Towards a Phenomenology of Macrocosm and Microcosm: The Contribution of Šayḫ Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī

Introduction[1]

Primordial Islāmic Philosophy

It is well known but frequently overlooked that the word '*islām*' denotes, not a set of abstract ideas, dogmas, or rules, but an *activity*. In particular, it is an activity of reception and response to the *dynamic, universal Agape* (*Walāyah*) of the One. The activity of Islām in general, and of *primordial* Islāmic philosophy in particular,[2] begins with, not a point of metaphysics, dogma, or jurisprudence, but with a *phenomenological* point. In particular, Islām and primordial Islāmic philosophy begin with the phenomenon of *agapeic astonishment*. In each of the above two sentences the word 'agape' is being used in a slightly different dictionary sense. The first 'agape', as in 'dynamic, universal Agape',

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[1] In this paper we use the latest version of the recent AL̃-ṢANĀ°Āᴴ transliteration convention for latinization of Arabic expressions. This convention is phonetically more precise than the traditional systems, and is based in part on the famous ZDMG system. For details, see Hamid (2003, pp. 211–222). Furthermore: For the use-mention distinction, we use a single-quote name of a given expression to mention that expression, and we use a double-quote name of a given proposition or concept to mention that proposition or concept. When employing the use-mention distinction we always place external punctuation outside the ending quote marks. Otherwise we follow the usual convention.

[2]   Note that Islāmic philosophy may be divided into four periods:

1. Primordial.

    This refers to the early hermeneutics, phenomenology and cosmological explorations pioneered by the son-in-law of the Prophet of Islām, his successor ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661). This tradition was continued by his descendants and their followers, usually under the very difficult circumstances of repression and persecution. It is arguable that this age represents the most authentically *Islāmic* period of philosophical development, a point greatly appreciated by Corbin (1993, pt. I, ch. 2).

2. Classical.

    The classical age of Islāmic philosophy is the one known best in the West. It includes both the Neoplatonic *Falsafah* as well as that set of (generally anti-Aristotelian) systematic theological systems known as *the Kalām*.

3. Scholastic.

    This is the period after the Mongol invasions of the 13th century, when philosophy was preserved and advanced primarily by religious scholars and doctors. Philosophical and systematic mysticism undergo heavy development.

4. Late.

    The final period of traditional Islāmic philosophy may be marked from the Eastern Renaissance of Islāmic thought that took place in 16th century Iran down to the end of traditional Islāmic civilization at the hands of Imperialism towards the end of the 19th century. This period is characterized by attempts to integrate primordial Islāmic philosophy and phenomenology with both philosophical mystical cosmology and post-Avicennan Aristotelianism.

is used to mention *sublime love* (in our case that Act of Love that is both the efficient and final cause of the cosmos). The second 'agape', as in 'agapeic astonishment', is used to mention a *state of wonder and awe* (in this case that astonishment that occurs *in response to* Universal Agape).[3]

These two standard senses of 'agape' closely mirror the two complementary and polar denotations of the all-important Arabic expression '*walāyah*'. The word '*walāyah*' may be used to mention the *active* effusing of love throughout the *macrocosm* (that is, the agape that is *given*); it may also be used to mention the free *receptive* and *responsive* reflection of that love projected by every individual *microcosm* (that is, the agape that is *returned*):

All Walāyah to Allāh the Real... (Q 18:44)

That is, all *walāyah* or dynamic loving begins with the Source of *Walāyah* and is to be returned to the Source of *Walāyah*.

The activity of Islām is thus the receiving, responding to, and returning of *walāyah* and agape. The pole of this activity is *cognizance* (*maʿrifah̃*). As the founder and first figure of primordial Islāmic philosophy, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, stated so often, this return of *walāyah* begins and ends with the act of *cognizing* (*maʿrifah̃*) the One. Cognizing is rooted in the activity of *reflective meditation* (*tafakkur*) upon the phenomena in the macrocosm and microcosm, a meditation which in turn is rooted in *deep silence* (*ṣamt*). This deep silence produces the first act of returning *walāyah*, namely *astonishment* (*haybah̃*). Then that agapeic astonishment produces cognizance.

From cosmological cognizance, in conjunction with a sacred scripture and prophetic message, one may distill a theology, morality, and jurisprudence. But the *fundamental essence* upon which the entire edifice of Islām is built, and the benchmark upon which an authentically *Islāmic* philosophy must be measured, is ultimately a *phenomenological activity*. That phenomenological activity leads to agapeic astonishment, which in turn develops into ever-deepening layers of cognizance of the One through the *signs* of the One. Yet the signs remain the signs and the One remains the One. That is, the phenomena are *preserved* but the Noumenon is *revealed through* the phenomena:

Say, "Praise belongs to Allāh!"; He will show you His signs so that you may cognize them. (Q 27:93)

We will show them our signs in the horizons and in their selves until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real. (Q 27:93)

All Walāyah to Allāh the Real... (Q 18:44)

The interjection, "Praise belongs to Allāh!," represents agapeic astonishment; the **signs** constitute the phenomena; the **horizons** constitute the macrocosm; **their selves** constitute the individual microcosms that respond in agapeic astonishment to the macrocosm; **you may cognize them** and **it becomes clear to them** represent the intuition[4] of the Noumenon (**the Real**) through the phenomena (**our signs**). Phenomenological intuition

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[3] We have adopted the expression 'agapeic astonishment', but not its use, from Desmond (1995).

[4] This intuition is not *eidetic* but *ousiological*, as we will explain below.

thus constitutes the foundation upon which *walāyah* is received and returned to the Real; on the realization of this intuition the macrocosm-microcosm axis revolves, as ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib expressed in a poem:

> *Are you really sure that you are just a small body [microcosm]?*
> *While within you the Greater Cosmos [macrocosm] is enfolded!*

The above comments are all too brief, but we hope that they convey the sense in which primordial Islāmic philosophy is primarily a phenomenological science of macrocosm and microcosm. Historically, the process of developing these primordial insights into a complete and systematic system was interrupted by two factors. First the political fortunes of ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the founder of primordial Islāmic philosophy, his successors (the Shīᶜī Imāms), and their disciples declined to the point of repression and severe persecution. The Imāms were generally not allowed to teach openly, nor could they publish their own writings (other than very short and occasional treatises), having to usually rely upon oral transmission to their disciples.

Then, about the time of the ᶜAbbasī caliph Maʾmūn (d. 833 CE), the heritage of Hellenic metaphysics and its rationalist, as opposed to phenomenological, methodology begins to make a profound impact on Muslim civilization and the ways of thinking of its scholars. Combined with the political climate in which the Imāms taught, primordial Islāmic philosophy gave way to the era of classical Falsafah and Kalām. The imposition of an alien system of thought in turn appears to have inadvertently yet profoundly led to the obscuring of much of the *foundation* of the primordial phenomenological and cosmological teachings of the Imāms.

To expand: The dicta and teachings of the Imāms come in the form of aphorisms, short treatises, speeches and lectures, and supplications. Many of these were written or transcribed under difficult circumstances. Partly in order to preserve themselves, their teachings, and their followers from extinction by the so-called "orthodox" authorities, the Imāms employed and encouraged at least two techniques:

- They practiced, and insisted that their followers practice, something they expressed by the word '*taqiyyah̃*', meaning "dissimulation" or to use Corbin's interpretation, "the discipline of the arcane" (Corbin 1993, p. 37).

- They also practiced the art of "dispersion of knowledge" (Haq 1994, pp. 6–7). As opposed to laying out a complete and systematic exposition of philosophical doctrine and methodology, the Imāms would mention a metaphysical issue while discussing a legal issue, or discuss a point of doctrine in a lecture, whose deeper implications may only be gathered by meditating upon a particular supplication, whose understanding in turn depends on a verse of the Qurʾān, the understanding of which depends on other verses including a verse which can only be understood in light of that original point of doctrine, and so forth.

Thus the Shīᶜī system is a very organic and holistic body of teachings. This raises serious problems for both the philosophical hermeneuticist and the would-be systematizer,

not only because the corpus of Imāmi teachings is so huge—many tens of volumes in fact—but because of the use of the techniques of dispersal of information and dissimulation to protect their school from the attacks of the authorities.

Although the Imāms were largely successful in protecting their teachings—despite some obscurity—, after the disappearance in 874 of the last Imām we see the mainstream scholars of the Shīʿī community gradually placing increasingly greater emphasis and reliance upon the methods of rational theology, many of which were derived from Hellenic thought. Amir-Moezzi (1994, ch. 1) and Modarressi (1984, ch. 4) each has a good description of this trend.[5] Due to the need to defend their faith in polemics with the Muʿtazilīs and Ašʿarīs, they soon produced great figures in this field. This led to an abandonment of phenomenology and an inexorable descent into philosophical and theological scholasticism.

An example of the subversion of primordial cosmology by rationalism can be found in the concept "ʿaql". When the sources of Greek philosophy were translated into Arabic, a word was needed to express the Aristotelian notion of the "nous" (reason, intellect). Unfortunately, the Arabic term 'ʿaql' was chosen for the job. I say "unfortunate" because as time passed, virtually every school of thought in Muslim civilization, whether or not it was sympathetic or hostile to Greek philosophy, eventually came to understand 'ʿaql', a gerund signifying an *activity*, as a substantive meaning the *substance* "reason" or "intellect". Later Shīʿī thinkers, when reading the works of the Imāms on ʿaql, tended to interpret it as a purely rational faculty. Most translators, when translating the traditions of the Imāms on the subject of ʿaql—translate it by 'intellect' or 'reason'.[6] These kinds of subtle misunderstandings resulted in the eclipse of the primordial phenomenological science of macrocosm and microcosm that was taught by the Imāms.

Although Suhrawardī (d. 1191), towards the end of the classical age of Islāmic philosophy, tried to restore a phenomenological element to philosophy, his *illuminationism* remained firmly fixed (or trapped) within the confines of Peripatetic discourse. As the scholastic age eventually gave way to the period of late Islāmic philosophy, figures such as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640) went even further in the consideration of phenomenological intuition in the solution of philosophical problems. But even Mullā Ṣadrā could not escape the confines of Peripatetic discourse. For example, despite his revolutionary doctrine of motion in the category of substance Mullā Ṣadrā still strictly adheres to the ten traditional Aristotelian categories, rejecting even the modest modifications suggested by Suhrawardī. Put another way, while keenly aware of the importance of macrocosmic and microcosmic phenomenological intuition in the solution of philosophical problems, neither Suhrawardī nor Mullā Ṣadrā integrated that awareness into the very axiomatic or methodological bases of philosophy itself. Both remained firmly wedded to the Peripatetic/scholastic discourse.

Alchemy and the Mirror of Philosophy

Closely related to the development of primordial Islāmic philosophy we must consider also the almost parallel development in Muslim civilization of the science of *alchemy* (*al-kīmyā*). Known in the West primarily as a precursor to chemistry, there can be little

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[5] Amir-Moezzi and Modarressi approach this problem from entirely different angles (cosmological and legal respectively); nevertheless, their conclusions are basically the same.

[6] For some details about the impact the rationalist, Neoplatonic interpretation of ʿaql had on the later development of Shīʿī theology, see *The Divine Guide in Early Shīʿism* (Amir-Moezzi 1994, ch. 1).

doubt that, as the bearer of a *natural philosophy*, the concepts of macrocosm and microcosm served as two of the fundamental categories of understanding and investigation. In particular, one of the axioms of alchemy provided that an *isomorphism* or *one-to-one mapping* obtains between every general phenomenon in the macrocosm and every general phenomenon in the microcosm. The application of phenomenological sensitivity was, then, to isolate and pinpoint

- the category of fundamental elements of *the macrocosm* (*al-ᶜālamu ãl-kabīr*) and the mappings or correspondences between those elements;

- the category of fundamental elements of *the microcosm* (*al-ᶜālamu ãl-ṣaḡīr*) and the mappings or correspondences between those elements;

- the category of isomorphisms or correspondences between the category of macrocosm and the category of microcosm. (This third category corresponds to a *functor* in the branch of modern mathematics known as category theory.)

