

Understanding *'aql* in Readings of *Usūl al-kāfi*: Early Shī'ite Hadith and its Later
Interpreters

By Mohammad Reza Hemyari

B.A. in Foreign Affairs and Philosophy, May 2010, University of Virginia

A Thesis submitted to:

The Faculty of
The Columbian College of Arts and Sciences
of The George Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

May 18, 2014

Thesis directed by

Mohammad Faghfoory
Professorial Lecturer in Islamic Studies

Dedication

The author wishes to dedicate this to him who continues to inspire me.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge all those who guided me, untiringly, through the difficulty of guiding me: my benevolent teachers from the past and the present, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Mohammad Faghfoory, Alfred Hildebeitel, and Kelly Pemberton, who have all inspired me to be and know more than I am; my loving wife, Sara, who continues to transform me with her love and patience; and my family, whose goodness has stopped them from seeing my lack thereof; among whom is my mentor, Rizwan, who has constantly helped me see what needs to be seen. To all those named and to the many unnamed: thank you.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī and <i>The Mirror of Intellects</i>	20
Chapter 3: Mullā Ṣadrā and His Commentary on <i>Uṣūl al-kāfī</i>	38
Conclusion.....	65
Bibliography.....	69

Chapter 1: Introduction

“[T]he intellect is the axis around which all else turns: through it does one argue; for it is one given reward; and according to it is one punished.” This is why the most important canonical text, *Usūl al-kāfī*, begins with “The Book of Intellect and Ignorance.”¹ Yet being a canonical text has meant that *al-Kāfī*, and the concept of intellect it provides has been redefined by its various commentators. Especially during the Safavid period, there was a sharp rise in these commentaries on *al-Kāfī*, and with it, diverging conceptions of the intellect. The authors of these commentaries were all dealing with one text within one tradition, and there are clear similarities between them. Equally as interesting however are the differences between the commentaries and the way each author viewed not only the text, but the reading of the text; not only the conceptions of the intellect, but how to read and learn from the ahadith.

This thesis will focus on the similarities and differences revolving around the issue of the intellect, both the varied and multi-dimensional conception provided in *al-Kāfī*, as well as the later readings and interpretations of that conception by its commentators. A nominal, albeit disparate, conception of the intellect can be extracted from the ahadith. Yet it is to the commentators to extract this conception and provide a synthetic and unified conception through their readings of the text. The Safavid period saw a surge of such commentators, whereby each would reflect a diversity of thought with regard to the text, with the various authors mirroring the perspectives of the period. This diversity ranged from the Akhbārīs to the Usūlīs, from the philosophers and mystics to the more literalist commentators, all of whom show a devoted reverence to the text,

¹ There are a number of editions, see Sayyid Hasan Faṭīmī-Muwahḥhad, “Gāmī seturg dar kāfī-pajūhī,” in *Fiqh-i Ahlul-Bayt* 15:60, 133-65; also a recent translation with commentary in English, by Rizwan Arastu, *Al-Kafī: Intellect & Foolishness*, (Dearborn, MI: Islamic Texts Institute, 2012).

while presenting its central definitions and notions from a particular hermeneutic that informs their reading of that same text.

In a way, this thesis can be seen in conversation with Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi's excellent work, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, where he attempts to focus on "Imamology and, within this framework, it seems essential to define "Imam" as well as can be done by using the words of the imams themselves."² And for a number of reasons, Amir-Moezzi focuses primarily on the earliest hadith compilations available, "the imams' own words (*ahādith, akhbār*) pronounced theoretically between the middle of the first/seventh century and the beginning of the fourth/ninth century."³ He separates this early doctrine from a later one, which he considers as two distinct Imāmī traditions, with the later being less loyal to the original tradition. In particular, he states, the conceptions of *'aql* in the later tradition are a result of a "semantic slide", entailing a more logical *'aql* that forms "under the influence of Aristotelian texts translated into Arabic and the establishment of the dialectical methodology of kalām..."⁴ In terms of this definition of *'aql*, he states four methodological points that would be important to cite here, because they function importantly for the rest of his text:

1. The idea of Imāmī *'aql* in its original acceptance;
2. The distinction of two Imāmī traditions, each with its own nature and each with an entirely different vision of the world;
3. The identification of those sources that belong to the original tradition;
4. And finally the authority and the nature of Imāmī hadith.

² Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

³ Ibid. 5.

⁴ Ibid. 11.

This study intends to explore these four points and their implications. One of the most basic implications in this study is the ability to clearly distinguish between the early, or “original acceptance”, of the Imāmī *‘aql* and its later accretions. By looking at both the original text and how it was used in the later period, I will try to examine how this distinction can be made. Basically, if we are to view it as Amir-Moezzi does, how far did the later Imāmīs fall from the original words of the Imams, and how closely are we able to approximate this fall?

This would imply the following questions: What are the possible ways of understanding *‘aql*, as defined in the *Usūl al-kāfī*? Do the later understandings of *‘aql* somehow diverge from the “original acceptance”, i.e., is it possible to distinguish and separate the two *Imāmī* traditions? What were those “later works written on the early texts, but whose reasoning and philosophical interpretations are justified only on the basis of hermeneutics from a much later time period?”⁵ More succinctly, what reasoning, interpretation, and hermeneutics? How did the individuals of these later traditions understand their own relations to the words of the Imams?

In terms of my primary sources, I will be focusing on *Uṣūl al-kāfī* itself, primarily its first chapter. Secondly, there is the commentary literature on *al-Kāfī*, much of which arose during the Safavid period, and confining this second set as well to their commentaries on the first chapter. The two commentaries I will be focusing on are the following:

1. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī’s *Mir’āt al-‘uqūl fī sharḥ akhbār al-rasūl*.⁶
2. Mullā Ṣadrā’s *Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī*.⁷

⁵ Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, 3.

⁶ Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Mir’āt ul-‘uqūl fī sharḥ akhbār āl al-rasūl* (Dār ul-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah).

Each of these commentators presents his own understandings of the tradition. I will explore their relation to each other as well as their relation to the original ahadith. Focus will be on the expediting the commentaries themselves, and I will attempt to draw out the larger themes that are present across these traditions, as well as those distinctive markers that allow for these broad categories regarding the intellect. As well, by placing them within their own particular historical and doctrinal context, I will attempt to show why the authors would present the conclusions they did, both when they allow for Amir-Moezzi's early/late tradition distinction and when they do not. One of the limiting factors of this thesis includes a disregard for the large hadith commentary tradition within Western scholarship, and the focus on hadith authentication debates as opposed to debates on hadith authority and meaning.⁸ Recently, there has been more work on hadith commentaries proper, but much more needs to be done in this field, particularly as distinct from hadith authentication issues.⁹

Methodology

In terms of methodology, it may be useful to think of the following issues: Firstly, what does *Usūl al-kāfī* mean as a canonical work within the Shī'ī hadith tradition? Here, what is meant by canon is what Jonathan Z. Smith explains in his essay, "Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon" as "broadly understood as the arbitrary

⁷ Ṣadrud-dīn Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī*, 3 vols. (Tehran: Mu'assaseh-yi Muṭali'āt wa Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, 1366); *Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī*, Persian trans. Muḥammad Khwājāvī (Tehran: Mu'assaseh-yi Muṭali'āt wa Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, 1366); *Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī*, vol. 1, online <http://www.shamela.ws>

⁸ For both a survey of the academic scholarship on hadith authority (versus authenticity) and an attempt at examining this authority, see Aisha Musa, *Hadith as Scripture: Discussions on the Authority of Prophetic Traditions in Islam*,

⁹ See Joel Blecher, "Hadīth Commentary in the Presence of Students, Patrons, and Rivals: Ibn Ḥajar and Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī in Mamluk Cairo" in *Oriens* 41 (2013): 261-87; In the Shade of the Ṣaḥīḥ: Politics, Culture and Innovation in an Islamic Commentary Tradition (PhD diss., Princeton: Princeton University, 2013).

