The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Shahrastani's 'Mafatih al-asrar'

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Abstract

Despite his fame in the Sunni intellectual scene 6th/ 12th century CE, Shahrastani's later works show the impact on him of contemporary Ismaili teachings, and this is especially true of his unfinished, final project – a commentary on the Qur'an. In its exoteric aspect the *Keys to the Arcana* documents much of the richness and sophistication attained in the Qur'anic sciences (*'ulum al-Qur'an*) by his period. But its particular interest lies in its esoteric aspect in which its author elaborated a grand framework of binary concepts by which he claimed to access the scripture's deepest semantics. He applies these hermeneutical 'keys' in a remarkable systematic way to each verse, producing in the reader a liminal sense of the Qur'an's hidden philosophical coherence. This translation presents the first volume of Shahrastani's great text in English for the first time and includes an extended introduction and notes on the text, together with an edition of the Arabic original.

Key words

Qur'anic commentary, exegesis, binary, hermeneutical keys, Shafi'ism, Ash'arism, al-ta'wil, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, Nizari.

Dr Muhammad 'Ali Azarshab's *editio princeps* of Shahrastani's Qur'an commentary retrieves a strange jewel of Muslim intellectual history from near oblivion. In the sections of the work which analyse Qur'anic arcana (*asrar*), the modern reader finds a fully elaborated system to gain entry to the realms of the scripture's higher meanings. The elements of this system are of course the keys (*al-mafatih*) referred to in the commentary's title. From these formulae an awesome codetext emerges from the Qur'anic plaintext. An unsuspected intelligibility is found beyond the surface forms - a self-consistent, sacred 'philosophy' hidden within the verses. We are not dealing here with the allegorising trend of most allusive (*ishari*) commentaries, with their adaptation of the Qur'an to the moral and psychological life of the individual mystic – the kind of exegesis known as *al-tatbiq*. Shahrastani's approach is not allegorical but truly anagogic, in the sense of co-ordinating facts *with* facts; in other words, a decipherment of scripture in terms of the ultimate principia, structures and dynamics of the divine order. His hermeneutics is thus oddly asymbolic and even positivistic, despite being highly esoteric.

The tragically incomplete commentary belongs to Shahrastani's later years and enshrines insights gained from a hard quest – as he himself presents it to his readers at the beginning of the work. Though a thinker of marked subtlety and rigour, whose works show an exceptional breadth and daring in their focus, it would nevertheless seem that Sufism – the final destination of many of the more probing intellects amongst his contemporaries – was not to be the answer for him. His reputation and writings bear little trace of the Sufi zeitgeist. Instead Shahrastani's remarkably eclectic religious identity took in Shafi'ism in the sphere of law, Ash'arism in the sphere of dogmatics, and

finally, a powerful form of Shi‘i gnosis in his higher theology and his esoteric hermeneutics (*al-ta’wil*).

A precise reconstruction of the tortuous path of Shahrastani’s quest is impossible on the mere basis of his own hints and the references in scholarly biography. He has left us no ‘confessio’ like *al-Munqidh min al-dalal* of his eminent older contemporary Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH/1111 CE). With exact details of location and timeframe, the *Munqidh* describes the author’s inner crises, his dissatisfaction with a purely externalised and credal concept of Islam, and his final recovery through the catholicon which he found in Sufism. Shahrastani’s case may well have been as intense, but it was quite different in outcome. Indeed, his distinct solution to his own plight ensured that similar details are out of reach. For several items of evidence point to the impact on him of Isma‘ili Shi‘ism, which remained both suspect and feared through the Saljuq period.

Thus Sam‘ani (d. 562 AH/1166 CE) says in his *Tahbir* that Shahrastani ‘was suspected of heresy (*al-ilhad*) and inclining to [the heretics]. He was extreme in Shi‘ism’.[1] Subki (quoting Dhahabi, who is again quoting Sam‘ani) says more specifically that Shahrastani ‘was suspected of inclining to the people of the mountain fortresses, meaning the Isma‘ilis, their missionary activity, and defending their calamities’.[2] He understandably immediately tries to clear his fellow Ash‘ari’s reputation: ‘I don’t know whence Ibn al-Sam‘ani had that, for Abu’l-Fath’s works indicate the very opposite!’ Shahrastani was clearly too important a spokesman of the Shafi‘i-Ash‘ari tradition to let such claims go unchallenged.

But further crucial testimony is to be found in the works of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (672 AH/1274 CE), around a hundred years later. Tusi had been an active member of the Nizari Isma‘ili community and had supervised (if not actually himself written) a thorough account of the Nizari system of thought in his *Rawdat al-taslim*. In his separate Nizari confession *Sayr wa suluk* he tells the story of how he joined the community and how his father had sent him to a local philosophy teacher, Kamal al-Din Muhammad Hasib, who suggested to the young Tusi that ‘the truth [may be found] among people who are, in the eyes of the group that you know, the most contemptible people’, i.e. the feared Nizaris. Tusi’s Isma‘ili (or Isma‘ili-sympathising) father, we next learn, was taught by a maternal uncle who was a direct student-attendant of our own Shahrastani. And the latter is even referred to here in *Sayr wa suluk* as Chief Missionary (*da’i al-du’at*) - a very specific, remarkably high rank in the Isma‘ili religious organisation.[3]

Perhaps the most telling evidence lies in Shahrastani’s own later works. Despite an obvious comparison with Ghazali’s *Tahafut al-falasifa*,[4] Shahrastani’s own critique of Avicennism, *Musara‘at al-falasifa* (Wrestling with the Philosophers) is characterised by teachings which, while not without some relation with Ash‘arism, arguably emanate from Isma‘ili Shi‘ism. The book’s keynote is an understanding of God’s transcendence which proves to be more radical than that of the Ash‘ari school to which our author nominally belonged. Ash‘ari theology typically involves the de-anthropomorphic affirmation of the divine attributes (*al-ithbat bi-ghayr al-tashbih*) and in the *Musara‘a* Shahrastani expresses the same general stance, though with great philosophical finesse.