On the basis of the outcome of macro/micro-cosmological/phenomenological investigation, investigation and research is performed on yet another category, one which represents the supreme object of the science of alchemy. This is *the philosophicosm* (*al-ᶜālamu ãl-falsafiyy*). The category of the philosophicosm is that within which the researcher works with a subset of nature with a view to imitate the development and *artistry* of both the macrocosm as well as the microcosm so as to uncover a *mirror* of both, which then provides even deeper insights into the mysteries of the cosmos as a whole. This category constitutes the *mirror of philosophy* (*mirʾāẗu ãl-ḥikmaẖ*); the attempt to discover the extension of this category is the *work* (*ᶜamal*); and the science as a whole is *the Art* (*ãl-ṣināᶜaẖ*).

Given the isomorphic relationships between the category of macrocosm (the world outside the human being) and that of microcosm (the world inside of the human being), the alchemists of Islām often interchanged the word 'cosmos' with that of 'anthropos' (meaning "human being"). So the macrocosm is also the *macroanthropos*, the microcosm is the *microanthropos*, and the philosophicosm constitutes the *philosophianthropos*.

Popularly, the philosophicosm or "mirror of philosophy" is often expressed and understood in the sense of transmuting lead into gold, a transmutation that modern physics has proven to be impossible.[7] Yet it is clear that, despite the very important contributions to both theoretical and experimental chemistry made by the Muslim alchemists, many alchemists (including the figure we are concerned with in this chapter) considered lead and gold as merely symbols of the philosophicosm. It is not the case that gold constituted in and of itself the object of the alchemical work.

At least partly because of its use of recondite symbolism, highly secretive transmission, and constant abuse by charlatans or the ignorant, the alchemical perspective always remained something apart from mainstream and exoteric philosophical thought in both the West as well as the Muslim world.[8] The old cliché of throwing out the baby

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[7] In China, on the other hand, it is *immortality* that is the most common symbol of the philosophicosm.

[8] Isaac Newton symbolizes this separation. Although he himself pursued (unsuccessfully) the alchemical work, he maintained an apparent strict separation between his alchemical researches and his research in physics.

with the bath water comes to mind, the baby in this case being the phenomenological investigation into the functor category of correspondences between the macrocosm and microcosm. This category of understanding was never fully integrated into the axiomatic basis of mainstream Islāmic metaphysics. Thus, despite the movements of Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā in the direction of employing this and other kinds of phenomenological investigation, philosophy proper remained firmly entrenched in a post-Aristotelian scholastic framework.

From the above we can see that the primordial Islāmic philosophical perspective shares a common phenomenological ground with alchemy. It is no coincidence that the greatest flowering of alchemy, already an ancient science, in Muslim civilization took place in the context of that very primordial Islāmic philosophy. The historical[9] Jābir ibn Ḥayyān (d. 815?, Geber in Latin), the most famous experimental alchemist of all time, was apparently a student of the sixth (and most prolific) Shīʿī Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765). Much of the history remains obscure, due to the combination of the political repression of Shīʿī Islām with the traditionally secretive transmission of alchemy. Yet the relationship between these two perspectives is confirmed by the famous legendary words of the founder of primordial Islāmic philosophy, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib: *Alchemy is the sister of prophecy, and the protection of true humanness* (*Al-kīmyā uḫtu al̃-nubuwwah, wa ʿiṣmatu ãl-muruwwah*).

Although the primordial Islāmic and Shīʿī phenomenological perspectives remained on the sidelines of both mainstream Shīʿī scholasticism and Islāmic metaphysics, it never died out completely. Figures like Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 1274–75) and Niʿmatullāh al-Jazā'irī (d. 1700) kept the tradition alive in a purely Shīʿī doctrinal context, while Ḥaydar al-ʿĀmulī (died after 1385), Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Ahsā'ī (d. 1401–2) and others sought the integration of aspects of primordial Islāmic and Shīʿī thought with the mystical cosmology of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240), a project just as fraught with difficulties as that of its integration with rationalism. Similarly, figures such as Aydamur Jaldakī (died after 1350) and Mullā Ṣadrā's contemporary Mīr Findiriskī[10] (d. 1640–1) kept the alchemical perspective alive during the scholastic and late periods of Islāmic philosophy.

The absence of a key phenomenological element at both the axiomatic and methodological bases of mainstream Islāmic metaphysics was a key concern of a later thinker, Šayḫ Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (d. 1826). He sought to remedy this in large part through the resurrection and systematization of primordial Islāmic philosophy—including some ideas drawn from alchemy—, which contained the elements needed for a systematic phenomenology of microcosm and macrocosm. It is our contention that Šayḫ Aḥmad's work represents the most sophisticated attempt within traditional Muslim civilization to realize a systematic, axiomatic and methodological integration of the phenomenological investigation into the functor category of correspondences between the macrocosm and microcosm, with the scholastic rationalism of traditional Islāmic metaphysics. We are also hopeful that the

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The philosophy of nature underlying his mechanics has little apparent relation to a phenomenological philosophy of macrocosm and microcosm.

[9] We say 'historical' because there are many apocryphal treatises attributed to Jābir/Geber which were certainly written long after his time, though his own historical existence is certain.

[10] It has even been speculated that Mullā Ṣadrā was once a student of Mīr Findiriskī, but nothing is known for certain.

contribution of Šayḫ Aḥmad to this effort may prove fruitful for the present task of developing a precise phenomenological science and cosmology of macrocosm and microcosm for the present day and age.

ŠAYḪ AḤMAD AL-AḤSĀ'Ī AND ḤIKMAH̃

Šayḫ Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī was a scientist, mystic, alchemist and important philosopher of the early nineteenth century. With Šayḫ Aḥmad ended the cycle of the great and profoundly *original* philosophers of traditional Muslim civilization, a cycle that began with al-Kindī (d. 870).[11] Šayḫ Aḥmad belonged to the period of Muslim scholasticism that stemmed from the work of both the *kalām* theologian Fakhru ãl-Dīn Rāzī (d. 1209) and the last great philosopher in the post-Hellenic tradition, Naṣīru ãl-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274). In particular, Šayḫ Aḥmad worked two centuries after Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640–41). The latter was both a mystic and a systematic rationalist whose influence is to be felt in Eastern Islām up to this day.

Šayḫ Aḥmad was not formally trained in the school of Mullā Ṣadrā, nor did he adhere to it. Of course, during the lifetime of Šayḫ Aḥmad the school of Mullā Ṣadrā was the predominant school of philosophy in the Shī'ī world and Šayḫ Aḥmad certainly interacted with it. He wrote extended studies (misleadingly called "commentaries") on a number of works of both Mullā Ṣadrā and those of the latter's son-in-law, Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāšānī. Yet his *conception* and *practice* of philosophy was in many ways incongruous with those of the "official" peripatetic (Avicennan) and illuminationist (Suhrawardian) schools. This has led to sometimes bitter misunderstandings of Šayḫ Aḥmad on the part of much of the traditional scholastic establishment.

For example, instead of subverting the language of the Qur'ān and the Imāms to fit rationalist first principles, Šayḫ Aḥmad would do the opposite. His method consisted in part of approaching the teachings of the Imāms *phenomenologically*, then applying the first principles and methodology so discovered to the problems of traditional philosophy. This led to the accusation that Šayḫ Aḥmad did not understand traditional philosophy. In fact, Šayḫ Aḥmad understood traditional philosophy very well but to some degree ingeniously and creatively *subverted* it (à la Hegel). This was with a view to providing a systematic yet Islāmically *authentic* foundation for philosophy.[12]

In this chapter we will discuss Šayḫ Aḥmad's approach to a foundation, within the spectrum of Shī'ī metaphysics but with general implications, for a phenomenology and metaphysics of macro/micro-cosm. In particular, we will look at his unique definition of the concept "ḥikmah̃" or "metaphysics". We hope this book chapter serves to pave the way for more than the superficial analyses of his thought to which academia, both East and West, has been subject up to now.[13] Our primary source for this discussion is *al-Fawā'id*

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[11] Of course the philosophical tradition remains alive in the lands of Eastern Islām, and continues to produce outstanding exponents; yet they virtually all operate in the context of one of the traditional metaphysical systems. The same is largely true in the West as well: Whitehead, for example, is *still* the last major original and comprehensive metaphysician of Western philosophy.

[12] See also Corbin's criticism of some of Mullā Ṣadrā's followers on this (Corbin 1964, pp. 48–49).

[13] With one exception, in the course of many years of research I have not found a single modern Eastern or Western scholar give anything approaching a profound discussion of the philosophy of Šayḫ Aḥmad. That exception is Henry Corbin.

al-Ḥikmiyyah (*The Wisdom Observations*), Šayḫ Aḥmad's philosophical epitome which we have critically edited and translated.[14]

At the outset of the *Fawāʾid*, Šayḫ Aḥmad expresses his dissatisfaction with the then prevalent modes of investigation in *the sciences that pertain to cognizance of the Divine* (*al-maᶜārif al-ilāhiyyah̃*), inclusive of *philosophy* (*falsafah*) and *theology* (*kalām*). In particular, al-Aḥsāʾī takes issue with the methods of rational analysis employed by these schools to reach their goal i.e., cognizance of God and reality. As an alternative and replacement of pure rational analysis, Šayḫ Aḥmad proposes a phenomenological approach that he calls "the proof of Wisdom (*dalīlu ãl-ḥikmah̃*)." In this rest of this chapter we will explore this concept and try to find out exactly what Šayḫ Aḥmad means by 'wisdom' and by 'the proof of Wisdom'.

Upon preliminary observation, we see that the very expression, 'proof of Wisdom', invites a number of questions, including the following:

- What is *Wisdom* (*ḥikmah̃*)?

- What is a *proof* (*dalīl*)?

- By the expression 'proof of Wisdom', does the author mean there is a science called "Wisdom", and that there is a method of proof specific to it; or does he mean that 'Wisdom' is the name of a kind of proof?

Based on the author's own commentary on the *Fawāʾid* and other statements of the author, it appears that sometimes he uses the word '*ḥikmah̃*' in the sense of method and sometimes in the sense of a science.

For example, immediately upon the author's first use of the expression '*dalīlu ãl-ḥikmah̃*' in the main text, he says in the commentary: (Aḥsāʾī 1856, p. 4)

I said: [We will accomplish] this [task] through the proof of Wisdom.
I now say: Sometimes, by '*ḥikmah̃*' is meant "theoretical wisdom (*ḥikmah̃ ᶜilmiyyah̃*)", and sometimes, "practical wisdom (*ḥikmah̃ ᶜamaliyyah̃*)". Now we mean by '*ḥikmah̃*' that Wisdom which is, at once, both theoretical *and* practical. . . .

From this passage in the commentary, it appears that, in this case, '*ḥikmah̃*' is used, not for the method, but for that science to which the method applies.

One of the most common uses of '*ḥikmah̃*' among the learned was as a synonym for '*falsafah*' ('*philosophy*'). In this regard, it was also used as an ellipsis for '*ḥikmah̃ ilāhiyyah̃*' i.e., that branch of philosophy that pertains to divinity i.e., *metaphysics*. In the First Observation of the *Fawāʾid*, the author says that the "proof of Wisdom"

. . . is an instrument of the sciences pertaining to the real. By means of it one becomes cognizant of Allāh as well as cognizant of that which is there besides Him.

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[14] To be published soon as two volumes. A preliminary version, with some commentary and analysis, is available (Hamid 1998). References to Šayḫ Aḥmad's own commentary on the *Fawāʾid* are based on the Tabriz edition (Aḥsāʾī 1856).