fixing of a limited number of ‘texts’ as immutable and authoritative...”¹⁰ He simultaneously posits “the necessary occurrence of a hermeneute, of an interpreter whose task it is continually to extend the domain of the closed over everything that is known or everything that exists *without* altering the canon in the process. It is with the canon and its hermeneute that we encounter the necessary obsession with exegetical totalization.”¹¹ There are a number of issues to be fleshed out here, including the finality of the text, the necessity for a hermeneute and the “exegetical totalization”, all of which pertain to our understanding of *al-Kāfī* and its commentators. Canons have a sense of completion and totalization, as the basic ingredients of religious phenomena, which Smith explores through divination. He makes the analogy to food and cuisine where: “*if food is a phenomenon characterized by limitation, cuisine is a phenomenon characterized by variegation.*”¹² This closed text needs an interpreter, a hermeneute, to make sense of the various pieces that are contained within it, and present them to the community in creative ways. Indeed, he states that “sacrality persists insofar as there are communities which are persistent in applying their limited body of tradition; that sacred persistence... is primarily exegesis; that, if there is anything that is distinctive about religion as a human activity, it is a matter of... what might be described as the extremity of its enterprise for exegetical totalization.”¹³ The connection between the canon, the hermeneute, and the community is made abundantly clear by Smith for understanding each of these pieces, as they work within a larger context.

¹⁰ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 44.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 48.

¹² *Ibid.* 40.

¹³ *Ibid.* 44.

Smith's theory of canon is brought into an analogy with semiotic theory by Taylor with the notion of *langue* (very simply, language) and *parole* (the particular use of that language), with the hermeneute's work being in the realm of *parole*, which is always in "response" to an "other", whether present or not.¹⁴ By connecting semiotic theory to Smith's theory on the necessity of the hermeneute in creating and defining the canon, *parole* is redefined as not just an really not just an act of langue, but also an enactment, with multiple connections being created: taking Smith's own analogy of food versus cuisine, every instance of a dish being made within the bounds of a particular cuisine is a creative act which pushes the limit of that cuisine to necessarily also include that particular dish, with all its brilliance and flaws, while at the same time, the dish itself, in so far as it is, is separate from the conception of a larger "cuisine". When we look at the commentaries of our own hermeneutes, we see that not only do they establish a proper way of reading the text, but they as well are reading (performing) the text in that way. For Majlisī, reading the text is defined as understanding the direct connection between the words of the text and the meaning/intent of the Imams. He as well as places the hadith within the context of the larger body of sayings, especially the referent (as opposed to the meaning) when the particular hadith is not clear. For Mullā Ṣadrā, the revelatory and intuitive sense of the ahadith is a discovery not only of the depths of the hadith, but as well a spiritual discovery for the reader in understanding those depths, as the reader attempts to understand not just the words of the Imams, but the intent of the Imams as deeply as one could. Each of these commentaries reads the text within the bounds of what

¹⁴ Tim Murphy, "Elements of a Semiotic Theory of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Leiden: Brill, (2003) 15: 48-67.

is deemed an “appropriate” hermeneutics, but simultaneously being creative in the way they make sense of each hadith within their own context.

In understanding the work of the hermeneute, it is also important to note the synthetic quality of his work. Smith implies this synthesis of the hermeneute when speaking of the divination practice of the Walbiri ritual. He states that within the divination ritual “each element bears a wide range of meanings...but is unambiguous in context...When a given design can synonymously (although not simultaneously) denote a variety of things, there is a principle by which these referents are perceived both as similar and as reducible to the geometric form that calls them to mind.”¹⁵ The hermeneute, having taken the basic structures and forms within the canon, rewrites them into a coherent whole, where he secludes a number of symbols and meanings as the primary factor in this use of the word (or this dream or activity) as opposed to other meanings and symbols, while at the same time presenting an explanation where all the disparate parts within the canon are strung together into a whole, making sense of the various parts in relation to the whole.