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[1] Sam‘ani, *Tahbir*, p. 161.
[2] Subki, *Tabaqat al-Shafi‘iyya al-kubra*, pp. 128-130.
[3] Tusi, *Contemplation and Action*, pp. 26-7 (English), p. 3 (Persian).
[4] Ghazali’s Incoherence (*Tahafut al-falasifa*) is in reality only the best-known case of a set of critiques of (mainly Avicennan) philosophy, of which Shahrastani’s is one. Others are Ibn al-Malahimi’s *Tuhfat al-mutakallimin*, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi’s *Sharh al-isharat*, al-Farid al-Ghaylani’s *Huduth al-‘alam*, and later Shihab al-Din ‘Umar al-Suhrawardi’s *Rashf al-nasa’ih.*

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He thus urges that all such attributes be treated as pure equivoques. That is, a given attribute is to be taken with wholly discrete senses when ascribed to a creature and when ascribed to God; indeed, when ascribed to God, the attribute's sense falls outside human understanding. The issue is argued by Shahrastani *ad hominem* in terms of Ibn Sina's principle of divine simplicity. He reasons that if concepts like 'intellect' (*'aql*), 'oneness' (*wahda*), or 'substantiality' (*jawhariyya*) were ascribed in an equivalent way to God and creatures, He is no longer simple but composite. For God would consist of the genus in question *and* a differentia marking out its divine instance from others.

So far, Shahrastani could be viewed as simply rendering Ash'ari principles on divine predication into philosophical terms. The leave-taking from Ash'arism lies in his inexorable pursuit of the said principles in refuting Ibn Sina's very attribution of being (*al-wujud*) to God, as for example in his famous description of Him as 'the Necessary Being' (*wajib al-wujud*). Shahrastani holds that 'being' would precisely amount to a kind of genus with divine and non-divine instances. The differentia 'necessary' then marks out the divine from the non-divine instance; and the presence within God of genus and differentia again ruins His simplicity. Shahrastani's uncompromising answer is to keep 'being' to a level underneath God, who in Himself is 'Exalted and Sanctified above His glory falling within the hierarchy of existents (*taqaddasa wa ta'ala 'an an yakuna jalaluhu tahta 'l-tartibi fi 'l-mawjudat*)'.[5]

This paradoxical, even ill-sounding concept of God as 'beyond being' is originally a Neoplatonic one, rare in Islam. It is encountered in the latter, in general, as a reflex of Isma'ili thought alone. Moreover it may be noted that in the *Musara'a* Shahrastani euphemises its distinctive theology as 'the Hanifi revelation' (*al-shar' al-Hanifi*),[6] and texts show that Isma'ilism was exactly self-styled in this way at the time.[7] Nasir al-Din al-Tusi again proves to be a key witness in the issue. As part of his agenda of defending Avicennism, he formulated a reply to the *Musara'a*, called *Masari' al-musari'* (Wrestlings with the Wrestler). In the course of refuting Shahrastani's *Musara'a*, Tusi stigmatises its core teaching that God is to be raised beyond all degrees, and beyond contraries like being and non-being, as the teaching of the Nizari Isma'ilis (*madhhab al-ta'limiyyin*).[8] This identification is to be treated seriously given that (as stated above) Khwaja Nasir al-Din was a major authority on Nizari doctrine and had himself been an active affiliate of the Nizari community. He was thus ideally positioned to point out the true philosophical background of Shahrastani's attack on Ibn Sina.

Be that as it may, the Isma'ilism of the Qur'an commentary is in places so explicit as to need no such prompting in its identification. A notable case is Shahrastani's discussion of the arcana (*asrar*) of Qur'an 2:34 referring to the Devil's refusal to obey God's command to prostrate to Adam. Adam is here taken to be the functional archetype of the Imam, and all religious error is traced by Shahrastani to this primordial act of disobedience: '... Just as Iblis did not acknowledge the present, living, current Imam, the commonalty are the same as that, while the expectant Shi'a only acknowledge the awaited, hidden Imam. And God has blessed servants on earth who do not get ahead of Him in speaking and they act on His Command, servants who are the purified servants of God, over whom Satan has no authority...'

[5] Madelung and Mayer, *Struggling with the Philosopher,* p. 32 (English) and p. 22 (Arabic).
[6] Ibid., p. 91 (English), and p. 119 (Arabic).
[7] For example 'Umara al-Yamani and al-Mu'ayyad fi 'l-Din al-Shirazi both refer to Isma'ilism in these terms, calling the reigning Imam the 'Protector of the Hanif faith' (*'ismat al-din al-Hanif*). See Smoor, ''Umara's odes describing the Imam', p. 559.
[8] Tusi, *Masari' al-musari'*, pp. 87-8.

In this boldly unequivocal statement, our author frankly convicts the Sunni masses (*al-'amma*) for refusing, like Iblis, to acknowledge the pontifex in their midst. He then states that, distinct from them, some of the Shi'a do recognise an Imam, but only a hidden one. This group – called the 'expectant Shi'a' (*al-Shi'a al-muntazira*) – also hold back from recognition of 'the present, living, current Imam' (*al-imam al-hadir al-hayy al-qa'im*). It is obvious that Shahrastani is here distinguishing the Twelver from the Isma'ili Shi'a, who alone are held to obey the divine command in its fullness by recognising the manifest Imam.[9] He goes on to equate the latter's speech with God's, his hand with God's, allegiance to him with allegiance to Him and war on him with war on Him, in conclusion declaring of the Imams that 'Whoever loves them has loved God, whoever submits to them has submitted to God, whoever prostrates to them has prostrated to God, whoever turns towards them has turned towards God and whoever places confidence in them has placed confidence in God. So what is it with these people who don't even understand a statement[10] and they talk on about how the prostration to Adam took place and what its interpretation was?! They do not grasp that prostration to Adam was prostration to God – rather, that so long as prostration to God is not combined with prostration to Adam, it is *not* prostration to God, just as so long as the formula "no god but God" is not combined with the formula "Muhammad is God's messenger", it is *not* the formula of testification and of sincerity!'[11]

So let us take it that Shahrastani's search indeed led him sometime to Isma'ilism, albeit as the esoteric complement – his 'higher theology' – perhaps for his well-known link to Shafi'ism and Ash'arism. Early in the commentary he makes passing reference to the key teachers credited with giving him this system of ideas, which turns out to be the main content of the Qur'anic arcana. The vital step in our author's discovery of these esoteric keys was his move as a youth to the main university centre of eastern Islam, the city of Nishapur. Shahrastani here studied with the greatest pedagogues, no doubt benefitting from Nishapur's new Nizamiyya College and using its precious library. And the most significant of Shahrastani's debts to a learned thinker of the city, by his own account, was to Abu'l-Qasim Salman al-Ansari (d. 512 AH/ 1118 CE).