This statement can be placed into one-to-one correspondence with the traditional division of metaphysics into *general* (*ʾumūr ʿāmmah̃*) and *specific* (*ʾumūr ḫāṣṣah̃*). General metaphysics deals with the problem of determining what there is ("that which is there besides Him") and with the classification of what there is i.e., what is "real." Specific metaphysics deals with the problem of God and theology. So it is plausible to suggest that the "proof of Wisdom" is a tool of metaphysics. In the course of a treatise, *Commentary on the Hadith of Kumayl*, Šayḫ Aḥmad is more explicit: (1856–59, vol. 2, p. 315)

> ...it has been firmly established in *metaphysics* (*ḥikmah̃ ilāhiyyah̃*), through the *proof of Wisdom* (*dalīlu ãl-ḥikmah̃*), that all of the motes of existence, of both the invisible and invisible realms, including [what are traditionally classified as] substances and accidents, are [actually] correlational accidents...

Here we see a more explicit connection between "the proof of Wisdom" and metaphysics. Yet we cannot simply identify Šayḫ Aḥmad's science of "Wisdom" with the traditional scholastic science of metaphysics that goes under the same name. Traditional *metaphysics* (*ḥikmah̃ ilāhiyyah̃*) is a branch of *philosophy* (*falsafah*) that comes under the Peripatetic category of *theoretical wisdom* (*ḥikmah̃ ʿilmiyyah̃*). Our author has something else in mind, something which does not fit exactly into this categorical scheme. For he clearly states that what he means by '*ḥikmah̃*' is something that cannot be classified as only theoretical or only practical, but not both. Yet there can be little doubt that what the author has in mind is in fact a metaphysics of some sort.

The foregoing preliminary observations indicate the following:

- Šayḫ Aḥmad does have in mind a science called "Wisdom" to which the "proof of Wisdom" applies;

- The proof of Wisdom deals with topics which are clearly metaphysical or cosmological;

- The science of Wisdom is not identical to metaphysics in the traditional scholastic sense.

On the basis of the foregoing, we will approach the question, "What is the proof of Wisdom", within the context of a larger question, "What is Wisdom?" Determining the intension of 'Wisdom' will involve answering the following:

- What is the aim of Wisdom?

- What is the object of Wisdom?

- What is the method of Wisdom? Under this heading we will discuss the "proof of Wisdom" proper;

- What kind(s) of proposition is (are) the subject of Wisdom?

- What are the first principles of Wisdom?

THE AMBIGUITY OF 'ḤIKMAH̃'

As we indicated above, the word 'ḥikmah̃' is very ambiguous. In early Arabic, 'ḥikmah̃' appears to have been a close synonym of 'ᶜilm', which means "knowledge". According to Lane, the *Tāju ãl-ᶜUrūs* defines 'ḥikmah̃' to primarily mean, "*What prevents,* [or] *restrains, from ignorant behavior*". The *Ṣiḥāḥ*, one of the earliest authorities, defines it as simply "knowledge (*ᶜilm*)".

The word 'ḥikmah̃' is also used in the Qurʾān and in sayings of the Prophet (Ṣ)and Imāms of his family (A). When asked about the meaning of the verse, **And surely, We gave Luqmān Wisdom**... (Q 31:12), the seventh Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim said that what is meant is that he was given "*consciousness-awareness* (*ᶜaql*) and *understanding* (*fahm*)" (Bahrani n.d., vol. 3., p. 270). Another verse which speaks of 'ḥikmah̃' is 2:269:

> **He grants Wisdom to whomsoever He wills. Whomsoever has been granted Wisdom has surely been granted abundant goodness. And none are mindful except those who possess kernels of consciousness.**

According to Imām Ṣādiq, the *ḥikmah̃* referred to here is *cognizance of the Imām and obedience to God.* Here "the Imām" is to be understood as the *logos* through which cognizance of God is obtained.

As Hellenic literature was translated into Arabic, Aristotle's '*sophia*' was translated by 'ḥikmah̃'. So as a technical term, 'ḥikmah̃' became synonymous with '*falsafah*'. In the category of *practical wisdom* (*ḥikmah̃ ᶜamaliyyah̃*), the word 'ḥikmah̃' also came to be synonymous with '*medicine*' ('*ṭibb*'), a usage which is common in Muslim lands up to the present day.

THE AIM OF ḤIKMAH̃

What is the aim of Wisdom, and what benefit is it supposed to provide? In the *Fawāʾid*, there are clear indications that the aim and benefit of *ḥikmah̃* is the cognizance (*maᶜrifah*) of God and of the realities of things. At the beginning of the Prologue of *Fawāʾid*, Šayḫ Aḥmad states:

> After I noticed many of the seekers penetrating deeply into the divine sciences, and supposing that they have penetrated deeply into the[ir] intended meaning— but which is only a deep penetration into *semantics* (*alfāẓ*), nothing else...

In the commentary (Aḥsāʾī 1856, p. 3), Šayḫ Aḥmad says that the "*intended meaning* (*maᶜnā maqṣūd*) is the cognizance of God...." In the main text, he goes on to claim that rational analysis is an inappropriate tool for the cognizance of things, and that only the "proof of wisdom" can lead one to that goal. In the commentary he clarifies what he means by 'the cognizance of things': (Aḥsāʾī 1856, p. 4)

> *I said:* It [rational analysis] does not lead one to the cognizance of things as they are, as he (upon him and his family be the communion of Allah and peace) said:
>
> > O Allah, make us see things as they are!

> *I now say:* The proof of Wisdom leads the one who uses it to the cognizance of
> *the realities* (*haqā'iq*) of *things* (*ašyā'*) in the state in which they really are. This
> cognizance is what he (upon him and his family be the blessings of Allah and
> peace) asked of his Lord, that He show him those very realities. This is because
> things, when you contemplate them *qua* themselves, and cut off any contemplation
> of those factors which individuate them and distinguish them, are then abstracted
> from everything besides their quintessences. A given thing, when you contemplate
> it, and cut off any contemplation of those factors which individuate it and distin-
> guish it, [you see it] purified of all aspects, modalities, and relations. When it is
> purified of all of these, it has become abstracted from all indications, configura-
> tions, and positions. It is neither an [*intelligible*] *meaning* (*ma'nā*) or a [*psychic*]
> *image* (*ṣūraĥ*), since both of the latter entail [some kind of] *indication* (*išāraĥ*).

What Šayḫ Aḥmad appears to be saying is that psychic and intellectual grasping and
perception involve making distinctions by means of which one can "point to" or "indicate"
(from 'indication *išāraĥ*'). What one "points to" or "indicates" in the course of intellectual
or psychic grasping is either a *psychic image* (*ṣūraĥ*) of the *mundus imaginalis* (*'ālamu
ãl-miṯāl*) or an *intelligible meaning* (*ma'nā*) of the *mundus intelligibilis* (*'ālamu ãl-'aql*).
But seeing a thing in its deepest state, contemplating it in its reality, in that whereby
it acquires its realization, involves bracketing all of its individuating and distinguishing
factors so that one can no longer indicate it or point at it. Once one has accomplished this,
one can be said to have true cognizance of it. This cognizance I call "ousiological intuition"
and the process by which one arrives at it I term "ousiological reduction." As we shall see,
Šayḫ Aḥmad considers this reality of which one obtains cognizance as the *ousia* or ground
of all created things. This 'ousia' turns out to be coextensive with '*existence*' ('*wujūd*')
as well as '*matter*' ('*māddaĥ*') and '*hylē*' ('*hayūlā*'), leading to a reversal of traditional
hylomorphism.[15]

We can see that, for Šayḫ Aḥmad, *ḥikmaĥ* contains a major *phenomenological* com-
ponent. This phenomenology is the inverse of Husserl's essentialistic method, whereby one
seeks to *bracket existence* (*eidetic reduction*) of a given thing and *intuit its essence* (*ei-
detic intuition*). By bracketing, if not denying, the reality of existence, Husserl, following
Kant's lead (for whom existence was nothing but a secondary intelligible), is left with
nothing but empty structural phenomena. Being empty, they cannot lead to any reality
outside of his mind. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka has made profound notice of this deficiency
in Husserlian phenomenology. As she points out (Tymieniecka 2003, p. xxxvi):

> Obviously, eidetic and intentional rationalities fall short of accounting for the orig-
> ination of their course, that is, for the origination of consciousness concurrent with
> its involvement with the real. They fall short of accounting for the primal force that

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[15] That is, in the metaphysics of Šayḫ Aḥmad, matter constitutes the *active principle* of a given created thing,
while form constitutes the *receptive principle*. This is exactly the opposite of the situation in traditional
Peripateticism, including that of Muslim scholasticism, where matter per se is nothing but potential.
But it allows a truly ingenious application on the part of Šayḫ Aḥmad of Occam's razor: namely, the
identification of matter with existence, something that could not work in traditional hylomorphism. See
also Hamid (2003a, pp. 199–215).

manifests itself through their deployment, that surges *sua sponte*, engendering innumerable streamlets of motion, releasing seminal factors, and launching the entire network of beingness on its every differentiating evolutionary course. This is the *logos* of life, its first promoter and ceaseless engendering, orienting, and directing force, which alone can answer the inquisitive inquiries provoked by our pursuits.

It also appears that Tymieniecka's *phenomenology of life* is, arguably, extensionally (if not intensionally) identical to Šayḫ Aḥmad's *ousiological reduction*, and that her *life* is, arguably, extensionally (if not intensionally) identical to Šayḫ Aḥmad's *ousia*. By restoring the link between the human microcosm and the macrocosm, Tymieniecka's *logos of life* thus embraces the entire network of cosmic interactions so that phenomenology can escape the trap of pure subjectivity. This is exactly analogous to Šayḫ Aḥmad's ousiological reduction.

Interestingly, Šayḫ Aḥmad's commitment to uncovering *ousia* is in consonance with Aristotle's own claim that the fundamental quest of metaphysics is the grasping of what exactly ousia is. So in one sense the aim of Wisdom is analogous to the aim of metaphysics in Aristotle's view: the cognizance of ousia.

It turns out that cognizance of God and cognizance of *ousia* amount to the same thing. However, this does *not* mean, as the Šayḫ goes to pains to point out, that there is any identity whatsoever between God and *ousia*. There is also something of a dialectic involved here, for cognizance of God is achieved through cognizance of the realities of things, that is, cognizance of the ground or *ousia* of things. After cognizance of God has been achieved, one can "look" at the essences of things through the "eye" of that very *ousia*, for it is through *ousia* that essences are realized and interconnected, while it is through essences that *ousia* is manifested. That is, what we call "eidetic intuition", for Šayḫ Aḥmad, can be accomplished only by seeing through the eye of *ousia*. It turns out that this results in, by Muslim scholastic standards, a very unconventional view of essence that we cannot elaborate here.[16] In the First Observation, Šayḫ Aḥmad quotes one of the Imāms as saying, *Beware of the penetration of the faithful; for he contemplates through the light of Allah* i.e., through *ousia*, not through bracketing *ousia*. Eidetic intuition can only come about *through* ousiological intuition.

In the Eighteenth Observation, Šayḫ Aḥmad says that the cognizance of God is the *final cause* (ᶜillaẗ gāʾiyyaẗ) of all creation, and constitutes the purpose of creation. In a sense, this doctrine lies at the heart of philosophical speculation in Muslim civilization in general, and Shīᶜī thought in particular. In a famous sermon, the first Imām ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib states, *the first part of the way* (dīn) *is cognizance of Him. . .* [sermon 1].[17]

THE OBJECT OF ḤIKMAẌ

Given the foregoing, the object or subject matter of Wisdom should not be too difficult to discern. However, there is an important subtlety involved. Given that the aim of Wisdom

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[16] See Hamid (2003a, pp. 199–215).

[17] The most important and authoritative collection of the sermons, letters, and aphorisms of Imām ᶜAlī is the Nahju āl-Balāġaẖ, compiled by Sayyid al-Raḍī. The number of editions of this work are countless. For ease of reference, we refer to it by sermon, letter, or aphorism number.

is the cognizance of God and the cognizance of "things", it may appear to follow that the object of Wisdom comprises God and everything else. Such a judgement would be hasty.