In this way, Amir-Moezzi’s view of the later commentators as somehow falling away from the words of the Imams in *al-Kāfī* does not account for the necessity of the synthesis in understanding the canon. He attempts to find the most authentic intent of the Imams’, before the later tradition and its “degrading” by the later tradition (for Amir-Moezzi, it is the later inserting of neo-Platonic views of intellect into the readings of the medieval commentators), whereas it is through the function of the hermeneute and the community whereby the text itself becomes what it is, namely a canon, and continues to be seen by the community as such and for it to continue to be a coherent whole for the

¹⁵ Ibid., 49.

community to refer to. Of course, this is not to deny that there was indeed an original intent of the Imams; however, it is difficult to posit such a distinct dichotomy between that which was, a primordial and original understanding, and the later degradation of the tradition. This also makes the hermeneutic and commentary tradition that much more relevant, as it is these commentators who attempt to make sense of the text and present it to the larger community.

Uṣūl al-Kāfī

Uṣūl al-kāfī is one of the primary hadith sources in Shī‘ī Islam, and is considered as part of the four canonical works of Shī‘ī hadith. Although its authority and authenticity is still a matter of some debate, it is considered one of the most, if not the most, foundational book of Imāmī Shi‘ism.¹⁶ Current scholarship on *al-Kāfī*, albeit scant, has examined the book from a number of varying perspectives. Modarressi examines the text as a reflection of the period in which it was written, where there is at once a rise of Ghulāt traditions and sects, a co-optation of some of those traditions by the larger Shī‘ī community and scholars, and an aggressive delimitation of Shi‘ism by the scholars, particularly in Qom, resulting in the banishment of those “extremist” ideas from what became the orthodoxy.¹⁷ Other approaches to *al-Kāfī* include that of Lynda Clarke, who examines the early sources, not just limited to *al-Kāfī* but also various other texts like *Kitāb al-Sulaym* and others, to cull that which all the texts “agree on—or at least are concerned with—a certain set of basic tenets, and that they connect these tenets in similar

¹⁶ For some of the varying positions taken towards al-Kāfī within the *Imāmī* scholarly community, see Seyyed Husayn Husayni Jalālī, *Dirayat al-hadīth*, (Beirut: Manshūrāt Mu’assisah al-A‘lamī lil-Maṭbu‘āt, 2004)

¹⁷ Hossein Modarressi Tabataba‘i, *Crisis and Consolidation*, (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1993).

ways.”¹⁸ Amir-Moezzi, also attempts to present us with an insight into the original (and esoteric) doctrine of the Imams (or rather the early Shī‘ī community) before the intellectual “shift” occurred towards the ratio-centric tradition of al-Mufid and al-Tūsī. This is followed by Andrew Newman’s work, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi’ism*, where he presents this shift as a conflict between the Qummi traditionalists and the Baghdadi rationalists (and *al-Kāfī* as a Qummi response to the school of Baghdad).¹⁹

What is missed in these texts, and what Amir-Moezzi somewhat addresses, is how salient the issue of ‘*aql* is, not only within *al-Kāfī*, and during this early period, but how it continues to inform and define much of Imāmī history thereafter. There has been some literature that addresses the issue of ‘*aql* in *al-Kāfī*, in addition to Amir-Moezzi’s work. This includes Douglas Crow’s Ph.D. dissertation on the early conceptions of ‘*aql*²⁰, primarily before and up to *al-Kāfī*, as well as Lynda Clarke’s dissertation mentioned above.

In the later Safavid era, the debates on the definitions and position of ‘*aql* in religious thought continued, not only with regard to jurisprudence in the famous Uṣūlī-Akhbarī debates, but as well between philosophers and theologians. As will be seen, these debates manifest clearly on the level of the commentaries as well, although not as starkly as we might suppose. Although each of the commentators do approach the text through their own particular hermeneutics, there are some interesting notions regarding

¹⁸ Lynda Clarke, “Early Doctrine of the Shi‘ah: According to the Shī‘ī Sources”, [Ph.D. Dissertation: Montreal: McGill University, July 1994].

