-yūnāniyya*, Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Najafī-Yazdī (ed.) (Mashhad 1364 Sh/1985), and the newer edition, Ḥasan Jamshīdī (ed.) (Qum 1385 Sh/2006). His other works include: *Mīrāj al-qurba*, a study of the spiritual significance of prayer; *Miṣāl al-hudā, ibṭāl-i maʿārif-i yūnān*, a critique of Sadrian philosophy; *Maʿārif-i Qurʾān*, a contemplation of the scripture that establishes the centrality of the text for the school; and *Vajh-i iʿjāz-i Qurʾān* on the doctrine of the inimitability of the scripture. On Iṣfahānī, see also Davari, *Political Thought of Murtaza Mutahhari*, pp. 7–9.

²⁶ Qazvīnī's main work is the five volume *Bayān al-Qurʾān* in Persian, one volume on each of the fundamentals of the Shīʿi faith (*uṣūl al-dīn*) – *Bayān al-Qurʾān*, 5 vols., (Tehran, 1370–71 Sh/1991–92). For a study, see Raḥīmīyān, *Mutaʿallih-yi Qurʾān*.

²⁷ For some relevant sources, see Mīrzā Javād Āqā Tīhrānī, *Mīzān al-maṭālib* (Qum, 1374 Sh/1995); *idem*, *Āyīn-i zīnādī va dars-hā-yi akhlāqī-yi islāmī* (Qum, 1370 Sh/1991); *idem*, *ʿArif va ṣūfī chih mī-guyad?* (Tehran, 1369 Sh/1990); *idem*, *Falsafa-yi basharī va islāmī* (Tehran 1355 Sh/1976); Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥakīmī, *Ilāhiyyāt-i ilāhī va ilāhiyyāt-i basharī: madkhal* (Qum 1386 Sh/2007); *idem*, *Maʿād-i jismānī va ḥikmat-i mutaʿāliya* (Qum 1381 Sh/2002); *idem*, *Maktab-i tafkīk* (2nd edn, Tehran 1376 Sh/1997); *idem* et al., *al-Ḥayāt* (Tehran 1367 Sh/1988).

²⁸ And as such a controversial and much maligned work – it is in fact quite difficult to obtain a copy.

²⁹ The Shīrāziyya translate *tafkīkī* works in Arabic: Shaykh Ḥasan al-Balūshī from Kuwait has kindly provided me with copies. On the Shīrāziyya, see Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (London 2008), pp. 88–102.

be hostile (although the hostility is not acknowledged in the school). In particular, and in contrast to natural law and theology's approach to presenting types of apodictic proofs for the existence of God, ontological, cosmological and teleological fideists insist that religious belief in the divine does not depend on rational justification. They draw upon philosophers who insist upon the unknowability of reality and truth, 'evidential ambiguity', and the limits of human reason such as Søren Kierkegaard and Ludwig Wittgenstein.³⁰ More recently, a number of Protestant theologians and philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga and William Alston have argued for a reformed epistemology that, in a sense, provides a warrant for fideism, although they resist the term.³¹

The school of *tafkīk* separates out the language and discourses of scripture, philosophy and mysticism, deliberately opposing the syncretical approach of the Sadrian school reflected in the teaching of *ḥikmat* and *'irfān* dominant in the *ḥawza*. However, the proponents are clear that this does not entail a hermeneutics of suspicion with respect to the text or reality or truth and that *tafkīk* is not a fideist form of Derridean deconstruction.³² Rather, the school insists that belief in the existence of God is basic and intuitive, and that the account that we have of reality needs to be accessed through infallible knowledge derived from the explicit sayings of the Imams – hence short-circuiting the basic hermeneutical problem (at least in theory). The school distinguishes between one legitimate form of intellectual inquiry that is described as rooted in revelation (*waḥyānī*) and two man-made forms of inquiry that represent the 'deviations' of philosophy and mysticism: namely, the rational (ratiocinative) philosophical method (*al-manhaj al-falsafī al-'aqlānī*) and the intuitive, gnostic approach (*al-manhaj al-'irfānī al-kashfī*). The school is inspired by three basic observations: first, that the discourse of the scripture and the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams take precedence over all other forms of expression and hence should be attended; second, that an historical analysis of philosophical traditions among Muslims reveals the fallibility of their intellectual endeavours; and third, that proper understanding requires a careful philosophical anthropology that is rooted in scripture, based on the notion of the innate disposition (*fiṭra*) of humans, the true light of intellect that resides within, knows God indubitably and is grounded in the contemplation of true knowledge from the infallible sources of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Infallibles.³³