Ansari is an enigmatic figure who, like Shahrastani himself later, was respected in his public role as an Ash'ari theologian.[12] But he is also sometimes recorded as a Sufi mystic. He is thus praised by Farisi, as '...the Imam, the pious godfearing ascetic, at one time the beloved of his age. His house was the house of righteousness, Sufism and *askesis*. He was amongst those who were peerless in the science of principles (*usul*) and scriptural exegesis...'[13] Subki's account too gives a picture of Ansari as an enthrallingly spiritual personality: '[Ansari's] gnosis was half spoken (*fawqa lisanihi*) and his meaning was greater than his outward [words]. He was in possession of seniority in Sufism and the mystical path, modest in his eating. He earned his livelihood by making paper, and he never mixed

[9] See Monnot, 'Islam: exegese coranique', in *Annuaire de l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*, tome 95 (1986-7), pp. 255-6; Steigerwald, 'Al-Shahrastani's Contribution to Medieval Islamic Thought', p. 265; Azarshab, *Tafsir al-Shahrastani*, p. 71.

[10] The expression 'so what is it with these people who don't even understand a statement' is from Qur'an 4:78.

[11] Iranian National Consultative Assembly Ms. 8086/B78, f. 121B.

[12] Subki says that he produced a commentary on the famous Ash'ari treatise *al-Irshad ila qawai' al-adilla fi usul al-i'tiqad* by Juwayni (with whom he had studied), and also a commentary on the *Kitab al-ghunya* (i.e. *al-Ghunya fi usul al-din*, an Ash'ari treatise, drawing on Juwayni's *Irshad*, by 'Abd al-Rahman b. Ma'mun al-Mutawalli). A manuscript of Ansari's *Sharh al-irshad* is available in the Garrett Collection at Princeton University Library, Ms number 3023.

[13] 'Abd al-Ghafir b. Isma'il al-Farisi, *Ta'rikh-i Nishabur* (part 1 of *al-Muntakhab min al-siyaq*) (Qum, 1403), biography 797, p. 386. Farisi was Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri's grandson, knew Ghazali and was his first biographer.

[with people], nor did he enter sociably into any worldly eating-house. He would be seated in the great library of the Nizamiyya at Nishapur, applying himself to his religion. He was stricken at the end of his life with weakness in his eyesight, and a cavity got going in his ear.'[14] Moreover this retiring but magnetic figure seems to have shared a supernatural reputation with his fellow mystics, for Subki transmits the following on the authority of Khatibi: 'I heard Mahmud b. Abi Tawba, the vizier, say: 'I proceeded to the door of Abu'l-Qasim al-Ansari and lo! The door was closed and he was having a conversation with someone, so I stood for an hour and the door was opened – and no one but him was in the house! So I said "With whom were you having a conversation?" and he said "One of the spirits (*jinn*) was here to whom I was speaking..."'[15]

Shahrastani for his part signals that Ansari was a turning point in his search. In particular, he credits him with beginning to confide the way to penetrate the arcanal reaches of Holy Scripture. It is noteworthy that, though he titles his mentor 'the defender of the Sunna', he also pointedly mentions that Ansari was steeped in a hermeneutic transmitted from the Prophet's lineage, and introduced Shahrastani to it: '...he would inform me about the [different] readings of the noble words from the People of the Prophet's House and their friends (may God be pleased with them), in line with buried arcana and firm principles in the science of the Qur'an'. The hint here is unmissable. The 'buried arcana and firm principles in the science of the Qur'an' (*asrar dafina wa usul matina fi 'ilm al-Qur'an*) surely allude to the complementarities by which Shahrastani gains entry to the Qur'an's anagogy. The detail that Ansari passed these keys down to his disciple as a legacy from the Prophet's progeny and their 'friends' (*awliya'*) implies that he is none other than Shahrastani's first point of contact with the Isma'ili Shi'i heritage. At any rate the roots of the hermeneutical system which Shahrastani began developing from Ansari, arguably lie firmly in the latter. It therefore seems that Ansari's reputation for Sufism might hide another, unchronicled affiliation, transferred by turns to our own author.

But Ansari was in fact only a harbinger. Pursuing his openings, Shahrastani says that in the end he found another, greater teacher. He symbolises this man, whose anonymity is telling, as the unearthly figure of God's 'virtuous servant' who was Moses' companion according to the Qur'anic narrative.[16] In Shahrastani's words: 'I searched for "the truthful" as passionate lovers might search. And I found one of the virtuous servants of God, just like Moses (peace be upon him) with his young man: "Then the two of them found one of Our servants whom We bestowed as a mercy from Us, and We taught him knowledge from Our presence".[17] So I learnt from him the ways of the creation (*al-khalq*) and of the Command (*al-amr*), the degrees of contrariety (*al-tadadd*) and hierarchy (*al-tarattub*), the twin aspects of generality (*al-'umum*) and specificity (*al-khusus*), and the two rulings of the accomplished (*al-mafrugh*) and the inchoative (*al-musta'naf*). I thus had my fill of this single dish, not the dishes which are the foods of error and the starting points of the ignorant. I quenched my thirst from the fountain of submission with a cup whose blend was from Tasnim...'[18] With its obvious feeling, the passage points to the very achievement of Shahrastani's quest, the encounter most responsible for his higher theology and esoteric hermeneutics. He clearly alludes here to his initiation by a high authority in the esoterism to which Ansari had first introduced him. We will almost certainly never know the *da'i*'s identity and it is tempting to think that he may even have been Hasan al-Sabbah (d. 518 AH/1124 CE) himself, or at least a surviving member of his circle.

[14] Subki, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya*, vol. 7, p. 96-99. The report is on the authority of 'Abd al-Ghafir.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Qur'an 18: 65-82. The servant is often identified with the immortal sage *al-Khadir*, 'the Green One'.
[17] Qur'an 18:65.
[18] Tasnim = a wellspring of Paradise.