¹⁹ Andrew Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi’ism: Hadith as Discourse between Qum and Baghdad*, (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000).

²⁰ Douglas Crow, *The Role of al-‘aql in early Islamic wisdom with reference to Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq* [Ph.D. Dissertation, McGill University, 1996].

wilayah that bring to the fore their distinct Shī‘ī identity, a connection not directly made by the hadith text itself.

In the introduction to *al-Kāfī*, Kulayni states the following, “I shall begin my book with a book on intellect and [another on] the merit of knowledge, the lofty station of those possessed of it, the deplorability of ignorance and the lowliness of those bereft of knowledge. [I begin with the intellect] because the intellect is the axis around which all else turns: through it does one argue; for it is one given reward; and according to it is one punished. And God is the Grantor of success.”²¹ In attempting to understand how the text itself presents the notion of intellect, Amir-Moezzi presents us with a number of categories that attempt to account for the vast semantic field covered by *al-Kāfī*, in the 34 or 36 verses that are present in this first chapter.

He begins by looking at the etymological meaning of the term *‘aql*, which meant simply “good sense,” and more directly, “what was tied to an animal’s feet to restrain it...” with its abstract meaning referring to the “faculty that restrains human beings from foolishness.” In the Qur’an, it is used in its verbal form in opposition to *jahl*, “the ignorance of the impious” and is used in similar ways to other words like “*tafakkara* (to think about God’s signs, to remember them, to meditate on them) *tadhakkara* (to keep God in one’s memory)”²² and so on. Amir-Moezzi states that we cannot create a unified definition of the intellect from that which is presented in *al-Kāfī*. Rather, he presents the

²¹ Al-Kulayni, *al-Kāfī*, lviii. One attempt at understanding Kulayni’s own view on the intellect is made by Muḥammad Akhawan, “Kulayni wa ‘aql garayī” *Ayinah pajūhī* (81): 267-81. There are other interesting ways of viewing the text, in terms of the ahadith selected, and the general structure of the text, through which one could cull Kulayni’s distinct touch regarding the topics he addresses, as attempted by the scholars previously mentioned.

²² Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide* 6.

text in its varying dimensions without unifying them into one, dividing the ahadith thematically into the following categories:

1. The Cosmogonic Dimension- the primordial creation of *'aql*, which is said to be the first of creation, and in another hadith, its 75 armies, each of which expands the moral and spiritual qualities of *'aql* even further, and are opposed to the creation of jahl and its armies. This Amir-Moezzi states is a “doctrinal development that breaks the mold of Qur’anic definitions and turns it into a kind of cosmic Morality, a metaphysical prototype of human morality, at war with cosmic Immorality.”²³
2. The Ethical-Epistemological Dimension- This is explored on the human level, where it is not “just an acquired quality, but a gift from God. One might call it an innate faculty of transcendent knowledge, developed to a great or lesser extent depending on the individual.”²⁴ People benefit from this varyingly, and its seeds are given before coming into this world, increasing with age and divine effusions.
3. Spiritual dimension- There are distinct spiritual aspects to *'aql*, including the “faculty for apprehending the divine, a faculty of metaphysical perception, a light located in the heart and through which one can discern and recognize signs from God.” Possibly, “a subtle organ of religion, without which man is cut off from his relationship with the divine plan.”²⁵
4. Soteriological Dimension- “In the absence of *'aql*, the organ of religion, there can only be false religiousness, an appearance of piety, hypocrisy.” It is one of the functions of the 12th Imam to complete the *'aql* of the people. It is also seen as the organ that

²³ Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, 8.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. 9.

allows man to “fight against the darkness of impious ignorance, and guarantees him salvation...allowing him as well to be a soldier of the ‘imam’.”²⁶

These are the various elements that Amir-Moezzi states cannot be described in a singular way. If we are to follow J.Z. Smith’s analogy of food versus cuisine, this would qualify as the food, the ingredients which are reduced and closed (the *langue*), from which the hermeneute begins his work of transformation into a synthetic and coherent *parole*. The question is, how do these various hermeneutes present their basic conceptions of ‘*aql*’ and how do they read the text so as to make sense of the text and their interpretation of it? I will explore these various dimensions in the following few pages, by presenting the synthesis of the commentators, along with the various ways in which they deal with particular ahadith that not only present these separate categories, but as well many of the other elements that are present within them, such as the narrative modes (e.g., the second hadith presents the story of Adam being presented with 3 things: intellect, decency, and devotion.) many of these traditions have in expressing the different dimensions of “intellect.”