With respect to God, Šayḫ Aḥmad emphasizes, especially in the Second and Twelfth Observations, that cognizance of God is *not* cognizance of His *Quintessence* (*ḏāt*). God *qua* God is unknowable and incomparable. Following the lead of the Imāms, the Šayḫ adheres to the strictest possible negative theology. Even the One of the Neoplatonists is not equivalent to the God of Šayḫ Aḥmad, for the One shares the ontological rank of *mundus intelligibilis* with at least two others, nous and soul. Nothing shares in rank with the God of primordial Islāmic philosophy. Indeed, it is not even a "rank" in the strictest sense of the term. It is beyond categories, classification, and ontology. It is the *Deus Absconditus*, *hyperousia*, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, beyond the beyond and yet present, the Unnamable, the Indescribable, the Ultimate *?*.

In Muslim scholasticism, the *subject matter* (*mawḏū^c*) of a science was defined as "that whose quintessential affections [i.e., essential aspects] are discussed in that science" (Jurjani 1938, p. 212). Jurjānī, who gives this definition in his *Kitābu ãl-Ta^crīfāt* (*Book of Definitions*), goes on to give two examples. The subject of the science of *medicine* (*ṭibb*) is the human body. The essential aspects of the human body at issue in this science are its states of health and illness. The subject matter of *syntax* (*naḥw*) comprises *words* (*kalimah̃*). The essential aspects of words at issue in this science are their *declension* (taking on the signs of the nominative, accusative, or genitive case) and *indeclension*.

At the end of the Second Observation, the Šayḫ Aḥmad says in his commentary:

> The subject of the science of the *profession of unity* (*tawḥīd*) [i.e., theology] is not the Quintessence of God (Exalted is He!), as the theologians claim. This is because [of the following:] The Quintessence of Allah cannot be grasped, so how can its quintessential affections be discussed when He (Exalted is He!) has no affections other than qualities which are either,
>
> - from every consideration, His very own Quintessence;
>
> - or *concomitants* (*aḥkām*) pertaining to those Stations which comprise His Designation [and *not* His Quintessence].

We will discuss what he means by 'Stations' and 'Designation' momentarily. The main point to be noted here is that not only is God unknowable, but He is also not the subject of Wisdom. This leads to what appears at first glance to be a paradox: The aim of Wisdom, nay, of creation itself, is cognizance of God. Yet He is Unknowable: Every proposition about His Quintessence *qua* Quintessence is a tautology and thus devoid of any information whatsoever. So how can one have cognizance of Him at all? *This question constitutes the fundamental problem of primordial Islāmic philosophy is general and Šayḫ Aḥmad's phenomenology in particular.*

This problem is not as crucial for, e.g., the Aš^carīs, because they affirm that His Attributes are distinct from His Quintessence and coeternal with his Quintessence. Therefore, propositions pertaining to God are not tautologous. Since they are not tautologous, they give us information about God's Quintessence.

Though Šayḫ Aḥmad's full solution to the problem of reconciling God's unknowability with cognizance of Him is original and ingenious, we cannot give the details in this chapter. Fundamental to his solution is his breaking up of this issue into two problems: a phenomenological problem and an ontological one. We will consider the phenomenological problem first.

Consider the proposition, "There is nothing like It". The statement of this proposition occurs in the Qur³ān, (Q 42:11). God describes Himself by this proposition, so one should be able to have cognizance of Him through it. The method by which one obtains cognizance of God through this proposition is that of *ousiological reduction*, which we will discuss in more detail in the next section. Briefly, it involves a series of meditations on the *signs* (*āyāt*) and *impressions* (*āṯār*) of God *around us* (*macrocosm*) and in *one's own self* (*microcosm*). When one reaches that state mentioned by the author where one has transcended both psychic and intelligible indication, one has what mystics generally hold to be an indescribable or ineffable experience. Upon return to the reality of essences and distinctions, the mystic can only describe this experience in negative terms. He may say, e.g., "there is nothing like it", where "it" covers every possible subject of human grasping, be it psychic or intelligible.

Imām ᶜAlī is famous for the dictum, *Whoever has cognizance of his* self (*nafs*), *surely has cognizance of his Lord.* According to Šayḫ Aḥmad, one's experience of the cognizance of the *self* (*nafs*) as "There is nothing like it" constitutes one's very cognizance of God: (Aḥsā³ī 1856, p. 15)

> When you *abstract* (*tajarrad-ta*) your *self* (*nafs*) from every thing, including resemblance to anything whatsoever, and so that self comes to be so that "there is nothing like it", then your self has come to be a *sign* (*āyah*) of cognizance of Him. So when you have achieved cognizance of Allah through your self, you have achieved cognizance of the fact that "There is nothing like It". Understand this, and do not understand from this discourse what the Sufis understand. For the Sufis say that when you abstract your self this way, then it *is* Allah. Due to this, one of their representatives proclaims, "I am God; indeed I am." This is a clear *covering of the truth* (*kufr*). The fact of the matter is that when you abstract your self, it becomes a *sign* of Allah and a *mark* (*ᶜalāmaȟ*) of his cognizance. This is as He has said (Exalted is He!):
>
> **We will show them Our signs in the horizons and in their selves until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real.**
>
> And He did not say, "We will show them our Quintessence", so understand and think about it!

Note that Šayḫ Aḥmad's criticism of the Sufis corresponds exactly to what modern phenomenologists would call a failure to "preserve the phenomenon." The *phenomenon*, in this case, is the *sign*. This phenomenological principle goes back at least to Plato's dictum to not confuse the representation of a thing with the thing itself.

The category of experience referred to in the above quote is called by Šayḫ Aḥmad "*wujūd ḥaqq*" (*Real Existence*). In this phenomenological category, the realization of the

propositions of negative theology is achieved. But this category must not in any way be confused with experience of God *qua* God. Yes, we may say of God that "There is nothing like It." But the proposition relates to Him only in a metaphorical sense because to posit a relation between God and a proposition in itself compromises his Indescribability. This proposition relates to something else, namely, this category of experience which Šayḫ Aḥmad calls the *Designation* (*ʿunwān*) of God and the *Stations* (*maqāmāt*) of God. It is this "Designation" and these "Stations" which constitute the object of Wisdom, as the author makes clear at the end of the Second Observation.

If it is not God that one experiences in the category of *wujūd ḥaqq*, then what exactly is the object of experience, and where does it fit in the ontological scheme of things? It turns out that for Šayḫ Aḥmad, the ontological category corresponding, but not identical, to the phenomenological category of Real Existence is that of existence *qua* existence. It is the *ousia* from which everything was made. It is also an acting, but in a secondary sense.

We see that this *ousia* is related to both the Acting of God and to all created things. On this basis we may now introduce the three most fundamental divisions of existence in Šayḫ Aḥmad's system:

- *Real Existence* (*wujūd ḥaqq*). It is a phenomenological category;

- *Absolute Existence* (*wujūd muṭlaq*), *the Acting* (*fiʿl*), or *the Commanding that is the Acting* (*amr fiʿliyy*) of God. It is *existence totally unconditioned* (*wujūd lā bi-šarṭ*). This is the first *ousia*, the first *logos of life*;

- *Delimited existence* (*wujūd muqayyad*). It is *the Commanding that is the outcome of the Acting* (*amr mafʿūliyy*) and the second *ousia*, the second *logos of life*. It may be considered from two angles:

  - It may be considered *qua* itself. That is, delimited existence may be considered *qua* delimited existence. This is *existence negatively conditioned* (*wujūd bi-šarṭi lā*). It is a dynamic intermediary between the Acting of God and the particularized outcomes of that Acting, outcomes conditioned by essence;

  - It may be considered as determined or particularized by something other than itself. This is *existence conditioned by something else* (*wujūd bi-šarṭi šayʾ*). This division comprises all of the outcomes of God's Acting conditioned by something other than existence alone. We may also call this "positively conditioned."

For Šayḫ Aḥmad, the object of Wisdom consists of the contents of these three categories. The cognizance of God and of the realities of things depends on an understanding of the relations between these three divisions of existence i.e., the phenomenological category of Real Existence and the ontological categories of Absolute Existence and delimited existence. Through Real Existence (the end of ousiological reduction) one uncovers Absolute Existence (*logos of life* as absolutely unconditioned) and Delimited Existence (*logos of life* as negatively conditioned or as positively conditioned).

THE METHOD OF ḤIKMAH̃

Ousiological reduction and intuition, as well as discovering true propositions about those things that constitute the object of Wisdom, is achieved through the "proof of Wisdom." In the First Observation, which is devoted to the proof of Wisdom and its distinction from rational demonstration and moral exhortation, is discussed the *support* (*mustanad*) of Wisdom and the *condition* (*šarṭ*) of Wisdom. In the commentary (Aḥsā'ī 1856, p. 7), Šayḫ Aḥmad defines the "support" of the proof of Wisdom to be "that source from which it [i.e., Wisdom] is obtained." The "condition" of the proof of Wisdom is defined to be that "through which it is realized according to the perfection of what ought to be" i.e., that through which it is a cogent proof. Šayḫ Aḥmad postulates two sources or "supports" of the proof of Wisdom and three "conditions." The two sources of the proof of Wisdom are the *the heart-flux* (*fu'ād*) and *the tradition* (*naql*).

The Fu'ād

The term '*fu'ād*', although a fairly common Arabic word, does not appear to have had any major technical usage in Muslim scholasticism before Šayḫ Aḥmad. It figures in neither Jurjānī's dictionary of technical terms, Aḥmad Nagari's, nor even Ibn 'Arabī's glossary of Sufi technical terms. It does occur in the Qur'ān and in the traditions of the Imāms. In the Qur'ān it is mentioned sixteen times. On seven occasions it is mentioned along with the faculties of *hearing* (*sam'*) and *seeing* (*ba.sar*), and once with just the faculty of seeing. So the ancient Arabs surely saw it as a faculty of some sort. The first eighteen verses of sura fifty-three give a description of the Prophet's own witnessing of God. In verse eleven we find, ***And the fu'ād did not lie about what it saw***. Here, the *fu'ād* is treated as a faculty of vision. Imām Ṣādiq is reported to have said, "*When the light of cognizance becomes revealed in the fu'ād (of the servant), then he loves. And when he loves, that which is besides Allah will not occasion any impression upon him*"(Aḥsā'ī 1856–59, vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 36).

There is no word in English which exactly corresponds to '*fu'ād*'. Lane (in his *Lexicon*, under *f ' d*), quotes earlier Arabic authorities in lexicography to the effect that the *fu'ād* is so-called because of its *tafa''ud*. Now *tafa''ud*, from the same root, means "burning brightly or fiercely", "blazing", "flaming", "ardour", or, according to some, "being in a state of motion". The primary sense expressed by '*fa'ad-an*', the gerund most immediately related to '*fu'ād*',is, according to some authorities, "motion" or "putting into motion". This primitive significance of '*fu'ād*' is consistent with the dynamic role it plays in the metaphysics and phenomenology of Šayḫ Aḥmad.

In ancient Arabic, there was a close connection between the *fu'ād* and the *qalb* (*heart*), so much so that sometimes the words '*fu'ād*' and '*qalb*' are frequently treated as synonymous. However, as Lane points out, the two are generally distinguished. There appears to be no general agreement on the precise relationship between '*qalb*' and '*fu'ād*'. The *fu'ād* is variously considered to be a *covering* (*ǧišā'* or *wi'ā'*) of the heart, the middle of the heart, or the interior of the heart. According to Ṭurayḥī, whose dictionary *Majma'u ãl-Baḥrayn* was in large part based on the traditions of the Shī'ī Imāms, "There is nothing in the human body more subtle than the *fu'ād*, nor which suffers damage as easily."