There are different paths to knowledge, but *tafkīk* is insistent upon retaining the purity of the teachings of revelation, refusing any mixture with *falsafa*. Most of the attack of the school is focused on Mullā Ṣadrā, correctly identified as the main proponent of an approach blending reason and revelation. Ḥakīmī is perhaps the most moderate and influential of contemporary proponents of the school. He is not opposed to philosophy as such but considers both the results of philosophical and mystical speculation to be fallible, whereas

³⁰Two recent examples include John Bishop, *Believing by Faith: An Essay on the Epistemology and Ethics of Religious Belief* (New York, 2007) and C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason: A Kierkegaardian Account* (Grand Rapids, 1998). For discussions on the usages of the term 'fideism', see Richard Amesbury, "Fideism", in Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2007 edn), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/fideism/> and Thomas D. Nicholl, "The traditions of fideism", *Religious Studies*, vol. 44 (2008), pp. 1–22.

³¹Dr 'Alī-Akbar Naṣīrī of the University of Baluchistan and Sistan has been working for some years on comparing the epistemology of the *maktab-i tafkīk* with reformed epistemology.

³²Zakariyyā Dāwūd, 'al-Madrasa al-tafkīkiyya wa-l-ta'ṣīl li-l-'aql al-shī'ī', [email sourced from Shaykh Ḥasan al-Balūshī, October 2009], p. 4.

³³Ḥakīmī, *Maktab-i tafkīk*, pp. 25–29.

only scripture and revelation of the person of the Prophet and the Imams are infallible. Around half of Ḥakīmī's book introducing the school is taken up with texts that demonstrate how philosophers confuse fallible with infallible knowledge, genuflecting to the superiority of revelation without internalising it.

The centrality of the Qur'ān to the school is clear in the voluminous exegetical works of Iṣfahānī and Qazwīnī; in fact, it could be said that exegesis and hermeneutics in *tafkīk* play the role of metaphysical inquiry.³⁴ *Tafkīk*'s hermeneutics pays attention to the explicit senses of terms, attempting to recover the authentic voice of the text as enunciated, and not succumbing to the fallibility of understanding of the text that is historically and linguistically contingent. It rejects Aristotelian and Hellenic logic in order to recover an 'Islamic' logic from the *ḥadīth* that eschews an esotericising *ta'wīl* of the text. As such, it proffers a hermeneutics of naivety. Some critics repudiate the gloss of *tafkīk* as pious dissent and argue that the school is objectionable on ethical grounds because it uses *ad hominem* arguments, character assassination and, most important, excoriates and anathemises philosophers as unbelievers, especially Mullā Ṣadrā.³⁵ While some of the basic principles of *tafkīk* would not be disputed by many philosophers, some are actually appropriated but others are rejected. Nevertheless, at the heart of the dispute lies the basic question of the legitimacy and scope of philosophical inquiry.

What is Philosophy?

As we have seen, the school of Mullā Ṣadrā's holistic position regarding knowledge leads to a conception of philosophy as a way of life, a religious commitment and ethical stance in this world and a rational grasp of reality in a language that complements that presentation of existence in the Qur'an and in the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams.³⁶ To use Corbin's famous term, it is 'prophetic' philosophy in which the Greek-inspired *falsafa* tradition is a uninterrupted continuation of the wisdom first bestowed on Adam and Seth and then transmitted through the Babylonians and the Egyptians to the Greeks and finally to the Muslims.³⁷

The fideists insist upon an authentic and non-Hellenic-derived form of philosophical reasoning, explicitly taking in terms of a Shi'i philosophy (*ḥikmat-i Shī'ī*) or even a Shi'i intellect (*al-'aql al-Shī'ī*).³⁸ The defence of a Shi'i sensibility (and attack on Sadrian philosophy) is associated in the school with two major tradents of the Safavid period known for their hostility to philosophy and mysticism, Shaykh al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104/1691) and the famous 'Allāma Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1111/1699).³⁹ While not espousing Akhbārī views on method, they often approvingly quote the critique of Sadrian philosophy

³⁴Raḥīmīyān, *Muta'allih-i Qur'ān*, for example.

³⁵Sayyid Ḥasan Islāmī, *Ru'yā-yi khulūṣ bāz-khwanī-yi maktab-i tafkīk* (Tehran, 1383 Sh/2004), pp. 189–342, especially pp. 269–294 on the *tafkīr* of Mullā Ṣadrā.

³⁶Cf. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, tr. M. Chase (Oxford, 1995); Juliusz Domański, *La philosophie, théorie ou manière de vivre?* (Fribourg, 1996).