Creation of Intellect

“When God created intellect, he gave it the faculty of language and said, ‘Come forward’ whereupon it came forward. Then he said to it, ‘Go back,’ whereupon it went back. Then he said, ‘By my might and my majesty, I have not created a creature more beloved to me than you, and I have not perfected you except in whom I love. Let it be known! You alone do I command, and you alone do I forbid. [According] to you alone do I punish, and [according] to you alone do I confer reward.”²⁷

²⁶ Ibid. 10.

²⁷ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kafi*, 1.

Some of the various elements that must be highlighted, and that the hermeneutes grapple with include: 1. The mythic quality: presented in narrative form, it tells us of the story of how God created the intellect as a seemingly separate entity from individual humans who may use this intellect; this has been read in many different ways, including allegorically, and literally, as an actual event in time, the latter being taken as either macrocosmically, like with Mullā Ṣadrā, as a cosmogonic event, whereby God creates the cosmos through this first instantiation of being (in hadith 14, the Intellect being the “first of spiritual beings” is stated explicitly, although this has been understood in different ways, and does not necessarily imply a cosmogonic event as such for some hermeneutes); or microcosmically, as a creation for man whereby he is given this intellect. 2. It is said that God gave the intellect the faculty of language, (*istantāqahū*); 3. Motion: somehow intellect is said to go back and come forward. This is used by those who read it literally and macrocosmically as the creation of the world, and thereafter the eschaton, where the Intellect descends to the world, and then ascends back to God. In hadith 14, Ignorance is given the same commands, but only follows the first, namely “Come forward” (*aqbil*), but not the second “Go back” (*adbir*) and because of his disobedience is punished; 4. God’s swearing upon His Might and His Majesty (*bi-‘izzatī wa jalālī*) (itself requiring much interpretation), that the Intellect is the most perfect of His creation, and that it is not completed in individuals “except for those whom I love.” This line has been interpreted in many different ways, including as a metaphor for the creation of the light of the Prophet and the Ahlul-Bayt, whereby they are the most perfect of God’s creation, and He completes the intellect of whomsoever loves them. 5. In the final lines, it states “You alone do I command, and you alone do I forbid. [According] to you alone do I punish,

and [according] to you alone do I confer reward.”²⁸ This is a somewhat difficult couple of lines, because after all, is not man himself, not the intellect that is punished and rewarded, and is it not man that is commanded and forbid from acts? On the surface, the hadith seems to place the onus on the intellect as the source of all good and bad actions, of all culpability, including the results of the culpability as well, in either punishment or reward.

Spiritual Dimension- Hadith 2

‘Ali said: “Gabriel descended upon Adam and said, “Adam, I have been commanded to offer you the choice of one of three [traits], so choose one, and leave two. Adam asked him, ‘Gabriel, and what are these three [traits]?’ He answered, ‘[They are] intellect, decency, and devotion.’ Adam said, ‘I most certainly choose intellect.’ Gabriel told decency and devotion, ‘Go away and leave intellect [with Adam.]’ Thereupon they said, ‘Gabriel, we have been ordered to remain with intellect wherever he may be.’ Gabriel said, ‘As you wish.’ Then he ascended.”²⁹

The various dimensions of this tradition include: 1. That intellect (along with decency (*hayā*) and devotion (*dīn*)) are portrayed as gifts from God. In another tradition, hadith 18, this quality of intellect is made even more explicit, where Imam al-Riḍā states, “Intellect is a gift from God while discipline can be attained through human endeavor...”³⁰ Amir-Moezzi states that there are distinct spiritual aspects to *‘aql*, including the “faculty for apprehending the divine, a faculty of metaphysical perception, a light located in the heart and through which one can discern and recognize signs from

²⁸ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kaḥfī*, 1.