Lane quotes the *Tāju ãl-'Urūs* to the effect that the *heart* (*qalb*) is the *suwaydā'* or *ḥabbah̃* (*core* or *kernel*) of the *fu'ād*. Now under the article *ḥ b b*, Lane quotes the *Tāju*

ãl-ᶜ Urūs to the effect that 'ḥabbaẖ' is used in the expression, 'ḥabbat̃u ãl-qalb', meaning, "*the heart's core*", or "*the black, or inner part of the heart*". Under the article *s w d*, Lane quotes the same source to the effect that '*suwaydā*ⁿ signifies *the heart's core; the black, or inner part of the heart*. The point I want to make is that the author of the *Tāj al-ᶜUrūs* has been somewhat inconsistent. First, under the discussion of *fuʾād*, he says that the *heart* (*qalb*) is both the *suwaydā*ʾ and the *ḥabbaẖ* of the *fuʾād*. Then, under the discussion of the former two, he describes the *suwaydā*ʾ and the *ḥabbaẖ* as each signifying the innermost part of the *heart* (*qalb*). So by describing the *qalb* as the *suwaydā*ʾ and the *ḥabbaẖ* of the *fuʾād*, he has, in effect, said that the *qalb* is the innermost part of the *qalb* of the *fuʾād*, which seems ridiculous. If we follow the opinion that the *fuʾād* is actually the interior of the heart, instead of its exterior, then the inconsistency disappears and we see that '*fuʾād*' is coextensive with both '*suwaydā*ⁿ and '*ḥabbaẖ*'.

Based on the foregoing, we have translated '*fuʾād*' as 'heart-flux'. This is meant to connote that the *fuʾād* is more specialized than the heart itself, and that a notion of motion or flux is fundamental to its meaning. This interpretation is also consistent with Šayẖ Aḥmad's use of '*fuʾād*', which is definitely consistent with the view that the *fuʾād* is more specialized than the *qalb*.

Šayẖ Aḥmad calls the heart-flux "the highest of all of man's *loci of sensation* (*mašāᶜir*, s. *mašᶜar*)." Not counting the five senses, the Šayẖ says that there are three *mašāᶜir*: the *bosom* (*ṣadr*), the *heart* (*qalb*), and the *heart-flux* (*fuʾād*). To each of these there corresponds a mode of cognition, an ontological rank in the Neoplatonic hierarchy, a set of objects of cognition, and a set of sciences to which that mode of cognition is appropriate. Šayẖ Aḥmad works out some of these correspondences in the course of his section on epistemology in his *Observations on the Philosophy of Law*, during the course of an attempt to define knowledge. Briefly, the bosom corresponds to *knowledge* (*ᶜilm*), which consists of *images* or *forms* (*ṣuwar*) in *the universal soul* (*nafs kulliyyaẖ*), mirrored by the *imaginal faculty* (*ẖayāl*). The heart corresponds to *certainty* (*yaqīn*), which consists of *intelligibles* (*maᶜqūlāt*) or *intelligible meanings* (*maᶜānī ᶜaqliyyaẖ*) in the *intellect* or *nous* (*ᶜaql*). The *fuʾād* corresponds to *cognizance* (*maᶜrifah*), which consists of that which cannot be intellected or perceived by intellectual or psychic differentiation or discrimination. The accompanying table summarizes the relations between these three organs and faculties. We will discuss the corresponding sciences later.

mode of cognition	locus of cognition	objects of cognition	ontological rank of objects of cognition
knowledge	bosom	forms or images	the universal soul
certainty	heart	meanings/ intelligibles	the universal nous
cognizance	heart-flux	light of cognizance	existence *qua* negatively conditioned

Table 1 The three types of cognition.

Tradition

The other "support" or source of Wisdom is *the tradition* (*naql*). For Šayḫ Aḥmad, the tradition consists of the Qurʾān and the Sunnah i.e., the word of God and the sayings and practice of Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭimah, and the Twelve Imāms from his household.

Placed in a larger context, what Šayḫ Aḥmad is attempting is an integration of the *sapientia* of the representatives of revelation with philosophical speculation and mystical experience. In principle, "tradition" could mean the scholastic tradition, the Sufi theosophical tradition, or any other transmitted body expressive of teachings or doctrines which constitute a philosophy or a set of related philosophies. In the West, India, China, and other civilizations, there exist bodies of transmitted literature which express, whether potentially or in actuality, philosophies or sets of philosophies. Individual philosophers are interested in studying a given body of literature so as to either systematically express the philosophy or set of philosophies latent in that body of literature, or else to develop a systematic philosophy of their own, but building upon that which is latent in that body of literature. Frequently, a given philosopher is engaged in both activities at once.

Given a body of literature potentially expressive of a philosophy or a set of philosophies,[18] how does one approach this body of literature in order to express its philosophical content? One may simply read a body of literature and not try to systematize anything. If a body of religious literature is at issue, one may simply accept everything one reads on faith, ignore apparent contradictions or paradoxes, and simply act out whatever doctrinal, moral, or legalistic demands he finds. Similar scenarios may obtain with a reader of the transmitted teachings of, say, Plato or Confucius.

Another way to approach a given body of literature is to apply some degree or other of rational analysis to both the goal of determining the propositions expressed by the body of literature and to those very propositions themselves. Given those propositions, the investigator tries to express, in a systematic way, the philosophy latent in the body of literature under investigation. In the tradition of Muslim civilization, this method is the preferred method of *the philosophers* (*falsafah̃*) and *the theologians* (*mutakallimūn*). The *falāsafah̃* were, by and large, pure rationalists, investigating whatever they put their hands on, be it Hellenic or Islāmic, through the method of demonstration through first premises. The *mutakallimūn*, especially the later ones, accepted certain doctrines on faith but still used rational analysis to systematize the philosophy they considered to be latent in, e.g., the body of Islāmic religious literature. In both cases, with the exception of some of the earlier *mutakallimūn*, rational analysis constituted the primary tool of investigation. One could say that for post-Ṭūsī scholasticism, as well as most Western philosophy, the sources of philosophical speculation are the rational intellect and the philosophical tradition. In the case of the Muslim scholastic theologians, one must add the body of purely Islāmic literature, namely, the Qurʾān and the Sunnah.

A third way to approach a given body of literature potentially expressive of a philosophy or set of philosophies is to approach it through some form of intuition that is

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[18] For purposes of this discussion, we accept Jorge Gracia's definition of philosophy as "a view of the world, or any of its parts, which seeks to be accurate, consistent, comprehensive, and for which evidence is given as support"(Gracia 1999, p. 10).

supra-rational. This was the approach of the Sufi theosophists to revelation and prophetic traditions, while Suhrawardī and his followers applied this approach to the Hellenic tradition, while keeping the intellect or nous in its privileged position.

Šayḫ Aḥmad was, of course, keenly aware of the attempts of his predecessors to integrate the traditions of *falsafah* with that of the *sapientia* of the Imāms. He approaches the problem by replacing the twin sources of *falsafah*, intellect or nous and the Hellenic tradition (inclusive of its Muslim representatives), with the *fuʾād* and the Islāmic twin sources of revelation and the traditions of the Prophet, Fāṭimaḫ, and the Imāms. He justifies this in part by appealing to the legend, propagated by the *falāsafaḫ* themselves, that Plato derived his philosophy from Pythagoras, who in turn learned it from the Prophet Solomon, who in turn transmitted it from the earlier prophets. Šayḫ Aḥmad claims that then philosophy became corrupted because Plato, Aristotle, and other philosophers added things of their own to the pristine wisdom they inherited from the prophets. So the division of the philosophers into Platonists, Aristotelians, and Stoics occurred. Furthermore, the translators from Greek and Syriac made mistakes on account of which the philosophers of Islām compounded upon the mistakes of the earlier philosophers. Now all of the prophets, according to Šayḫ Aḥmad, received their Wisdom through the intermediary of the Logos, which manifests in this world as the Prophet Muḥammad, Fāṭimaḫ, and the Imāms. Since that is the case, it must also be the case that their teachings represent the pinnacles of Wisdom. Philosophical speculation and exposition must therefore begin with them and not with the corrupted baggage left behind by the Greeks. The hermeneutic process is now put in reverse: instead of applying *falsafah* to the interpretation and clarification of religious texts, one first seeks to draw the principles of Wisdom out of the divine sources and then apply these principles to finding solutions to the problems of *falsafah*. This at least partially explains why, although the author says in the First Observation that the sources of Wisdom are the Islāmic tradition and the *fuʾād*, he makes full use of the terminology of *falsafah* throughout the *Fawāʾid*, and modifies it to suit his objectives.

The Conditions of the Proof of Wisdom

For the proof of wisdom to be realized, it is not enough simply to have these sources. After all, the Qurʾān and Sunnah are accessible to everyone, and mystical experience was nothing new. The use of these sources depends upon three conditions, conditions which he outlines in the First Observation.

The first condition for the cogency of the proof of Wisdom "is that you give your Lord what is His due because, when you contemplate by the proof of Wisdom, you are summoning your Lord and He is summoning you to your heart-flux...." According to the commentary (Aḥsāʾī 1856, p. 10–11), in order for the "gates to light" to be opened in the *fuʾād*, one must first respond to the calling of one's Lord. This requires one to give up all preconceptions and principles and approach the Lord with an empty mind. Then one will discover tidbits of truth in one's self that may be either accepted or rejected. If one refuses to change accordingly and continues to blindly follow preconceptions and preconceived principles, then the door will not open and the heart-flux will remain "closed" to one. If one accepts and follows that light, then the gate will open and cognizance will be attained. In another place (Aḥsāʾī 1856, p. 4), the author points out that approaching

God with a mind empty of preconceptions and preconceived principles is the condition of *theoretical Wisdom*.

Later we read in the text, "Then your Lord contends with and overcomes you, so weigh **with an even balance. That is better for you and best in respect of the outcomes [of your deeds]** (Q 17:35))." According to the commentary, this means that your Lord shows you the proof of Himself in your innermost self and that if this proof is accepted, and if your actions, discourse, and beliefs manifest this acceptance, then one can begin to employ the proof of Wisdom and to discover many hidden things. By "weigh **with an even balance**", the author (Aḥsāʾī 1856, p. 11) is saying that one must exert all one's effort, through the proof of Wisdom, to contemplating the signs of God "in the horizons and in one's self", that is, in the macrocosm and in the microcosm. At the same time, one must equally exert oneself in the purification and sincerity of one's intention so that the only goal whatsoever that one has at all times is to please God. In another place (Aḥsāʾī 1856, p. 4), the author points out that the latter is the condition of practical Wisdom (remember that our author has said that Wisdom is *at once* theoretical and practical). Both theoretical and practical Wisdom must be in balance for the proof of Wisdom to be sound.

The second condition for the soundness of the proof of Wisdom is that one never, in one's beliefs, investigations, and proclamation, go beyond what one has knowledge of. Arrogance and boldness are grave dangers, even for mystics. According to the Qurʾān (Q 17:36)), even the *fuʾād* of an individual will be questioned about on the Day of Judgement.

The last condition is that one cultivate one's vision through the *fuʾād* until, with respect to all of the above mentioned matters, one sees through the "eye of God" i.e., the *fuʾād*. Šayḫ Aḥmad then quotes the verse, "**Do not walk exultantly upon the Earth. Surely you will never rend the Earth asunder; nor will you ever surpass the mountains in height** (Q 17:37))." According to the commentary (Aḥsāʾī 1856, p. 11–12), the Earth is symbolic of *essence* (*māhiyyaĥ*). Every individual has two "eyes": the eye of essence and the eye of existence. The eye of essence can only see tangible, ephemeral, being. The eye of God i.e., the heart-flux i.e, the eye of existence qua negatively conditioned, can see the psychically and intelligibly intangible realities of things. The ultimate goal is that one be guided at all times by the heart-flux and not by essence, for it is prideful to think that one can operate or "walk" without the guidance of God as manifested through the heart-flux. Without His aid, without existence, one cannot conquer the "mountains" or obstacles present in the self, in one's essence. Almost paradoxically, the power of God's "eye" is only available to those who worship him in total humility. Šayḫ Aḥmad's entire approach is also very reminiscent of Zen Buddhism and Taoism.