The system of esoteric hermeneutics which passed in this way to Shahrastani is fully preserved in the commentary. Though the unicum does not reach beyond Qur'an 2, *al-Baqara*, it remains an invaluable witness to how this hermeneutic functioned on the text. For each verse is analysed under a set of headings, the last of which is always 'the arcana' (*asrar al-ayat*) in which the said 'keys' are used to probe the scripture's mysteries. The prior rubrics supply a trove of information on the plaintext (*al-zahir*), with treatments of the verses from the angle of 'lexicography' (*al-lugha*), 'linguistic-coinage' (*al-wad'*), etymology (*al-ishtiqaq*), 'grammar' (*al-nahw*), 'harmonious order' (*al-nazm*), 'transmitted exegesis' (*al-tafsir*), 'semantics' (*al-ma'ani*), etc. The value of these sections is at least threefold. Firstly they quote and preserve a great variety of sources, from Hadith (both Sunni and Shi'i), to more obscure works such as the *Maqayis* of Ahmad b. Faris (d. 395/1004), and others lost to history. These sections, in short, document the impressively ripe exegetical science of the mid-Saljuq period. Secondly this material implies an attitude to the interior (*al-batin*) itself, which (we gather) is never to be treated in isolation from the exterior. Instead, the riches of the interior are only won at the price of sincere self-exertion on exterior preliminaries. This concerns spiritual etiquette (*al-adab*) as much as critical method. Whoever would scale the heights of the sacred text must display their humility towards it through perseverence in such disciplines. Here we have a precise parallel of a reflex of Islamic mysticism: the principle that insight and other graces of the Spirit are only attained through an ascetic process of self-humiliation. The third value of these prior sections is as specific propaedeutics to the arcana. Shahrastani's unfolding of the latter partly depends on information in these earlier sections.

But our author's main instrument in opening up the arcana is his great lattice of complementarities, often co-ordinated with one another on a given verse. These paired ideas are largely covered in the list of methods conferred by the virtuous servant, as quoted above. The full series comprises creation/the Command, hierarchy/contrariety, the accomplished/the inchoative, generality/specificity, the abrogating/the abrogated, the clear/the ambiguous, and revelation/hermeneutics.[19] True, the last four pairs here are widespread in Qur'anic exegesis; yet *in situ* in Shahrastani's lattice they are nuanced and ramified in various brilliant ways. Each couple is briefly introduced in the following.

Shahrastani generally ramifies these, as we discover, through subdivision with the foundational complementarity of creation/the Command, for Qur'an 7:54 asks: 'Are not creation and the Command His?' (*a-la lahu 'l-khalqu wa 'l-amr*). These two terms thus signify the primary orders of reality beneath God, of which the Command is logically prior since it is the very means by which the things of creation enter existence.[20] It can be compared with the concept of the Logos in John 1:1-3, without which 'was not anything made that was made'. Shahrastani crucially extends his identification of the Command from the existentialising esto (*kun* = 'be!') to include the entire Qur'an, and also the religious laws issuing from the latter (i.e., precisely, the divine *commandments*). An objective cosmogonic role is thus attributed to the scripture by him, and with this role as a premise he develops his strongly non-figurative esoteric hermeneutics.

Our author's positive identification of the Qur'an with the creational blueprint brings about a heightened reactivity to its literal aspect: the placing of certain verses between others, the role of a *kaf* here or a *nun* there, and even the visual forms themselves of letters in the Arabic script. A notable

[19] I do not discuss these here in the precise order in which Shahrastani presents them.

[20] E.g., Qur'an 16:40: 'Our saying to something when We will it is simply that We say to it "Be!" (*kun*) and it is (*fa-yakun*)'. The idea of God's existentialising command echoes the hexaemeron of Genesis 1, where God's creative activity on successive 'days' is framed in exactly these terms – namely, His address 'let there be X', followed by 'and there was X'. E.g. 'And God said (*yomer*, from *amar*, which can also mean 'to command', esp. late), 'Let there be light' (*yehi or*), and there was light' (*wayhi or*). Gen. 1:3.

example of this is his interpretation of the letters of the divine *nomen proprium* in the Qur'an (i.e. A, L, L, H). He traces the germinal form of tridimensional space, the 'primary body', to the different characteristics of the three relevant Arabic letters. The height of the primary body follows from the vertical extension of the *alif*, its breadth from the horizontal extension of the *lam*, and its depth from the cavity (so to speak) of the *ha'*. While these correspondences are quite literal for our author, they also surely function to valorise the entire spatial domain, whose very structure becomes an icon of the name of God. An Isma'ili pedigree may be found for these ideas which appear to have been current in the circle of the renegade Fatimid *da'i* al-Hasan b. Haydara al-Akhram (d. 408 AH/1018 CE).[21]

It seems, then, that for Shahrastani creation and the Command are synonymous, respectively, with the subject matter of physics and metaphysics. An upshot is that for him the authentic hermeneutic of scripture achieves the very understanding sought by philosophers through their discipline of metaphysics. The deep configurations of the Qur'an illumine the structure of creation, due to their *causal priority*. This is why Shahrastani always finds the other complementarities as properties of both scripture *and* the external world, as for instance in the case of his next complementarity of hierarchy (*al-tarattub*) and contrariety (*al-tadadd*). The first of these is an ultimate 'vertical' differential, while the second is an ultimate 'horizontal' one. The two occur in the first place in the divine Word's underlying architecture, so that, for Shahrastani, its title *al-furqan* ('the Criterion', from the verbal root *faraqa*, 'to discriminate') refers to its expression of contrariety, while its title *al-Qur'an*, derived through a 'semantic' (versus historical) etymology from *qarina*, 'to join' (rather than its historical derivation from *qara'a*, 'to recite'), refers to its expression of hierarchy - its 'gathering together the things hierarchically ordered within it (*mutarattibat fihi*)'. Both aspects are acknowledged together in Qur'an 17:106: 'And it is a Qur'an that We have divided up (*faraqna-hu*)...'

These traits of the Command in turn inform the created cosmos. For example, Shahrastani quotes a hadith suggesting that existence within creation is actually premised on hierarchy: 'Human beings continue to prosper as long as they are different. When they become equal they are destroyed'.[22] For Shahrastani, reality is wholly expressed in hierarchies, with gradings between one angel and another, one prophet and another, one human being and another etc.[23] One human must thus function as a teacher and another as a disciple – in line with the principle of authoritative instruction (*al-ta'lim*) with its teacher-disciple relationship as elaborated in the complex formal rankings known as the *hudud al-din*. There is an obvious resonance in this key element of Isma'ili doctrine in the commentary, with earlier religious expressions of Neoplatonism. Consider, for example, the powerful reciprocity of the divine or daimonic hierarchy (*taxis tôn theôn)* and the sacrificial or cultic hierarchy (*thesmos tôn thusiôn*) in the theurgic Neoplatonism of Iamblichus; or the same link of the angelic and ecclesiastical hierarchies in the Christian Neoplatonism of Pseudo-Dionysius. We seem here to be confronted by a similar impulse of thought in Islamic guise.