²⁹ Ibid. 8.

³⁰ Ibid. 18.

God.”³¹ This is in line also with the ethical-epistemological category he gives for the ‘*aql*, as being a gift from God, and that is developed variously in different individuals. 2. It is the foundation of the other two, namely decency and devotion, and with it one necessarily attains the other two, but not the other way. Thus, if Adam had chosen either *dīn* or *ḥayā*’, he would not have necessarily attained ‘*aql*. 3. The question of how Adam made this decision seems to always come up. If Adam is asked to choose one of the three for the first time, based on what criteria is he choosing one over the other? A common answer is that he is asked for the perfection of each (i.e. the perfection of his intellect) and that he already had some intellect by which he made the decision in the first place. 4. Another dimension is the significance of Adam himself, the fact that he is the father of mankind (*ab ul-bashar*) and that it continues from him for all of humankind. 5. The narrative form of the hadith is also particularly interesting. Many different issues are hinted at within the hadith, including the possibility of Adam to choose ‘*aql* mentioned previously, but also the seeming external existence of devotion and decency, where all of this is taking place (i.e., Is this all metaphoric? Is this within the individual soul? Or a primordial realm?), why and how devotion and decency are connected to the intellect (i.e., what type of connection is this: legislative (*tashri* ‘*ī*) or existential (*takwīnī*)?) the function of Gabriel in this story and why he did not know the command (*amr*) and needed to be informed by devotion and decency that they must stay with the intellect, and so on. Indeed the fecundity of the narrative form is employed in a number of the ahadith in this section, to their full effect, including the 8th hadith of the story of the angel who sees the seemingly obedient but ignorant worshipper.

Soteriological Dimension- Hadith 3

³¹ Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, 9.

“I asked Abu Abd Allah [al-Sadiq], ‘What is intellect?’ He replied, ‘It is that by which [God,] the All-Beneficent is worshipped and the gardens are earned.’ I asked him, ‘Then [what was] the trait in Mu‘awiyah?’ He answered, ‘That was cleverness. That was devilry. It is similar to intellect, but it is not intellect.’”³²

The various dimensions seem to be: 1. The connection between worship, salvation, and the intellect. Many ahadith attest to the necessity of the intellect for the acceptance of actions, like hadith 8, where the Imam Ja‘far al-Şādiq states, “If news reaches you of a man’s favorable disposition [in deeds and character], then examine the level of his intellect, for he shall only be rewarded according to his intellect.” This is what Amir-Moezzi refers to as the “organ of religion”: “In the absence of *‘aql*, the organ of religion, there can only be false religiousness, an appearance of piety, hypocrisy...”³³

2. In this hadith, the Imam also distinguishes between the proper intellect, and the “devilry” (*shayṭanah*) of Mu‘awiyah, stating the similarity in certain respects, but entirely different. The commentators will examine these similarities and differences between the good intellect, and the evil devilry or cleverness, the vices that are ultimately connected to ignorance, and how they are connected.

Eschatological- Hadith 21

Abu Ja‘far (al-Bāqir) said, “When the *Qa‘im* establishes his government, God will place his hand upon the heads of the people. Through his hand, God will unify their intellects, and through him, intellects will attain perfection.”³⁴

This hadith has obvious eschatological implications, with the *Qa‘im* being the 12th Imam, the messianic figure who reappears at the end of times: 1. Said to bring about

³² Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kaḥfī*, 11.

³³ Amir-Moezzi, 10.

³⁴ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kaḥfī*, 165.

peace and justice to the world, here the Mahdi's function is also understood to be the cause of perfecting intellects, raising the questions of what exactly perfected intellects would be, and what it is that we have at this point, and why it will only be perfected at the end of times, and not now? 2. What does it mean that "God will place his hand upon the heads of the people?" The pronoun "his" has been read in different ways, namely it being the 12th Imam's hand, or God's hand himself. The latter is given by Mullā Ṣadrā, who as will be discussed later states that it is among the closest angel's of God who is named as such (God's hand or *yadullah*) and through this, the intellects of the people are perfected.