³⁷Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1986), pp. 21–38; Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics*, pp. 17–26.

³⁸See Riżā Ḥaqq-panāh, 'Ḥikmat-i shī'ī', *Andīsha-yi Ḥawza*, (Ādhar va diḥ 1378 Sh/1999–2000), no. 19, pp. 26–36; Dāwūd, 'al-Madrasa al-tafkīkiyya'.

³⁹Dāwūd, 'al-Madrasa al-tafkīkiyya', pp. 1–2.

and Avicennan-Muʿtazilī based philosophical theology found in the work of Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (d. 1033/1622) and Shaykh Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1772).⁴⁰

Following Iṣfahānī, the school distinguishes between valid, *ḥadīth*-based approaches to questions of knowledge and existence and those derived from Greek learning; *falsafa* is thus illegitimate, but philosophy may not be. In *Abwāb al-hudā*, Iṣfahānī provides the following polemical reason for the caliphate's embrace of philosophy and mysticism that came from the Greeks:

For anyone familiar with the policy of the caliphs, it is as clear as the sun that the reason for the translation of Greek philosophy and the encouragement of the Sufi way taken from Greece was naught but a policy to suppress the teachings of the Ahl al-bayt, peace be with them, and to distract people from them after they had been attracted to their teachings before the translation [movement]. They were successful in their goal after the result [of the translation] just as they had dominated them by denying them apparent [political] power. So Muslims occupied themselves with theoretical and discursive inquiries and after the translation [movement] did not feel the need for the teachings of the family of Muḥammad, peace and blessings be with them, and even used disputation and discourse against them as is clear from the history of the eighth Imam, peace and blessings be with him. Not just that, the matter went so far as to diminish their teachings in the eyes of their followers by interpreting their words through Greek, human and fallible teachings and by claiming that the most important intent of the Imams lay in the teaching of Greek sciences. This is not correct because the utterances of the Scripture and the *sunna* are predicated of technical meanings and the guidance of humans rests upon their learning after having been ignorant of those technical terms. A few of them extracted from the speech of God most High and the speech of the Messenger using the method of the rational, and cynically referred the community to one who knows Greek philosophy. This is a deficiency sidelining the mission [of the Prophet] and destroying the works of prophecy and mission. It is an act of oppression above and beyond the sword and the spear.⁴¹

Iṣfahānī makes it clear that *falsafa* is reprehensible as it reflects an inauthentic Shiʿi surrender to ʿAbbāsīd and hence to Sunni policy. The association of philosophy with Sunni illegitimacy is significant because it is also used by Akhbārīs such as Astarābādī in *al-Fawāʿid al-Madaniyya* who insists that certain knowledge comes from the Imams alone:

The reports from the pure Imams are transmitted in a corroborated manner saying that it is forbidden to rely upon the thoughts of the intellect [alone]; it is forbidden to study the science of philosophical theology and to teach it unless one is referring to the theology derived from their words.⁴²

True knowledge and understanding of reality comes from the teachings of the Imams for which the major tradents Abū Jaʿfar al-Kulaynī (d. 328/941) and Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1111/1699) are cited.⁴³ The Imams themselves and their true followers are cited as

⁴⁰ On these Akhbārīs, see Robert Gleave, *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shiʿi Jurisprudence* (Leiden, 2000) and *Scripturalist Islam: the History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shiʿī School* (Leiden, 2007), pp. 31–60.

⁴¹ Mīrzā Mahdī Gharavī Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā fī bayān ṭarīq al-hidāya al-ilāhiyya wa-mukhālifatihī maʿ al-ʿulūm al-yūnāniyya*, Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Najafī-Yazdī (ed) (Mashhad, 1364 Sh/1985), pp. 3–4; cf. Raḥīmīyān, *Mutaʿallih-i Qurʾān*, pp. 36–40.

⁴² Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī, *al-Fawāʿid al-madaniyya* (Qum 1424 Q/2003), p. 571.

⁴³ Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, pp. 4–5.

condemning *falsafa*.⁴⁴ A key distinction being drawn is between the illegitimate and fallible human knowledge derived from the Greeks and the legitimate and infallible knowledge of the Imams. Iṣfahānī does not dispute the validity of the objects of inquiry in philosophy; his criticism focuses on method and epistemology. *Abwāb al-hudá* is primarily concerned with an analysis of what is meant by the human soul and discusses key concepts such as *naḥs* (soul), *‘aql* (intellect), *ḥaqīqa* (reality), *wujūd* (being), *burhān* (proof), *‘ilm* (knowledge) and *ma‘rifā* (cognition). He does not dispute the need to engage in the study of *divinalia* (*‘ulūm ilāhiyya*) but objects to the method of Sadrian philosophy: true understanding can only come from the study of the teachings of the Imams. It indicates that cognition of God is an innate act of grace, a doctrine to which we will return later.