One wishes that Šayḫ Aḥmad would have given more details of the process through which the vision of the *fuʾād* is attained. That is, Šayḫ Aḥmad has described the sources and conditions of ousiological *intuition* or vision, but has not provided many details of the process of ousiological *reduction*. Many details may be found by combing through some of his other works. To pull all of this together here is beyond our scope. A good summary though may be found in the author's *Risālah Jaʿfariyyaĥ* or *Treatise in Response to Questions of Mīrzā Jaʿfar*.[19]

The process of "ousiological reduction" the author calls "*kašf*" ("*uncovering*"). Basically, it involves the *piercing* (*ḫarq*) of a total of nine *veils* (*ḥujub*) of essence. These veils roughly correspond to the vertical hierarchy of existence *qua* conditioned-by-something. One pierces these veils through a discipline that involves a series of (often forty-day) cycles of intense *reflective meditation* (*tafakkur*),[20] alternated with worship. In this vein, Šayḫ quotes an interesting *ḥadīth* of Imām ᶜAlī, one reminiscent of a very Socratic approach to knowledge, and which may serve to summarize the Šayḫ's approach:

> *Knowledge is not in the Firmament, so that it may descend down towards you. Nor is knowledge in the Earth, so that it may rise up towards you. Rather, knowledge is created as a disposition within your hearts. Become imbued with the temperaments of spiritual individuals, and it will self-manifest to you.*

We are still researching further details of the method of ousiological reduction in Šayḫ Aḥmad's other writings. Of particular importance is the dialectic between *meditative reflection* and *works*, a dialectic that stands in correspondence to the alchemical work.

THE NATURE OF THE PROOF OF ḤIKMAH̃

Šayḫ Aḥmad considers there to be three kinds of *proof* (*dalīl*), each corresponding to one of the three types and loci of cognition. From the proof of *Wisdom* one acquires *cognizance* (*maᶜrifah*) and Wisdom; from the proof of *good exhortation* (*mawᶜiẓah̃ ḥasanah̃*) one acquires *certainty* (*yaqīn*); from the proof of *argumentation in the best way* (*mujādalah̃ bi-ãllatī hiya aḥsan*) one acquires *knowledge* (*ᶜilm*),[21] but neither certainty or cognizance. In the commentary (Aḥsāᵓī 1856, p. 7–8), the author gives examples of these three proofs, pointing out the differences between them. Examining this may help to clarify the nature of the proof of Wisdom.

The goal of Wisdom is the cognizance of God. If one tries to reach this by means of the proof of good exhortation, then one goes about it something like this (Aḥsāᵓī 1856, pp. 7–8):

> If you believe that you have a creator, then you can be sure that you will remain free of His wrath. If, however, you choose not to believe in Him, then you have no way of being sure that, if you are wrong, you will be free of His wrath. Rather, He

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[19] See al-Aḥsāᵓī (1856–59, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 130). A printed edition (not critical) of this treatise may be found in *Rasāᵓilu ãl-Ḥikmat̃* (Aḥsāᵓī 1993, p. 26). Be warned that the editors of this recent collection of some of the author's works accidentally placed the first fourteen lines of this treatise at the beginning of the immediately preceding treatise. The first fourteen and one half lines (ending in the word '*ḥudūd*') have been taken from the beginning of the immediately preceding treatise and placed at the beginning of the *Risālah̃ Jaᶜfariyyah̃*. The names of the two treatises are also reversed. Such sloppiness is really unforgivable.

[20] Note that, throughout this chapter, our use of the word 'reflective' is meant to correspond to its etymology, in which is expressed a kind of *receptivity* and *response*, while not adding anything of oneself to the response. This is analogous to the role of a mirror. Indeed, the mirror is a perfect symbol of the microcosm in its essential nature, and is often used by Šayḫ Aḥmad.

[21] Note that Šayḫ Aḥmad uses 'ᶜilm' in two different ways: when used alongside '*yaqīn*' and '*maᶜrifah*', it has the particular definition we discussed in the previous section. In other places, his use of the term is more general, covering both this sense of '*ᶜilm*' as well as that of '*maᶜrifah*'.

may very well punish you. The only way to be assured of salvation is to believe in
God.

Although one may obtain salvation by submitting to the proof of good exhortation, it will
not give you cognizance of God.

An example of the use of the proof of argumentation in the best way is as follows
(Aḥsāʾī 1856, p. 8):

> If it is the case that among existents there is a preeternal creator that is uncreated,
> then that establishes the existence of the Necessary Existent (Exalted is He!). If
> not, then the existents [as a whole] must have a Fashioner because it is impossible:
>
> • that they bring themselves into existence;
>
> • that they exist without something to bring them into existence.
>
> Both alternatives are absurd.

This is a very abbreviated version of a popular proof of the existence of God based on
contingency and the impossibility of an infinite regress or circle of causes. According to
our author, one does not obtain real cognizance from this kind of proof; it is designed only
to silence an opponent. It does not create certainty, and an ingenious enough opponent
can probably find a way to wiggle himself out of any rational proof of the existence of
God. Rational proofs of God's existence have been offered by major philosophers from
Plato to Gödel, yet the equally rationalist skeptics never seem to go away.

As an example of the proof of Wisdom, Šayḫ Aḥmad offers the following. It makes
use of his unique theory of *subsistence* which we will not discuss in detail here:

> Every impression resembles the actional quality of its agent; it subsists through
> its agent, that is, through its acting, by means of *processional subsistence* (*qiyāma
> ṣudūr-in*). This is like the case of speech: it subsists through the speaker by means of
> processional subsistence. Similar is the subsistence of rays through sources of light,
> and images in mirrors. Thus, things constitute a self-manifesting of the Necessary to
> them and through them. This is because He (Exalted is He!) does not self-manifest
> through His essence. Otherwise, He would differ from state to state.
>
> Now nothing is more intense in self-manifesting, presence, or evidentness than
> that which self-manifests with respect to the act of its self-manifesting. This is
> because *that which self-manifests* is more manifest than its *act of self-manifesting*,
> even though it is not possible to reach cognizance of it except through its act of
> self-manifesting. Consider the acts of standing and sitting. The stander is more
> manifest, in the very act of standing, than the act of standing itself, although it
> is not possible to reach [cognizance of] him except through the act of standing. So
> you may say: "O stander!", or "O sitter!." You are only referring to the stander,
> not the act of standing. This is because, through his act of self-manifesting to you
> through the act of standing, he [in effect] prevents you, initially, from witnessing
> the act of standing [itself]. [This is the case] unless you focus on the act of standing

itself, in which case the stander through the act of standing becomes hidden from you.

So by means of this inference, which is from the proof of Wisdom, He (Glorified is He!) is, for the one who has cognizance, more manifest than anything. This is like what the Chief of the Martyrs [Imām Husayn] (upon whom be peace) has said [in the course of a supplication]: *Can something other than You have an act of self-manifesting which You do not have, so that it comes to be that which manifests You?* So through it [i.e., this type of inference], cognizance [of Allah] occurs, and it cannot occur through [a proof] other than this at all.

The crux of all this is that, through the proof of Wisdom, the existence of God is no less obvious to the heart-flux than the existence of someone standing is to the eye. In fact it is more obvious, for the heart-flux is "the highest of all loci of cognition." One has cognizance of a standing person not through his quintessence, but through the field of activity that constitutes his act of standing by which the stander manifests himself to one. Similarly, the heart-flux has cognizance of God, not through His Quintessence, but through a field of activity or act of self-manifesting which reveals His presence. The object of the proof of Wisdom is not to silence the opponent but to see the realities of things with the heart-flux just as one sees the appearances of things through the five senses as well as psychic and intelligible grasping. If someone argues with one who has achieved cognizance of God or something else through this proof, then he or she is no different from any of the blind men arguing about the elephant, or whether there is such a thing as sight.

The mystical experience which constitutes one of the grounds of the proof of Wisdom is, of course, not unique to Šayḫ Aḥmad or to Muslim mystics for that matter. For Šayḫ Aḥmad, however, this experience must be grounded in the fountain of revelation and in purity of intention, otherwise one may "follow that of which one has no knowledge", in contravention to the Qurʾānic verse which commands the opposite and which threatens to hold even one's vision through the heart-flux to account. Without proper grounding, someone may come up with the notion that all is God, that he or she is God, or other pantheist notions. Because revelation is God's Word, grounding the experience of cognizance in His Word will help shield the mystic from antinomian behavior and from describing God and His relationship to the world in ways which contradict how He Himself has described Himself.

The question of metamystical expression and interpretation is important here. The example Šayḫ Aḥmad gives above as a proof of Wisdom is, in fact, a metamystical interpretation of the vision of the heart-flux. So we must be careful to distinguish the proof of Wisdom proper from its propositional expression.

Of course, this is also true of a logical proof: its expression must be distinguished from the epistemic act involved in a proof. A logical proof is communicable only to those capable of the epistemic act of reasoning. Although probably few of us could have come up with Gödel's incompleteness theorem on our own, given the proper tools many of us could follow his proof to the end and rationally concur with its cogency. Similarly, not just any mystical philosopher could come up with Šayḫ Aḥmad's metamystical interpretation of cognizance through the heart-flux, but other mystics could learn from it and would-be mystics could be given some idea of what to look for as they pursue the goal of Wisdom.

Šayḫ Aḥmad's metamystical interpretation of the proof of Wisdom is propositional. In the example given above one sees both the statement and application of first principles. One principle he states is that every impression resembles the actional quality of its agent. A principle that he applies but does not state is what I call the *cosmological correspondence principle*: the cognizance of a higher level of existence can only be accomplished through the cognizance of a lower level. He applies this in his correspondence of, on the one hand, the act of witnessing God through the field of activity that constitutes His act of self-manifesting, with the act of witnessing a standing person through the field of activity that constitutes his act of standing. One notices upon reading the *Fawāʾid* a plethora of *paradigms* (*amṯilaḫ*, s. *miṯāl*) proffered to serve the purpose of metamystical modeling.

In view of the above, one may interpret the proof of Wisdom as a tool for the discovery of metaphysical and cosmological first principles. Given these general principles, one may rationally deduce other propositions. But, one may ask, doesn't that turn the proof of Wisdom into a propaedeutic to rational analysis, analogous to Suhrawardi's program of grounding rationalism in mystical experience?

Indeed, one definition the author gives of the proof of Wisdom is that it is an "*experiential* (*ḏawqī*), *visionary* (*ᶜayānī*) proof which entails necessary and immediate knowledge of that which is inferred (Aḥsāʾī 1856, p. 7)." In traditional philosophy, propositions of which one has *necessary* (*ḍurūriyy*) or *immediate* (*badīhiyy*) knowledge constitute first principles, which may be used to deduce other propositions. Yet Šayḫ Aḥmad appears to go further than Suhrawardī in his deemphasis of the role of Peripatetic rational demonstration. This issue must be studied further, however. For example, in the *Šarḥu ãl-Mašāᶜir* (Aḥsāʾī 1861a, p. 129–31), he tries to show the inadequacies of the logical theory of predication when applied to the interpretations of the paradigms of the proof of Wisdom. Our author does, on occasion, apply some degree of rational analysis to the application of his metaphysical and cosmological principles to the solution of problems in *falsafah*. He also applies rational analysis to the answering of objections to some of his positions. On some occasions, he says that an objection has two answers, one *outward* (*ẓāhir*) and one *inward* (*bāṭin*). By an *outward* answer the author means a response based on rational demonstration from propositional principles derived from or consistent with the proof of Wisdom. By an *inward* answer, the author appears to mean a deeper application of the proof of Wisdom. Here, the proof of Wisdom is still modelled in a rational manner, but the principles applied require greater philosophical and experiential depth on the part of reader to be understood. These degrees of outwardness and inwardness give the proof of Wisdom a certain openness and flexibility, an ability to accommodate various levels of phenomenological and philosophical preparedness. One is not trapped within the confines of any one particular axiomatic system. Rather, repeated application of the proof of Wisdom opens new vistas and horizons to those who continually persist in its application. As Inada would put it, it points towards a *dynamic, open ontology* (Inada 1996).