The complementarity of the accomplished/the inchoative is one of the most thought-provoking in Shahrastani's hermeneutical system. In Chapter 10 of his introduction he quotes in full the hadith which he considers the original basis for the distinction. The hadith's context, as our author provides

[21] From Ibn al-Akhram's doctrines, in the end, arose the Druze. Hence the letter mysticism in question was sometimes condemned in Fatimid teaching as typifying his deviation, and deemed crudely anthropomorphic. However, the same interpretation of the name "Allah" is also found in Nasir Khusraw's *Gushayish va rahayish*. See Kirmani, *Majmu'at rasa'il al-Kirmani*, pp. 134-137, especially p.139.

[22] Sunan al-Darimi, *Muqaddima*, 32.

[23] Shahrastani bases hierarchy in each of these on quotations from the Qur'an: for angels, Qur'an 37:164; for prophets, Qur'an 17:55; for scholars, Qur'an 58:11; and for human agents in general, Qur'an 6:132.

it, is a clash between Abu Bakr and 'Umar.[24] The Prophet is upset to hear their voices raised in argument, and on inquiring finds that their contention concerns predestination. He suggests that they think in terms of a great angel whose make-up is half fire and half ice. The fire in it never melts the ice and the ice in it never puts out the fire. The angel praises God incessantly for maintaining the paradox of its identity in existence. But unsatisfied, 'Umar wants a definite ruling from the Prophet and asks him bluntly if our lives are as yet unfolding (*anif*), i.e. inchoative (*musta'naf*), or are they already accomplished (*mafrugh*) and wholly determined? The Prophet rules that they are in fact accomplished, but says that we must also take action: 'Act! And each is eased towards what he has been created for'.

Clearly the Prophet's framing his answer in terms of this paradoxical angel allows a transition from the natural standpoint in which the antinomy remains insoluble, to one from which the rationally 'impossible' combination of the terms can be accepted - and in fact celebrated - as testimony to the Supreme Being's mysterious power.[25] Whatever the case, Shahrastani puts the complementarity to full use both to explain problems of Kalam theology and exegesis. In the former, neglect of the complementarity results in opposed extremes, i.e., the necessitarians (*al-Jabariyya*) who wholly deny free will and the libertarians (*al-Qadariyya*) who wholly affirm it. On the other hand his use of the inchoative/accomplished complementarity in exegesis has to do with resolving *prima facie* conflict (*al-tanaqud*) between Qur'anic verses, i.e., the basic exegetical challenge known as *al-tarjih* (= preference, weighting). For instance, some revelations tell the Prophet to reprove and guide unbelievers, such as Qur'an 20:44: 'Speak to him a gentle word, perhaps he will pay heed or be godfearing'. But others say that such exertion on their behalf is vain, such as Qur'an 2:6: 'It is all the same for them if you warn them or do not warn them. They will not believe'. For Shahrastani, the distinguo dissolves the conflict. Revelations urging guidance simply refer to the inchoative and verses repudiating it, to the accomplished. In unfaltering pursuit of the internal logic of his system, Shahrastani will again split the complementarity between the Command and creation. Firstly, the accomplished and the inchoative as expressed within the Command are precisely the Qur'an's necessitarian verses (e.g., 2:6, just quoted) and its verses of commandment or admonition (e.g., 20:44, just quoted). Next, the accomplished and the inchoative as expressed within creation are taken to be the two great classes of beings: spiritual ones transcending space-time, and material ones subject to space-time.

With generality (*al-'umum*) and specificity (*al-khusus*) we enter the territory of more familiar exegetical principles. Yet Shahrastani takes the complementarity far beyond its normal juristic use, which is again to weigh different injunctions (*al-tarjih*).[26] Shahrastani's use of the distinguo is instead surely influenced by its function in Aristotelian logic; and further degrees are introduced by him – the general, the specific, the more intensely specific and finally, the individual.[27] All four levels are assumed in the framework of the Qur'an, if our author is to be believed. 'Humanity' (*al-nas*), for

[24] Compare al-Shaykh al-Saduq, *Kitab al-tawhid*, p. 280. Also see Tabari, *Jami' al-bayan*, vol. 7, p. 70 (on Qur'an 11:106).

[25] It is noteworthy that certain Jewish traditions speak of angels as made from fire and water (rather than ice), with God harmonising the opposing elements. See *Talmud Yerushalmi*, tractate on Rosh Ha-Shanah, ii, 58a.

[26] In the simplest application of the complimentarity, the general verse prevails over the specific one. See e.g. Khadduri, *al-Shafi'i's Risala*, p.96 ff.

[27] Sometimes Shahrastani introduces yet further degrees. Thus, beyond individualisation there may be a final 'resolution' (*talkhis*) of the concept, through a negation which removes any residue of generality from it. See e.g. his comment on the arcana of verse 7 of the Fatiha: "His statement 'Not those upon whom is wrath nor those who go astray' is a further resolution (*talkhis*) of that individualised idea so that no taint of indiscrimination (*ijmal*) is left...".

instance, covers the whole human species in a verse like 2:21: 'O Humanity (*ayyuha 'l-nas*)! Worship your Lord'. Yet the command to worship is not binding on the level of total generality, given that Islamic law grants that children and deranged adults are not legally answerable, though they of course fall within the genus, humanity. A stronger specificity is implicit in a verse like 2:199: 'Then hasten to where humanity (*al-nas*) hastens'. Referring to the rites at 'Arafat in the Greater Pilgrimage (*al-Hajj*), this in fact orders Muslims to imitate a more specific group, whom Shahrastani titles 'the rightly guided guides' (*al-hudat al-mahdiyun*). The group is nonetheless called 'humanity' in this verse. Finally 'humanity' is also used in the Qur'an at the purely individual level since traditions state that *al-nas* in the following verse (4:54) refers to the Prophet alone: '...or are they jealous of humanity (*al-nas*) because of what God gave them in His bounty?'

According to Shahrastani, the same fourfold dilation is found in 'mercy' (*al-rahma*) in the Qur'an. A single verse exemplifies three degrees of it, namely 7:156-157. Here, the most general degree comes first: 'My mercy encompasses everything'. More specifically, it covers the godly, but irrespective of their tradition: 'I will stipulate it for those who are God-conscious and give the poor-due and who believe in Our signs'. Narrower still, mercy is assigned to the godly of Islam: '...those who follow the Messenger, the prophet to the unlettered'. Finally, Shahrastani says that 'mercy' can be completely individualised, since a verse like 21:107 identifies it with the Prophet: 'We only sent you as a mercy for the worlds (*rahmatan li-'l-'alamin*)'. From the unquestionable presence of each degree of generality in Shahrastani's complex scheme, the liminal sense grows of a higher-order system within the Qur'an – a gathering impression of its profound underlying methodicalness.