On the key issue of knowing God, Iṣfahānī summarises the differing approaches of *falsafa*, Sufism and the way of the Ahl al-Bayt:

Cognition of *divinalia* depends on the perfection of the intellect and knowledge (*al-‘aql wa-l-‘ilm*) as it is only through the perfection of the cognition of these two [faculties] that the path of knowing the Most Glorious Lord can be known. The most sublime veil is [constituted by] things that are known, cognised and conjectured; true cognition and perception of Him the most High can only occur through it [the *‘aql*] and then only with His permission and will. It is because of this that the gracious Messenger and the Imams, peace and blessings be with them, alone are the guides to the path of the Most Glorious Lord. The aim of teaching in *divinalia* is recognition of the inability to know [God] through reason and taught knowledge and the necessity for bewilderment and the realisation that God is beyond affirmation and negation.

The way of the philosophers and the sages is knowledge by representation (*al-‘ilm al-ḥuṣūlī*) and this is the intellect according to them. The way of the Sufis and the gnostics is spiritual wayfaring (*al-tajrīd wa-l-sayr wa-sulūk*) with a guide and nurturer. The Most Glorious Lord is, according to the philosophers, the reality of existence in the most intense degree devoid of volition and creative agency. According to the Sufis, He the Most High is the very reality of Being and the reality of essences and their occurrences and their activities. The way of the philosophers culminates in materialism and atheism (*al-mādiyya wa-l-dahriyya*) and the way of the Sufis culminates in peace to all and affirms magic (*al-siḥr*) for prophets since they consider all miracles to be like these powers which they presume comes from the niche of sainthood (*walāya*).

But His way, the Most High, in acquiring *divinalia* is light, which is the intellect that opens the gate of knowledge and it is to this way that the prophets, repositories of knowledge, have indicated. They teach people the scripture and wisdom and take them out of the darkness towards the light with the permission of their Lord to the Path (*ṣirāṭ*) of the Most Glorious and Praised. There is no end to the munificence of their intellects and their impulsion towards the light. They make people understand through the intellect and knowledge (and none other) the transcendence of the Most Glorious Lord, resulting in His glorification and the effacement of conjectured things and the oblivion of things which their spiritual and physical fathers and mothers had taught them.

Since the way in *divinalia* is the intellect and knowledge, they are the two proofs for the truth of the mission in opposition to human knowledge and the ‘disclosures’ of the Sufis for which there

⁴⁴ Ḥusayn Muẓaffarī, “Mukhālifat-i imāmān-i ma‘šūm va aṣḥāb iṣhān bā falsafa az dīdgāh-i maktab-i tafkīk”, *Ma‘ārif-i ‘aqlī*, (summer 1385 Sh/2006), no. 2, pp. 67–86; *idem*, “Mu‘arrafi-yi maktab-i tafkīk va naqd-i nigāh-i īn maktab bih tarjuma-yi falsafa az yūnānī tā ‘arabī”, *Ma‘ārif-i ‘aqlī*, (autumn 1384 Sh/2005), no. 2, pp. 83–104.

is no proof of its truth except a certainty that is not free of error! The way of the Sufis is the way of the deranged because submission of even the human soul into the hands of another (in such important matters) is surely the act of the mad.⁴⁵

Despite the vehemence of the language against philosophy and Sufism, it is not so far removed from the *docta ignorantia* professed by Neoplatonists, including Mullā Ṣadrā. The distinction is methodological and not related to content as such.

Iṣfahānī's student Miyānījī addresses the central theological tenet of divine unicity and juxtaposes Sadrian doctrines about the existence of God with textual evidence from scripture. The basic problem with philosophers according to Miyānījī is the fallibility of their epistemology and inability to understand what intellect and knowledge are: *'ilm* and *'aql* in the Qur'ān and the sayings of the Imams are not what Ṭūsī, Mullā Ṣadrā and others assume, read through the prism of their Neoplatonism.⁴⁶ One of the basic strategies is to contend that although the terms used in the *ḥadīth* are the same as technically philosophical ones, the homonymy of the terms is purely at the semantic level of the form and not the semantic content. That is to say, there is *ishtirāk lafẓī* (formal homonymy) not *ma'nawī* (meaningful homonymy), an old objection previously cited against Mullā Ṣadrā in the Safavid period by Mullā Rajab 'Alī Tabrīzī and Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī.⁴⁷