Another possible way of characterizing the difference between Peripatetic metaphysical principles and those of propositional models of the proof of Wisdom is to say that the former constitute synthetic a priori principles and that the latter constitute synthetic a posteriori principles. Now a synthetic a priori principle is a proposition whose truth value

- does not depend on the respective meanings of the terms of the proposition;

- is known independently of experience.

    A synthetic a posteriori first principle is a proposition whose truth value

- does not depend on the respective meanings of the terms of the proposition;

- is not known independently of experience.

Consider the proposition, "God exists". The truth value of this proposition depends neither on the meaning of 'God' nor on the meaning of 'exists'. So it is synthetic. In an example like the rational proof of God's existence given above by Šayḫ Aḥmad, the proposition is also a priori, for one seeks to discover its truth value through rational deduction, not experience. In the metamystical propositional model of the proof of Wisdom, the knowledge of the truth value of the proposition that God exists is just as dependent on experience as the knowledge of the truth value of, say, "John is standing". For Šayḫ Aḥmad then, the proposition is synthetic a posteriori. The only difference is the organ of experience involved.

Most philosophers today, presumably inclusive of rational metaphysicians, reject the notion of a synthetic a priori proposition. Šayḫ Aḥmad would probably reject it also, for at least two reasons:

- The whole thrust of Šayḫ Aḥmad's program is to discover the truth values of certain metaphysical principles through ousiological intuition grounded in revelation; to acknowledge the existence of synthetic a priori propositions would probably defeat, or at least undermine, his purpose;

- In Šayḫ Aḥmad's psychology, *knowledge* (ʿilm), *certainty* (yaqīn), and *cognizance* (maʿrifah) are all rooted in experience. The notion of an a priori proposition is thus difficult to hold, and the definition of an a posteriori proposition is vague because it does not distinguish between knowledge, certainty, and cognizance;

Our author would probably define a synthetic a priori proposition as something like "a synthetic proposition whose truth value is both only *thought* to be known in general, as well as *thought* to be known independently of experience." For a precondition of the knowledge and cognizance obtained through the proof of Wisdom is the emptying of one's self of all preconceptions and preconceived notions. Until one sees through the proof of Wisdom, one's metaphysical principles remain purely suppositional.

THE PRINCIPLES OF ḤIKMAH̃

Based on my perusal of the *Fawāʾid*, its commentary, and other writings of Šayḫ Aḥmad, I have come across a set of nine general principles that appear to include the most fundamental philosophical commitments of the author. We will not give a detailed analysis of those commitments here. We will restrict ourselves to mentioning some of the most immediate consequences of these propositions. The author summarizes these principles in the form of formulae. These formulae are repeated over and over again, especially throughout

the author's later works (See, e.g., the end of the Thirteenth Observation). Most of them are in the form of verses of the Qurʾān or traditions; as is his wont, he prefers to speak his mind through the Islāmic sources of revelation and the traditions of the Šīʿī Imāms whenever he can.

1. The principle of ousiological reduction and ousiological intuition.

According to this principle, the cognizance of God depends on the cognizance of the realities of things, and the cognizance of the realities of things depends on the cognizance of God. This is illustrated by the following verse of the Qurʾān:

> **We will show them Our signs in the horizons and in their selves until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real.** (Q 41:53)

For Šayḫ Aḥmad, this reflective meditation upon the signs of God includes meditation upon the objects of the *macrocosm* (*ʿālam kabīr*) and the astronomical sciences, as well as those of the *microcosm* (*ʿālam ṣaġīr*) and the natural sciences;

2. The topological principle.

This is the ontological principle that *functorial* relationships obtain between realms in the ontological hierarchy. That is, each realm shares characteristics that belong to the realm beneath it, but in *a more sublime way* (*ʿaā naḥw-in ašraf*). For example, the dualism between intelligible and corporeal, between ideal and material, disappears. Whatever is corporeal has an intelligible aspect; whatever is intelligible has a corporeal aspect. As one climbs the ladder of existence (or the logos of life) *qua* positively conditioned, in ascent towards the Divine Wish (or the logos of life totally unconditioned), the corporeal aspect becomes more and more subtle, while the intelligible aspect becomes more intense. Similarly, as one descends from the Nous, the intelligible aspect decreases in intensity while the corporeal aspect increases. Nothing is absolutely incorporeal except God, and since all propositions about Him are tautologous, no one can know what this incorporeality means. Šayḫ Aḥmad uses the following statement of Imām Ṣādiq as a formula to illustrate this state of affairs:

> *Servitude* [receptivity, mirror, diversity, essence, yin, manifestation, phenomenon, microcosm, subjectivity, *walāyah* or agape that is returned] is a jewel whose ultimate reality is *lordship* [activity, light, unity, existence, yang, manifested, noumenon, macrocosm, objectivity, *walāyah* or agape that is given]. So what is *missing* (*fuqida*) in servitude is *found* (*wujida*) in lordship; what is hidden in lordship is attained in servitude.

It appears to me that this statement of Imām Ṣādiq holds the key to a complete phenomenology of macrocosm and microcosm. There is hardly a problem in dialectical phenomenology and cosmology that cannot be interpreted within the context of this proposition, including each of the principles mentioned in this section. Indeed, I would like to suggest that this statement offers us a *supreme phenomenological, cosmological and dialectical principle*;

3. The codependent origination principle.

   This is an ontological principle that states that whatever is higher in the hierarchy of conditioned existence depends on that which is lower for *manifestation* (*ẓuhūr*); that which is lower depends on that which is higher for *realization* (*taḥaqquq*); and finally, that neither can exist without the other. This is illustrated by the same saying of Imām Ṣādiq as the previous principle;

4. The cosmological correspondence principle.

   This is an epistemic principle, according to which the inference of truths about realms higher in the vertical hierarchy of conditioned existence can not be attained without a knowledge of the state of affairs of the sensible realm. This may at first glance appear to contradict what was said above to the effect that the proof of Wisdom requires an emptying of the self of all preconceptions and preconceived notions. This is not the case. If I am understanding Šayḫ Aḥmad correctly, the cosmological principle is applicable primarily to the metamystical, quasi-rational modeling of the experience of cognizance. Presumably, the one exercising this principle should already be able to "see" with the heart-flux. So as one applies this principle he should be under the guidance of the light of the heart-flux. This principle is represented by the saying of the Imām Riḍā, grandson of Imām Ṣādiq:

   > Surely those who possess the kernels of consciousness-awareness [that is, vision through the heart-flux] know that the way of guidance to what is *there* cannot be known except by what is *here*!

   This principle leads to a very interesting dialectical naturalism which no category of metaphysics, not even the world of the *nous* and the intelligible, can escape. It also has important consequences for Neoplatonic types of philosophy. Neoplatonists, and Platonists in general, saw in the science of mathematics the ideal paradigm upon which an understanding of reality must be based. Based upon the supposedly a priori and ideal objects of arithmetic and geometry, Neoplatonists (like Proclus) tried to construct deductive metaphysical systems. Sensible reality, containing only imperfect representations of these mathematical and other ideal objects, was thus considered to be somehow unreal, and the locus of reality was determined to be in the immaterial, atemporal, and intelligible realm.

   This is reversed in Šayḫ Aḥmad. For our author, there are two sciences most important to the development of metaphysical and cosmological models based on the proof of Wisdom. These are chemistry (or alchemy) and astronomy. In the traditional civilization to which Šayḫ Aḥmad belonged, astronomy was considered as one of the mathematical sciences. But our author shows little interest in the structures of astronomical models *qua* ideal structures. Rather, he tries to apply the principles of post-Ptolemaic celestial physics to the droplets of becoming which he calls essences.[22]

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[22] According to some (Swerdlow and Neugebauer 1984, p. 43), one of the distinguishing features of the Marāghah school of astronomy, initiated by Ṭūsī and studied by Šayḫ Aḥmad, is an emphasis on the *physical* problems of Ptolemy's models. Ṭūsī, following Aristotle, says that the principles of astronomy are derived from metaphysics, geometry, and physical science (Ragep 1993, pp. 38 and 90).

And the interplay of essence and existence at every rank of both conditioned existence and Absolute Existence is modelled on principles of physical science, including alchemy. For Šayḫ Aḥmad, astronomy is the science of the *macrocosm* (*ᶜālam kabīr*), exoteric physical science is the science of the *microcosm* (*ᶜālam ṣaġīr*), and alchemy provides the mirror to both in the *philosophicosm* (*ᶜālam falsafiyy*).

The use of physical science in metaphysics is not altogether new. And Šayḫ Aḥmad would find partial justification for such a use of alchemy in particular in the legendary words of Imām ᶜAlī to the effect that *alchemy* (*al-kīmyā*) "*is the sister of prophecy*" (Aḥsāʾī 1861b, p. 168). This emphasis by our author on physical science in the *Fawāʾid* and in other works of his points to a very *naturalistic* approach to metaphysics.[23] His proof of the dual principality of essence and existence rests on what are fundamentally naturalistic principles. Moreover, Šayḫ Aḥmad makes the fateful move of reversing the order of traditional hylomorphism, through his theory of the active, dynamic nature of matter, and the receptive, becoming nature of form;

5. The causal principle.

This principle states that "every *impression* (*aṯar*) resembles the *actional quality* (*ṣifaĥ*) of its *proximate agent* (*muʾaṯṯirhi ãl-qarīb*)". The words '*aṯar*' and '*muʾaṯṯir*' are basically coextensive with '*effect*' ('*maᶜlūl*') and '*cause*' ('*ᶜillaĥ*') respectively. The Latins translated '*aṯar*' with '*impressio*', and '*muʾaṯṯir*' with '*agens*' and '*imprimens*' (see Freytag's *Lexicon Arabico-Latinum*, under ʾ t r). The word '*muʾaṯṯir*' literally means "that which occasions an impression". The corresponding gerund is '*taʾṯīr*', meaning, "the occasioning of an impression". Muslim scholastics frequently defined the concepts "*action*" ("*fiᶜl*") and "*passion*" ("*infiᶜāl*") in terms of "*taʾṯīr*". This principle expresses at least two ideas:

− That actions are real. On this point, Šayḫ Aḥmad is in sharp disagreement with Ibn Sina, Ṭūsī, Suhrawardī, Mīr Dāmād, even Mullā Ṣadrā, all of whom in some sense denied the external reality of *taʾṯīr qua taʾṯīr*, and hence, of both action and passion (except of course as conceptual categories of understanding). They claimed that admitting the ontic status of *taʾṯīr* would result in circularity or infinite regress. This is because a given *taʾṯīr* would need its own *taʾṯīr* to come into being. But then that other *taʾṯīr* would need its own, and so forth. With respect to God, this meant denying that there was such a thing as a distinct *Willing* (*mašiyyaĥ*) or *Acting* (*fiᶜl*) distinct from God Himself and the outcomes of His action. Mullā Ṣadrā, while more lenient on the issue of the reality of action and passion, sides with his predecessors on the issue of a separate Willing of God. We have given Šayḫ Aḥmad's response to this elsewhere (Hamid 1998, pt. 2, § 2.4.2). We should add that there are few issues over which he takes such strong issue with his fellow philosophers and theologians as this one. He vents particular anger at Mīr Dāmād (as in, e.g., his *Treatise on Knowledge*) and Mullā Ṣadrā (as in, e.g., his *On Matters of Subjective Signification*), because, as Shīᶜī theologians, they

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[23] Naturalism "holds that the best methods of inquiry in the social sciences or philosophy are, or are to be modelled on, those of the natural sciences" (Schmitt 1995).

were definitely aware that their Imāms were unequivocal about the separate and distinct reality of actions in general and God's Action in particular. Instead, as Šayḫ Aḥmad sees it, they twist the intentions of the Imāms to fit the requisites of Peripatetic method (as in Mīr Dāmād's case) and of both Peripatetic method and Sufism (as in Mullā Ṣadrā's case);

– That whatever characteristics which are manifest in a given *outcome of acting* (*mafᶜūl*) are latent in the *acting* (*fiᶜl*) from which the outcome of acting originated. For example, the configuration of a sample of writing may be either smooth or crooked. For Šayḫ Aḥmad, this smoothness or crookedness of the writing sample is a manifestation of something latent within the field of activity from which the sample of writing originated. In the Third Observation of *Fawā᾽id*, the author uses this principle in an attempt to resolve the dichotomy between unity and multiplicity.