The author's view of the otherwise standard complementarity, the abrogating (*al-nasikh*) and abrogated (*al-mansukh*), again impresses. Abrogation is of course the exegetic tool par excellence for the aforementioned task of *al-tarjih*. Contradiction is here resolved on grounds of chronology, so an earlier revelation is taken to be abrogated, and a later, to be abrogating.[28] But Shahrastani is in fact strenuously against the common, ill-sounding view that abrogation amounts to the negation or elimination of earlier revelations. He thus applies a strictly non-eliminative model to all cases of abrogation within the Qur'an: '[In the case of] every verse of the Qur'an which is said to be abrogated by another verse, the abrogating verse is found to be set up by the abrogated, not annulling it, nor negating it (*la rafi'a wa la mubtila*)'. But more daring still, Shahrastani's concern is not just one Qur'anic revelation's relation with another but the Qur'an's relation per se with earlier revealed scriptures – that is, not just intra-textual abrogation but also inter-textual abrogation. With this issue in mind he states categorically: 'never hold the opinion that one divine system (*shari'a min al-shara'i'*) negates another or that its injunctions are annulled and others laid down'. Instead for Shahrastani, each *shari'a* supplements what precedes it in an ongoing development from Adam till the end of history.[29] A daringly ecumenical attitude comes out in this, perhaps reflecting the global interest in beliefs characterising Shahrastani's most famous work, the *Kitab al-milal wa 'l-nihal* (The Book of Religions and Sects).

Shahrastani's stance on the complementarity of the clear and the ambiguous is again based on this strict system. The complementarity is theoretically vital since the Qur'an itself divides its verses

[28] Khadduri, *al-Shafi'i's Risala*, p. 123 ff.

[29] Shahrastani may even hint here at a cyclical concept of time and religious history, for he adds that the Resurrection will in turn prove to be 'another genesis' (*al-nash'at al-ukhra*), a term deriving from Qur'an 53:47. This must be put with other allusions in his commentary, such as his praising God in the doxology for concluding prophecy with the 'Chosen One' Muhammad, 'conclusion in the sense of utmost degree and perfection, *not conclusion in the sense of abatement and passing away*'. On the Isma'ili concept of the 'great cycle' (*al-kawr al-a'zam*), see Daftary, *The Isma'ilis: Their History and Doctrines*, pp. 140, 295, 297.

through it: '[God] it is who sent down to you the scripture consisting in clear verses (*muhkamat*) – they are the essence [literally, mother] of the scripture – and other ambiguous ones (*mutashabihat*)...'[30] The intractable problem of how to define the two categories is dealt with ingeniously by Shahrastani, by co-ordinating them with the accomplished/inchoative. The 'people of realization', he says, simply read the clear as the accomplished, and they read the ambiguous as the inchoative. Next, with inexorable logic, he again subdivides this by the distinguo of creation and the Command. Certain ambiguous verses for example, relate to the inchoative aspect of creation (unknown, future events) and other ambiguous verses relate to the inchoative aspect of the Command (legal injunctions rooted in scripture, but only later put into effect). The real interest of all this emerges in Shahrastani's wholly expected stipulation of hermeneutic interpretation (*al-ta'wil*) – a privilege of the Imams – for the ambiguous aspect of the Qur'an. It follows that for Shahrastani, all Qur'anic prophecies of future events as well as later legal applications rooted in the text, fall *beyond* the reach of conventional exegesis and require the hermeneutic of the Imams. This *inter alia* gives the Imamate a vital legal authority.

In the commentary's doxology Shahrastani even speaks of the Imams as complementing the angels in their role. If angels are the means of sending down (*al-tanzil*) revelation, then the Imams and their scholar-adherents (*al-'ulama' al-sadiqa*) are the means of tracing it back up (*al-ta'wil*, i.e. 'hermeneutics'). Both are instrumental for completing the great circuit of revelation, from God to God, and both together exercise a divine function. This is implied for Shahrastani by Qur'an 15:9: 'We send down the Remembrance and We are its protector'. In other words, God is the real agent of the scripture's descent to our world through angels and He is also the real protector of its ultimate significations through the Imamate.

Such formulations brim with the atmosphere of Shi'i gnosis, but our exegete's teaching that God protects the Qur'an through the Imamate also results from quite concrete historical considerations. For early in his introductions he explores the complex events leading to the canonizastion of the Qur'an, reaching conclusions in which the Imamate *literally* safeguards the codex for posterity. That Shahrastani problematises – however cautiously – the 'Uthmanic received text, is undeniable. Most of the information for the relevant discussion in chapter 2 of his introduction is in fact drawn by him from Sunni sources. He notes, for example that according to recognised traditions, the crucial revelation 33:23 was initially absent from the texts assembled for the 'Uthmanic codex. It was restored to its rightful place by Zayd b. Thabit who traced it to Khuzayma b. Thabit.[31] Shahrastani stresses that the verse refers, amongst other notables, to 'Ali b. Abi Talib; indeed, it prophesies while he was as yet very much alive, that he would be included in a list of superlative martyrs in the cause of Islam.[32] Our exegete asks: does the acknowledged case of this verse's omission perhaps imply a wider picture? Namely, a pattern of diffidence regarding texts proving the general pre-eminence of the Prophet's Household.[33] Shahrastani goes on to quote other traditions on the dropping of material

[30] Qur'an 3:6.

[31] Bukhari, *Fada'il al-Qur'an*, 3; Bukhari, *Maghazi*, 17; Tirmidhi, *Tafsir Sura* 9, 19.

[32] Qur'an 33:23 may be translated as follows: 'Amongst the faithful are men who fulfil what they pledge themselves to God to do. For amongst them is he who fulfils his promise and amongst them is he who bides his time. And they are quite unchanging.' In connection with this verse it is recorded that 'Abd Allah b. al-Harith b. 'Abd al-Mutalib, Hamza and Ja'far b. Abi Talib are covered by the words 'he who fulfils his promise', while 'Ali b. Abi Talib is referred to as 'he who bides his time'. The reference is to the martyrdom of the individuals mentioned – 'Ali's as yet being in the future at the time of revelation.