In concord with Mullā Ṣadrā, *tafkiḳ* criticises the blind imitation and rehearsal (*taqlīd*) of philosophy and proposes a critical approach, albeit one rooted in revelation.⁴⁸ The school of *tafkiḳ* has gradually developed and become more sophisticated and critical. Interestingly, it did not create a new orthodoxy and *tafkiḳīs* are rather proud of insisting that they do not imitate Iṣfahānī or other epigenous figures.⁴⁹ Authentic Shi'ī philosophy and mysticism can only be derived from text. It is rooted in exegesis of revelation: *ḥikmat* is what the Qur'ān says it is.⁵⁰ The separation of the three paths means that the holistic approach of the Sadrian school has to be rejected.⁵¹ While that school did not traditionally define its endeavour as Shi'ī philosophy, it is becoming a popular term in the contemporary period, partly as a reaction to *ḥadīth*-based criticism coming from the direction of the alliance between the school of *tafkiḳ* and the Shīrāziyya. The appellation 'Shi'ī philosophy' is somewhat odd because it represents a partial claim: 'Islamic philosophy', which is the preferred term of the Sadrian tradition is a far better claim. All too often we forget that the Shi'a claim to understand and explain the faith best: they represent what they understand as the faith, not in comparison or contradiction to any other theological grouping. Unfortunately far too much of what passes for Islamic studies still fails to understand this and perpetuates in effect a bias of the assumed orthodoxy of the majority.

Perhaps one key difference is that while the Sadrian school is paradigmatically concerned with the question of being and takes knowledge (and human knowledge at that) as a case

⁴⁵ Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, pp. 123–124.

⁴⁶ Mīrẓā Muḥammad Bāqir Malikī Miyānījī, *Tawḥīd al-imāmiyya* (Tehran, 1415/1994), pp. 14–53.

⁴⁷ Miyānījī, *Tawḥīd al-imāmiyya*, pp. 59–75. Cf. Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī, "al-Nafahāt al-ilāhiyya wa-khawātir al-ilhāmiyya", in N. Ḥabībī (ed.), *al-Arba'ūniyyāt li-kashf anwār al-quḍsiyyāt* (Tehran, 1381 Sh/2002), pp. 157–170.

⁴⁸ Raḥīmīyān, *Muta'allih-i Qur'ān*, p. 60.

⁴⁹ Raḥīmīyān, *Muta'allih-i Qur'ān*, pp. 61–64.

⁵⁰ Ḥaqq-panāh, 'Hikmat-i Shī'ī', p. 33.

⁵¹ Ḥaqq-panāh, 'Hikmat-i Shī'ī', pp. 28–30.

of being, *tafkik* focuses on the human as a thinking, recollecting and reflecting individual hardwired to recognition of the reality of the divine.

Another *tafkikī*, Rīzā Birinjār, systematically juxtaposes philosophy, or what he calls Aristotelianism, and the understanding of the faith that is derived from the teachings of the Imams. Fundamentally the concepts of *ḥikma*, 'aql and 'ilm must be comprehended from the scripture and the teachings of the Imams. Contrary to the famous position of Ṭabāṭabā'ī (articulated in his ultimate work of reconciliation, his exegesis *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*) that Islamic philosophy expressed in the *ḥikmat* tradition represents truth and the veracity of the Qur'ān is *ḥikmat*, a historical and linguistic analysis raises questions about such simple equations.⁵²

Rationality is, therefore, not the main problem but one founded upon a notion of the intellect as a sacred disclosure of God's grace. Philosophy as an understanding of reality that is drawn from the sayings of the Imams is entirely legitimate; *falsafa* or the *ḥikmat* tradition is not.

Epistemology of Religious Experience

The Sadrian philosophical tradition expends much ink on rational proofs for the existence of God and considers God to be a proper object of inquiry.⁵³ *Tāfkik* responds with a fideist denial of the need to prove the existence of God. The link to reformed epistemology is quite striking. Like thinkers such as Plantinga, the school considers belief in God to be 'properly basic'; hence there is no need for providing rational justification, either through the mode of ontological reasoning deployed by pure reason or cosmological inference drawn from natural theology.⁵⁴ *Tāfkik* insists that humans are hardwired to recognise the divine because, unlike philosophers who argue that knowing God is incumbent, they argue that one only needs to prove something that is doubted. Rather naively perhaps, *tafkik* argues that God is not a dubitable entity and to this end quotes numerous texts that demonstrate that recognising God involves simple, innate knowledge that exists within each of us and merely needs to be activated or recollected through contemplation of the Qur'ān and the teachings of the Imams.⁵⁵ In effect, the school proposes a rather optimistic anthropology: everyone possesses in themselves a warrant for their belief in the existence of God, which cannot be falsified by the doubt of another. This internal warrant, a practical expression of the notion of the light of the intellect as the 'inner Imam' (*imām-i bāṭin*) is corroborated by the authority of the text and the Shi'ī tradition, which may be considered to be a variant of the 'argument from authority' for the existence of God.⁵⁶