This principle is again a direct manifestation of the aforementioned formula

Servitude *is a jewel whose ultimate reality is* lordship. *So what is* missing (*fuqida*) *in servitude is* found (wujida) *in lordship; what is hidden in lordship is attained in servitude.*

So this principle appears to be very closely related to the topological principle;

6. The realist principle.

This is basically equivalent to Meinong's[24] thesis to the effect that to every thought there corresponds a real object. Šayḫ Aḥmad uses the following tradition of Imām Ṣādiq as his formula of epistemological realism:

Anything that you discriminate through your minds, in its deepest meanings, is created like you are, and is reverted to you.

This formula contains information beyond that which is indicative of Meinongian realism. For it also ties in to Šayḫ Aḥmad's strict negative theology. Any concept, notion, or term that the human mind can imagine or devise denotes a created thing and only a created thing. In reality, none of these things denote God *qua* God, and no propositional combination of them will give any information whatsoever about His Quintessence;

7. The ontological polarity principle.

This principle states that every created, contingent thing is a complex of *acting* (*fiᶜl*) and *becoming-in-yielding-to-acting* (*infiᶜāl*). That is, everything is composed of an act of existence and an act of becoming or essence. Assuming the ontological import of the essence-existence distinction, this principle takes both existence and essence as coprincipal, coterminous, and coincident, although existence is ontologically prior to

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[24] *Alexius Meinong* (1853–1920). Important metaphysician and ontologist who helped pave the way for the modern *analytical philosophy* movement.

essence. Both originate and subsist codependently. A polar dialectic obtains between them so that there can be no question of a separate entity called "existence" and a separate entity called "essence." Existence is the all-pervasive and unitary active matter and *ousia* which constitutes the necessary and sufficient condition for the *generation* or *becoming-generated* (*takawwun*) and the *realization* or *becoming-realized* (*taḥaqquq*) of essences, while essences are the individuated acts of becoming which constitute the necessary and sufficient condition for the manifestation of existence. Another implication of this principle is the denial of certain presuppositions underlying Peripatetic and scholastic conceptions of substance. The author's formula corresponding to the polarity principle is the following saying of Imām Riḍā:

> Allah definitely did not create any single thing subsisting through itself and without something else. [This is a point] for whoever desires an indication of Him and the affirmation of His existence;

8. The principle of the relation between quality and qualified.

This principle has two parts, an ontic and an epistemic part. The ontic part Šayḫ Aḥmad states as follows: the existence of a given qualified subject is a condition of the existence of the corresponding quality. The epistemic part states this: the existence of any given quality, in the *condition* (*ḥāl*) of being a quality, prior to the existence of the qualified subject is neither intelligible nor conceptualizable (as in the Seventeenth Observation);

9. The creation principle.

According to this principle, God created everything in the best possible way, and in accordance with the exigencies of His own Wisdom, a Wisdom that is latent within the realm of His Acting-Possibility (the *logos of life qua* unconditioned). The formula the author uses to express this is the following verse of the Qur'ān:

> **And if the Real chose to follow their passions, the Heavens, the Earth, and whoever is in them would have been corrupted. Rather, we have presented them with their presence; and from their presence do they turn away.** (Q 23:71)

The implications the author draws out of this principle and the accompanying formula are among the most profound and also most difficult to follow. He tries to explain that God is present[25] to His creatures through the very bounds of their acts of becoming, and yet that past, present and future are all identical for Him. He is also at pains to

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[25] Some Arabic scholars may question my translation of '*ḏikr*' with 'presence'. The word '*ḏikr*' commonly means "reminder" or "mentioning". Its literal meaning, however, is "presence in the mind" (See Lane's *Lexicon*, under *ḏ k r*). Based on Šayḫ Aḥmad's use of the term, it is clear to me that he is interpreting '*ḏikr*', as used in the Qur'ān and some of the traditions of the Imāms (as in the beginning of the Fourth Observation) to signify "that through which a given thing is present to something else". Both the remembering and mentioning of a given thing presume some kind of presence of that thing to the one mentioning or remembering.

show that God's Wisdom in the ordering of the world does not entail determinism. Rather, the Acting of God and the set of acts of becoming that constitute His creatures are engaged in a continuous dynamic interplay wherein each one operates only through the other. Unfortunately, the author left no commentary on the Eighteenth Observation, where these themes are laid out in most detail. Written later than the twelve observations that constitute the original *Fawāʾid*, the Eighteenth Observation, proceeding from this principle, contains some of the highest philosophical speculations of the author.

It appears to be the case that some of these principles are reducible to others. It is a task for further research to determine the smallest, irreducible set of principles upon which Šayḫ Aḥmad's system is based. The above list should not be considered as constituting a mutually exclusive or jointly exhaustive set. As we alluded earlier, each of these principles appears to be latent with the overarching phenomenological, cosmological and dialectical principle enunciated by Imām Ṣādiq above. I am sure that I have left a few things out, especially in the area of epistemology (such as his theory, apparently not explicitly articulated until late in his career, of the identity of knowledge with the object of knowledge).

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF "ḤIKMAH̃"

Let us return to Šayḫ Aḥmad's division of cognition and organs of cognition. *Knowledge* (*ʿilm*) proper has its locus in the soul and the imaginal faculty; true *certainty* (*yaqīn*) has its locus in the nous, and *cognizance* (*maʿrifah*) has its locus in the heart-flux. To each of these types of cognition there corresponds a method of *proof* (*dalīl*) appropriate to it. To knowledge there corresponds the proof of *argumentation in the best way* (*mujādalah̃ bi-ãllatī hiya aḥsan*), or logical analysis; to certainty there corresponds the proof of *good exhortation* (*mawʿiẓah̃ ḥasanah*); to cognizance there corresponds the *proof of Wisdom* (*ḥikmah̃*). These three types of proof are referred to in the Qurʾān:

> **Call to the path of your Lord with Wisdom and good exhortation. And argue with them through that which is best.** (Q 16:125)

Given a method of proof, there should be a set of sciences to which that proof is applied. Šayḫ Aḥmad finds the key to this question to lie in a tradition of the Prophet to the effect that there are only three useful branches of knowledge: the *firm sign* (*āyah̃ muḥkamah̃*), the *just duty* (*farīḍah̃ ʿādilah̃*), and the *established Sunnah* (*sunnah̃ qāʾimah̃*) (Aḥsāʾī 1856, p. 14). According to Šayḫ Aḥmad, the firm sign corresponds to the science of Wisdom, the just duty to the science of ethics and purification of the soul, and the established Sunnah corresponds to the science of *the Law* (*šarīʿah̃*). The accompanying table summarizes the relations between these sciences and the types of cognition. Although he does not say so explicitly, this does not mean that he rejects other sciences. It is just a matter of appropriately fitting them somehow into these categories. The usefulness of other sciences, regardless of the type of proof appropriate to it, is to be measured in accordance with how it relates to the sciences mentioned by the Prophet. For example, medicine can come under the category of Sunnah because the Prophet encouraged his followers to learn it;

it is covered by "the just duty" because spiritual development is assisted by corporal soundness; and it is covered by Wisdom because it gives some knowledge of the human microcosm, meditation upon which is a requisite of the proof of Wisdom.

mode of cognition	corresponding type of proof	science mentioned by the Prophet	science mentioned by Šayḫ Aḥmad
knowledge	logical argumentation	the established Sunnah	the Law
certainty	good exhortation	the just duty	ethics and spiritual development
cognizance	the proof of Wisdom	the firm sign	Wisdom

Table 2   The three sciences.

In other places (such as the *Šarḥu ãl-ᶜAršiyyaᵗ* (Aḥsāʾī 1861b, p. 100), Šayḫ Aḥmad mentions that the proof of "argumentation in the best way," inclusive of *semantic and conceptual analysis* (*taṣḥīḥu ãl-ʾalfāẓ wa ãl-mafāhīm*), is an appropriate tool in those sciences which pertain to language, in the mathematical sciences (which include astronomy), and in "some of the physical sciences." In as much as each of these sciences has a role to play in the construction of metaphysical and cosmological models based on the proof of Wisdom, the man of Wisdom must be familiar with rational analysis. In as much as the sciences of ethical and spiritual discipline must be mastered so that vision of the heart-flux be attained, the man of Wisdom must also be familiar and conversant in the "proof of good exhortation." Indeed, the author says that the way of practical spiritual advancement is the inner spirit of the way of traveling the road of advancement in knowledge (Aḥsāʾī 1856, p. 12). And one of the supports of the proof of good exhortation is the tradition, which for Šayḫ Aḥmad is comprised of the Qurʾān and the Sunnah, which in turn includes the Law.

Thus, we see that Wisdom is a very organic and holistic science. It deals primarily with metaphysical questions. But, analogous to the Wisdom of Plato's *Timaeus*, the answers to these questions depend upon a method which requires the resources of many of the theoretical sciences and practical disciplines that underlie the traditional civilization to which Šayḫ Aḥmad belonged (note that Šayḫ Aḥmad was a practicing chemist and geologist). It is thus a *cosmological* science. According to Whitehead (1978, p. xii),

> . . . it must be one of the motives of a complete cosmology to construct a system of ideas which brings the aesthetic, moral, and religious interests [of a given civilization] into relation with those concepts of the world which have their origin in physical science.

I believe that the foregoing discussion illustrates the applicability of this statement to Šayḫ Aḥmad's concept of Wisdom. Furthermore, in Šayḫ Aḥmad, this cosmological emphasis is axiomatically grounded by the principle of the mutual mirroring of macrocosm and microcosm. It is thus a *dialectical science of macrocosm and microcosm*. Finally, the

method of *ḥikmah̃*—the proof of Wisdom— is rooted in what is a fundamentally experiential bracketing and reduction (in the ousiological sense); it is thus a *phenomenological science.*

Yet Wisdom and cosmology aim for more than a structure and a system of ideas. At the end of a complicated analysis in the *Šarḥu ãl̃-Ziyārah̃ ãl-Jāmiᶜah̃* (*Commentary on the Great Visitation*) of the concept and reality of Wisdom, Šayḫ Aḥmad (Aḥsāʾī 197?, vol. 1, p. 173) concludes,

> What is meant by 'Wisdom' is an *all encompassing* (*iḥāṭiyy*), experiential knowledge associated with that which is tied to it by the way of the *work*. It occurs in *everything* in a way appropriate to it.

In Whiteheadean terminology, *ḥikmah̃* or Wisdom in the highest sense is a manifestation, on the part of a given actual entity, of its *prehensions*, acquired through that given entity's ground (the heart-flux in humans), of other actual entities. Wisdom is essentially *interactive* and *relational.* This is ultimately the most fundamental sense of '*walȳah̃*' (*dynamic loving*), the most important concept in primordial Islāmic philosophy. It subverts any sharp distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy; rather, they stand in a mutual dialectical relationship.

In saying that Wisdom "occurs in *everything* in a way appropriate to it," Šayḫ Aḥmad connects macrocosm, microcosm and even philosophicosm in a single, continuous *logos of life.* The dialectic of objective and subjective obtains at every level of *life.* In its totally unconditioned state it is the *heart-flux* of the World. Thus the Cosmos subsumes the Anthropos, and the Anthropos subsumes the Cosmos. And the *philosophicosm*, the "mirror of the philosophers," is none other than the *phenomenologicosm*, the mirror of the *logos of life*, the final goal of the phenomenological *work*:

> *Are you really sure that you are just a small body?*
> *While within you the Greater Cosmos is enfolded!*

Idris Samawi Hamid

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