[33] In Shahrastani's words: 'Some of the learned asked: How many verses like it did they lose, consisting in what related to the outstanding traits of the Prophet's House?'

from the received text.[34] In the same analysis, he casts a critical eye over the credentials of the key agents of the 'Uthmanic canonisation, namely Sa'id b. al-'As and Zayd b. Thabit, who (as Shahrastani points out) were actually disparaged by figures widely acknowledged as superlative authorities in the Qur'an, such as Ubayy b. Ka'b and Ibn Mas'ud. It is reported here that the Caliph felt finally compelled to take action against the increasingly outspoken Ibn Mas'ud, sending a slave who attacked him so violently that he supposedly killed him.[35]

In tandem with this assessment of the received text, Shahrastani credits Shi'i sources claiming the existence of a codex of 'Ali b. Abi Talib. According to these accounts, as soon as the Prophet died 'Ali devoted himself to collecting a definitive version of the Qur'an. His codex was founded on the Prophet's direct guidance while alive, giving it an effectively apographic status. As though this were not enough, the texts also contained 'Ali's own commentary, which mainly gave attention to parallel statements in the revelation.[36] In the sources referred to, 'Ali and his slave Qanbar took his codex – which amounted to a camel load in size – to the Prophet's Mosque. But when 'Ali saw how he was snubbed by all present, he vowed to save his collection from harm and to keep it utterly secret: 'By God! You will never see it again'. The parallel of 'Ali and Aaron is well-known in Sunni and Shi'i traditions,[37] and Shahrastani here likens 'Ali's situation to Aaron's at Sinai. For did not Aaron bow to similar circumstances when the Israelites preferred the golden calf to God's plan for them – even as his brother Moses was bringing them His Word? The point is also explicitly that 'Ali's thinking was close to Aaron's long before him, since in the Qur'an he pleads a motive of keeping unity: 'I feared lest you would say "You have caused a division among the Israelites and [so] disrespected what I said"'.[38]

But the real parallel only comes out when Shahrastani explains that though the received (i.e. Masoretic) text of the Torah is supposedly impaired by scribal meddling (*al-tahrif*), nevertheless a copy of the original tablets is ever preserved by the Jewish high priesthood, the Aaronides. His drift here is clearly that the 'Alid codex is likewise the verbatim divine Word protected in Islam's own hereditary 'high priesthood', the Imamate.[39] While open access to the codex remains impossible because of 'Ali's oath that 'you will never see it again', yet the Imamate's teachings do enshrine it and afford access of a kind. Shahrastani's theory thus envisages a kind of binary transmission for the Qur'an, such that it reaches us through the two transmissive lines: the 'Uthmanic received text and the Imams' teachings. In fact, regardless of his theory's controversy, Shahrastani by no means disrespects the 'Uthmanic text which remains a portal to the noumenon of God's Word.[40] In the end the impact of his theory seems just to be to reinforce his dependence on the Imams' authority in hermeneutics. Moreover, against expectation, this dependence does *not* mean that Shahrastani cites prooftexts from the Imams for each arcanum. He instead decodes the verses, in practice, on his own initiative. But in

[34] Shahrastani mentions seventy names of hypocrites, originally recorded in Qur'an 9:64; and also the 'verse of lapidation' (*ayat al-rajm*) said to be found originally in Qur'an 33. This last has 73 verses in the *textus receptus* but originally had 286 or even 300 verses according to Ubayy b. Ka'b.
[35] Ibn al-Athir, *Usd al-ghaba*, vol. 3, p. 384; Ibn Abi 'l-Hadid, *Sharh nahj al-balagha*, vol. 3, p. 41.
[36] Parallel statements = *ma ya'taridu min al-kalamayn al-maqsudayn*.
[37] For a list of such traditions see Musawi, *Muraja'at*, pp.150-153.
[38] Qur'an 20:94.
[39] For a discussion, including numerous references to textual authorities, of the supposed Qur'anic recension of 'Ali, the *Kitab 'Ali*, and the *Mushaf Fatima*, see Modarresi, *Tradition and Survival*, vol. 1, p. 2 ff, and p. 17 ff.
[40] Its sacredness is confirmed in a final declaration in Shahrastani's discussion that 'The Qur'an in our midst is the Word of God between the two covers, protected by God's protection from change, solecism and error'.

so doing, he firmly bases himself on the lattice of keys outlined above, which he takes to be a secret heritage transmitted from the Prophet's line.

Let us look very briefly at how the lattice actually works, taking examples from Shahrastani's commentary on the *Fatiha*. The deeper sense of most of the verses is plumbed through the complementarities. To begin with the *Basmala*, the consecrative formula with which the *Fatiha* begins: 'In the Name of God, the Infinitely Merciful, the Compassionate'. In showing the presence of generality/specificity in the Qur'an, the different degrees of mercy (*al-rahma*) have been referred to above. It is important that the degree of mercy (*rahma*) manifest in the name *Rahman* is not the same as the degree in the name *Rahim*. The former name is more intensive in its grammatical form, so the mode of mercy signified is absolute and wholly indiscriminate. The adjective *Rahman*, 'infinitely merciful', is kept in the Qur'an for God alone and is even treated as close to the divine nomen *proprium* itself in its exclusivity: 'Pray to *Allah* or pray to *al-Rahman*...'[41] The case of the name *rahim* is quite different, for it applies to God *and* creature. The Qur'an applies it for instance to the Prophet: 'For the believers [the Prophet] is full of pity, compassionate (*rahim*)'.[42] So the mode of mercy signified by *rahim* is instead relative and discriminate. In his discussion Shahrastani captures the relation between the two epithets in a brilliant, chiastic formulation: *Rahman* is exclusive in predicability (used only of God) but inclusive in operation (extending to all existents) while *Rahim* is inclusive in predicability (used of God and creature) but exclusive in operation (extending only to believers). Or as he himself puts this: '*Rahman* is specific as a name (*khass al-ism*) but general in meaning (*'amm al-ma'na*) and *Rahim* is general as a name (*'amm al-ism*) but specific in meaning (*khass al-ma'na*)'. So it is clear in all this that the complementarity of generality/specificity, is already operating in the *Basmala*.

Next, the divine title 'Lord of the Worlds' (*rabb al-'alamin*) in verse 2 is clearly in a parallel relationship with the title 'Ruler of the Day of Judgement' (*malik yawm al-din*) in verse 4. On various grounds Shahrastani brings out how these directly correspond with the complementarity creation/the Command. 'Lord of the Worlds' relates especially to creation while 'Ruler of the Day of Judgement' relates to the Command and the next world (as intimated by texts like Qur'an 82:19, '...the Command that day is God's'). Creation stands for the corporeal dimension while the Command stands for the spiritual dimension; in other words, God's Realm of Omnipotence (*al-Jabarut*) in contrast to His Realm of Sovereignty (*al-Malakut*). Shahrastani here explores the intensity of connexion between the beings of creation and those of the Command, the concept of which connexion, however, he is at pains to sublimate. The model of physical contiguity is wide of the mark: '...there is no existent amongst the existents of the world which He has created out of something or which He has originated ex nihilo, without there being an angel from His realm of Sovereignty which directs it, and a Word (or Logos) which is its active agent determining it – even the rain drop from the sky falls accompanied by an angel and the mote of dust from the earth rises upwards accompanied by an angel. The two worlds are not adjacent to one another in the manner of bodies, nor do they combine intimately in the manner of bodies with shape and form. Rather they are distinct in significance and in reality...'