Most of the contemporary and more sophisticated members of the school engage with the question of epistemology and even make links with reformed epistemology by way

⁵²Rīzā Birinjār, *Ḥikmat va andīsha-yi dīnī* (Tehran, 1383 Sh/2004), pp. 95–110.

⁵³For example, 'Abdullāh Javādī Āmulī, *Tabyīn-i barāhīn-i ithbāt-i khudā* (Qum 1374 Sh/1995); for a good survey in philosophy of religion to rational approaches to the existence of God, see Graham Oppy, *Arguing about Gods* (Cambridge, 2006).

⁵⁴Alvin Plantinga, "Is belief in God properly basic?" *Nous* 15 (1981), pp. 41–51.

⁵⁵Miyānjī, *Tawḥīd al-imāmiyya*, p. 86; Rīzā Birinjār, *Ma'rifat-i fitrī-yi khudā* (Tehran, 1374 Sh/1995); *idem*, *Mabānī-yi khudāshināsī dar falsafa-yi yūnān va adyān-i ilāhī* (Tehran, 1371 Sh/1992).

⁵⁶Cf. Oppy, *Arguing about Gods*, pp. 332–344.

of comparison (although they would insist that this does not entail the contamination of knowledge derived from revelation with that which is human and fallible). Dānīsh-Shahrakī argues that metaphysics is not possible without a serious and rigorous epistemology. The weaknesses of Sadrian's metaphysics therefore lie in mistaken conception of the intellect. The *'aql* as expounded in the scripture and in the sayings of the Imams is not identical with the immaterial substance of the Neoplatonists nor the standard of value articulated in Enlightenment reason.⁵⁷ He explicitly denies that Sadrian philosophy produces a homologous and harmonious approach to the reconciled truths of the Qur'ān, the intellect and mystical intuition. Like other *tafkīkīs*, he insists that *'aql* needs to be understood in its technical linguistic and lexical usages as well as its instances in infallible texts.⁵⁸ The intellect in Sadrian philosophy is a substance that descends and emanates in a chain from the One in a Neoplatonic cosmology and psychology; the fallibility of the Ptolemaic cosmology raises issues concerning the shortcoming of the epistemology. The *'aql* of infallible texts is not something that emanates from the One and descends in stages of disclosures until it illuminates human intellects: the intellect that is linked and united with transcendent intellects is not the light that exists as an internal guide of the *ḥadīth*.⁵⁹ The Aristotelian rational soul is not what is intended in these texts.

Intellect is a means to knowledge and the second stage of the *tafkīkī* attack on Sadrian philosophy relates to the notion of *'ilm*. Raḥīmīyān's critique begins with the twin doctrines of knowledge in Mullā Ṣadrā: first, that knowledge is an expression for a mental mode of existence (*wujūd dhihnī*) that is infallibly predicated upon the *a priori* nature (*bidāhat*) of existence and on the indubitability of self-knowledge; and second, that certain and infallible knowledge is acquired through a non-dualistic and immediate grasping of the epistemic object through an act of union known as knowledge by presence (*'ilm ḥuḍūrī*).⁶⁰

The basic difference, as expressed by Sayyidān, is that the Sadrian tradition considers the *'aql* to be the nous of the Neoplatonists, the first emanation and then, in humans, a simple, separable and immaterial substance that undergoes degrees of perfection. For the *tafkīkīs*, *'aql* is an illuminative reality that informs and attaches to the human soul that it may evoke its innate ability to recognise God.⁶¹ Whereas the Sadrian tradition considers knowledge to be a process whereby the intellect starts from a position of ignorance and first principles and constructs and forms cognition and knowledge, *tafkīk* considers the process to involve revelation activating the *'aql* that illuminates the human soul and makes it realise that it recognises God.⁶² The catalyst for this process in each case may well be the disclosure of *kashf* (that method of intuiting truth through mystical insight), albeit for the *tafkīkīs* it arises from revelation and from divine grace, while for the philosophical tradition it may arise from spiritual practices associated with Sufis.⁶³

⁵⁷ Ḥabībullah Dānīsh-Shahrakī, *'Aql az naẓar-i Qur'ān va ḥikmat-i muta'ālīya* (Qum, 1387 Sh/2008), pp. 15–17.