But in verse 3 between the twin divine titles of 2 and 4, we find repeated the titles 'the Infinitely Merciful, the Compassionate' (*al-Rahman al-Rahim*), which have already come in the *Basmala*. Why, Shahrastani asks, are these repeated here? Nothing in the divine Word should be seen as arbitrary or redundant. So, for Shahrastani these mercies *a priori* have some special significance. This emerges from their very placing within the structure of the *Fatiha*, whose every detail he understands to

[41] Qur'an 17:110.
[42] Qur'an 9:128.

correspond with the greater order of reality. Now these mercies are specifically positioned between creation and the Command, as signified by 'Lord of the Worlds' and 'Ruler of the Day of Judgement'. He therefore takes it that the general and specific modes of mercy are again invoked here precisely insofar as they *mediate* between these two great dimensions. Presumably each mercy retains its distinct scope within this new cosmological role, the *rahma rahmaniyya* being undiscriminating and the *rahma rahimiyya* being discriminating.

The next complementarity used by Shahrastani to penetrate the arcana of the *Fatiha* is that of the accomplished/inchoative in the case of verse 5: 'It is You we worship and it is You we ask for help'. Within the reciter's first declaration 'It is You we worship' is an implicit acknowledgement that the human agent is acting freely in response to the divine commandment to worship, for merit versus demerit. This first declaration of verse 5 therefore negates unqualified necessitarianism, and presupposes the entire inchoative dimension. But vitally, the second declaration 'it is You we ask for help', is co-ordinate with this. This instead implicitly acknowledges the agent's utter dependence on the divine. It therefore negates unqualified libertarianism, and presupposes the entire accomplished dimension.

The radically non-figurative nature of Shahrastani's esoteric hermeneutics comes out in the following. In the arcana of verse 5 he speaks of two definitive influxes of divine light. The rational creature undergoes one influx on its projection into existence by God (*al-ijad*), and another in its heart on its self-submission to Him (*al-taslim*). Our author here states enigmatically that the Arabic letters *kaf* and *nun* trigger both influxes. To be sure, *kaf* and *nun* in the form of the divine creative fiat *kun* ('Be!', as mentioned in Qur'an 16:40 etc.) are understood to produce the first of these eruptions in the creature's life story. But how might the cardiac light of submission be brought forth by contact with these letters? We gather that this is because verse 5 of the *Fatiha* is a kind of performative declaration – in itself enacting the creature's self-abandonment to God. The minutiae of the Arabic must thus be weighed: *iyyaka na'budu wa iyyaka nasta'in*. The second person singular pronominal suffix *-ka* ('You', as in 'it is You...'), technically known as the "'k' of addressing" (*kaf al-khitab*), grammatically betokens direct witnessing (*al-mushahada*) of the addressee, whose actual presence is implicit in it. And then, the inflexion of the first person plural of the imperfect *na-* ('we', as in '...we worship' and '...we ask for help') betokens the speaker's capacity in carrying through the action of the verb. The *kaf* and the *nun* of verse 5 thus fulfil the conditions for the cardiac light: respectively, acknowledging the divine object and free self-submission to it. The highly evocative idea here, of self-submission as an inner 'photic' experience, can doubtless be traced to texts such as Qur'an 39:22 which asks whether 'one whose breast God has opened to Islam so that he has a light from his Lord' is not better than 'those whose hearts are hardened against God's remembrance'.

Shahrastani's unfolding of the arcana of the rest of the *Fatiha*, verses 6 and 7, has many uses for the hermeneutic lattice. But the main complementarity used is undoubtedly that of hierarchy/contrariety. To begin with, hierarchy is the principle underlying the sequential statements 'guide us on the straight path' and 'the path of those You have graciously favoured'. For the first statement is a plea by those who need guidance, ranked beneath the 'graciously favoured' guides in the second statement – strictly encapsulating the hierarchy of *'alim-muta'allim* in the religious system of Isma'ili Shi'ism. Here again, Shahrastani brings out the mutual coherence of his hermeneutical keys by arguing that within this hierarchy, the spiritual seekers occupy the inchoative dimension, which is developing towards perfection, while the spiritual guides occupy the accomplished dimension, which is perfected and ever-realised. On the other hand, contrariety is the principle at work between these two positive groups and the two mentioned in the rest of the *Fatiha*: 'Not those against whom is Your wrath nor those who go astray'. These are the negative equivalents of the same ranks, such that the guides

match the vessels of divine wrath, while the seekers match the astray. In this way, the last two verses are a pure expression of the metacosmic principles of hierarchy and contrariety.

The whole text of the revelation is in theory susceptible to unfolding in these same terms used for the *Fatiha*. Through the conceptual talismans of the lattice a body of ideas underlying the Qur'an is brought into view whose numinosity and mysteriousness do not obviate the sense that they are also profoundly systematic. It would seem that through Shahrastani's esoteric hermeneutics we discover a real 'semantic logic' of the Qur'an, the divine ideas themselves which inform and underlie it. This liminal system is in the end to be identified with the higher orthodoxy which he elsewhere calls 'the mensuration of prophecy' (*mi'yar al-nubuwwa*) and 'the Hanifite revelation' (*al-shar' al-Hanifi*). In the *Musara'a*, Shahrastani contrasts the problematic metaphysics of Ibn Sina with this ultimate philosophy, with its claimed revealed basis. In the context of the work in question, the *lür* i.e. *über* orthodoxy is in particular called on as a source for doctrines correcting those of Avicennan metaphysics, such as God's alleged ignorance of particulars and the eternity of the world. But in substance, the higher orthodoxy of the *Musara'a* is completely at one with the hidden dimension of the Qur'an in the *Mafatih al-asrar*. It is simply that the concepts function in the *Musara'a* in a philosophical context, and in the *Mafatih*, in an exegetical one. The subjects of philosophy and of exegesis – respectively, the world and the Word – are united in their core meaning. In the provocative terminology of Proclus, the 'anagogic hero' ascends to the same, unitary meaning through his interpretation of either realm.

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