⁵⁸ Dānīsh-Shahrakī, *'Aql az naẓar-i Qur'ān*, pp. 65–133.

⁵⁹ Dānīsh-Shahrakī, *'Aql az naẓar-i Qur'ān*, pp. 137–207.

⁶⁰ Alī-Riżā Raḥīmīyān, *Mas'ala-yi 'ilm: taḥlīl-i 'ilm dar falsafa-yi Ṣadrā'i va maktab-i ma'ārif-i ahl-i bayt 'alayhim al-salām* (Tehran, 1385 Sh/2006), pp. 25–150.

⁶¹ Sayyid Ja'far Sayyidān *et al.*, "Kursī-yi naqd va naẓariyya-pardāzi: nisbat-i 'aql u vaḥī az dīdgāh-i falsafa va maktab-i tafkīk", *Kitāb-i naqd*, (winter 1385 Sh/2006), no. 41, pp. 313–314.

⁶² Sayyidān *et al.*, "Nisbat-i 'aql u vaḥī", pp. 315–316.

⁶³ Sayyidān *et al.*, "Nisbat-i 'aql u vaḥī", p. 317.

However, as critics of the school point out, there are potentially two contradictions in the method.⁶⁴ First, the insistence upon adherence to infallible text does not preclude the need to articulate a hermeneutics. Merely negating a ‘Hellenising’ reading of the text does not entirely explain how we can infallibly extract that meaning of the text since we are not infallible. It is rather difficult to derive the intentionality of the text in the face of an assumption of the utter alterity of the divine.⁶⁵ *Tafkīkīs* make much of the incoherence and discord among philosophers on the nature of knowledge in order to question the definitive probative form of intellect as an independent source of knowledge; but the *qaṭʿ* nature of revelation requires a hermeneutics that can successfully extract this.⁶⁶ Second, the reliance upon the indubitable light of the intellect that lies within the believer seems to make reason sovereign in a manner akin to a naive Enlightenment rationalism, which would in itself entail a reliance on fallible and human notions of what it means to be human and to know. Explicitly, the parallels with Kantian and pragmatic epistemology are drawn. The basic assumptions of the school of *tafkīk* need to be articulated; without these, their claims to access infallible teachings cannot be substantiated.⁶⁷

Furthermore, *tafkīkī* epistemology is not far removed from tendencies in late Neoplatonism. It considers recognition of God to be an innate disposition which is created in humans; in our pre-existence, according to Qurʾān 7.172, we all testified to the lordship of God, the prophecy of Muḥammad and the sainthood of the Imams – the function of contemplating the scripture and texts is to recollect (*tadhkīr*) what we already know. In response, God bestows upon the hearts of believers contentment and tranquillity (*sakīna*), according to Qurʾān 48.4: “It is He Who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the Believers, that they may add faith to their faith; for to God belong the forces of the heavens and the earth; and God is Full of Knowledge and Wisdom.”⁶⁸ Contemplation of the texts acts as a transformative switch in the soul that activates the confirmation of faith. This is somewhat akin to the process in late Neoplatonism where the hierarchical reading of the texts within the curriculum is designed to be most efficacious for the production of philosopher-magi.⁶⁹

Eschatology of Bodies and Souls

One of the most problematic and yet important aspects of Sadrian philosophy is the attempt to provide a rational justification for corporeal resurrection within the confines of Neoplatonic philosophy, an endeavour rejected as futile by Avicenna. Mullā Ṣadrā and philosophy in the Safavid period more generally felt the need for a greater integration of reason and revelation. However, Ṣadrā’s solution that glosses the concept of body by introducing intermediary types of bodies is quite problematic. He famously circumvented the debate between spiritual and corporeal resurrection by insisting that the human is both a dyad and a unity of soul and

⁶⁴ Islāmī, *Ruʾyā-yi khulūṣ*, pp. 70–83.

⁶⁵ Sayyidān *et al.*, “Nisbat-i ‘aql u vaḥī”, pp. 322–323.

⁶⁶ Sayyidān *et al.*, “Nisbat-i ‘aql u vaḥī”, p. 327.

⁶⁷ Islāmī, *Ruʾyā-yi khulūṣ*, pp. 113–125.

⁶⁸ Miyanjī, *Tawḥīd al-imāmiyya*, pp. 87–89.

⁶⁹ Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (Cambridge, 2000).

body and that each level and stage of existence possesses a body appropriate to it.⁷⁰ Since the body of this world is mortal, it cannot share in the delights and pains of the afterlife that is beyond this corporeal world. The corporeality of the afterlife must be rooted in a perfection that arises from spiritual forms of perfection in that realm. The Qur'anic account does not specify the nature of the resurrected body. The body and soul of the afterlife are consistent with saving the appearance of the words of the scripture but represent a 'second birth' of a human.⁷¹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī famously did not teach the section of resurrection from the *Asfār* because he found the analysis unsatisfactory and contrary to the explicit wording of the Qur'an.⁷² Another prominent teacher of the school of Mullā Ṣadrā in an earlier generation, Muḥammad Taqī Āmulī, a philosopher from Tehran, argued that the Sadrian view amounted to a recapitulation of Avicenna's spiritual resurrection in a more obtuse manner.⁷³ Yathribī argues that the Sadrian presentation is deeply flawed with mixed rhetorical and logical premises and philosophical and unphilosophical modes of argument to produce a version of the Avicennan argument for the immortality of the soul and the spiritual nature of the afterlife in a different linguistic garb.⁷⁴

Tafkīkīs take two contradictory approaches on this question. Some, like Ḥakīmī, argue that on this point Mullā Ṣadrā is *tafkīkī* because he holds that the Qur'anic account of resurrection represents truth and the philosophical and mystical accounts are something different.⁷⁵ Others anathemise Mullā Ṣadrā for disbelieving in an exoteric reading of bodily resurrection. They claim that his position amounts to the Avicennan affirmation of a purely spiritual and non-corporeal afterlife and, in support, cite a number of prominent philosophers from his school who disagreed with him.⁷⁶ However, there is little doubt that Mullā Ṣadrā was the first philosopher to attempt a demonstration of bodily resurrection and was genuinely committed to arriving at a reconciliation that could solve a difficult problem; this is better than just denying that rational objections to the Qur'anic text should not be tackled head on. In the *Asfār*, Mullā Ṣadrā argues that a proper proof of bodily resurrection requires the consideration of scripture and the sayings of the Imams alongside the eleven central metaphysical contentions of his philosophical approach as well as the mystical intuitions of the school of Ibn 'Arabī. Such an approach is decidedly intellectually risky and courageous and quite the opposite of *tafkīkī*.

Conclusion

The school of *tafkīk* and its objections to the hegemony of Sadrian philosophy in the *ḥawza* cannot just be dismissed as unsophisticated obscurantism. As in the earlier epistemological conflict located primarily in jurisprudence between the *uṣūlīs* and the *akhbārīs*, the struggle between the Sadrians and *tafkīkīs*, while heavily loaded in favour of the former, not least

⁷⁰ Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Asfār al-arba'a*, IX, pp. 163–188.

⁷¹ Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Asfār al-arba'a*, IX, p. 302.

⁷² Algar, "Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī", 335–336.

⁷³ Muḥammad Taqī Āmulī, *Durar al-fawā'id fī sharḥ ghurar al-farā'id (li-l-Sabzawārī)*, 2 vols., (Qum, 1374 Sh/1995), pp. II: 460.

⁷⁴ Yathribī, *'Ayyār-i naqd*, II, pp. 145–159.

⁷⁵ Islāmī, *Ru'yā-yi khulūs*, pp. 236–237.

⁷⁶ Raḥīmīyān, *Muta'allih-i Qur'ān*, pp. 73–76.

because of the power of the institutions of the state and of history, is really about the true nature of Shi'i intellectual life. What does it mean to be Shi'i? How should believers see themselves, the texts that they read and the contexts in which they live? More critically, what is the relationship between our rational faculty and knowledge, and how does the Imam with his infallible knowledge intervene in the epistemic process? *Tafkīk* is not an anti-rational movement but one that insists that our assumptions about the nature of the intellect and the epistemic faculties need to be challenged and investigated in the light of scripture. There is still much more to investigate, and the schools of Mullā Ṣadrā and of *tafkīk* are evolving and diversifying. The political affiliation of *tafkīk* and whether some of their key thinkers now articulate an ideological response to the official political theory of the Iranian state requires some consideration. Two central issues remain at the heart of each: that proper rational inquiry needs to be critically engaged in evaluating intellectual traditions, eschewing *taqlīd*, and that the revelation in the words of both the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* directly addresses our reality both within and without. Out of these two methods a hybrid version will probably emerge that seeks to integrate philosophical inquiry about the nature of existence, selfhood and knowledge with a deep contemplation of the texts transmitted from the Imams. The primary task of that hybrid will be to articulate a clear and coherent hermeneutics that can effect this reintegration. S.H.Rizvi@exeter.ac.uk

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