Hermeneutes

Some of the most salient issues that concerned the scholarly community during the Safavid period, and which are relevant to the issues addressed here, are 1. the debates that arose between the acceptance of philosophy, mysticism, and Shī'ī doctrine, and 2. Issues relevant to the Usuli-Akhbari debates. Both sets of debates dealt with a wide range of issues, however parties in both debates had a stake, and a particular claim for legitimacy through their varying definitions of intellect. Thus, one finds the varying accounts, and indeed an increase in commentary literature during this time, from authors with differing intellectual loyalties: from the Akhbaris, such as Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī himself, to the marginal figures, like Majlisī, to the peripatetics, like Qazwini, to the muti'allihs, like Mullā Ṣadrā and Faydh Kāshānī.³⁵

³⁵ For an account of intellectual life during Safavid Persia, see Roger Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, especially chapter 9, "Intellectual life under the Safavids" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); the interaction between mystics and traditional jurists, see Kathryn Babayan "Sufis, Dervishes and Mullas: The Controversy over Spiritual and Temporal Dominion in Seventeenth-Century Iran," in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. Charles Melville (New York: IB Tauris, 1996); for a view on how the influx of 'Amili ulema affected and were affected by the Persian milieu, see Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "History and Self-Image: The 'Amili Ulema in Syria and Iran (Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries)" in *Distant Relations*, ed. H.E. Chehabi, (New York: IB Tauris), 62-95.

As for the first debate, on the position of philosophy in Shī‘ī doctrine, there is a long history of interaction and influence of philosophy on theology proper, beginning with Nasīr ud-Dīn Ṭūsī and his *Tajrīd*. But this debate is particularly poignant during Mullā Ṣadrā’s time, when the various Shī‘ī intellectual sciences really come to a fore. Mir Muḥammad Bāqir Dāmād rekindled the study of philosophy during the Safavid period, as well as being the teacher of Mullā Ṣadrā himself. It was a vibrant time for philosophy, containing both Peripatetics, Illuminationists, and those who attempted to create a synthesis between the various sciences like Mullā Ṣadrā himself.³⁶ And the interaction between the philosophical and the traditional scholars was also quite intense; in the case of Mullā Ṣadrā, it was partly the reason why he went to Kahak, a self-imposed exile that was his spiritual “retreat”.³⁷

In terms of the second debate, between the Usulis and the Akhbaris, it is clear how prominently the issue of ‘*aql*’ arises in the debate. There are various ways of describing the origins of the debate, as has been done by various Western scholars, and much of it, as Robert Gleave correctly notes in his *Scripturalist Islam*, depends on what one means by Akhbarism.³⁸ Although similar debates as to the priority of either scripture or reason, and the relation between the two has been a perennial debate from the very early days of Islam, not to mention Shi’ism, yet the distinct Usuli-Akhbari positions, Gleave argues emerged after the work of Astarābādī himself. One of the most fascinating aspects of Gleave’s study however, is how he presents Astarābādī’s own thought: that in

³⁶ For the intellectual background to Mullā Ṣadrā, see S.H. Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy*, esp. chp. 1, “The Intellectual Background” (Tehran: Imperial Academy of Philosophy, 1978).

³⁷ Ibid, 31-50. See also Mullā Ṣadrā, *Siḥ asl* for his attack against the exoteric ‘*ulama*’ who became opponents to his philosophical positions.

³⁸ Gleave also presents a clear synopsis of the various positions other scholars have taken on the Usuli-Akhbari debates, along with his own position; see Robert Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, (Boston: Brill, 2007) 10-30.

fact his anti-rationalist position was primarily jurisprudential, and did not factor much into his theological or philosophical positions, for which he used rational arguments with little reference to scripture. Majlisī's father was himself an Akhbari, but his son's position in the issues of fiqh is not entirely clear, mainly because we do not have a fiqh work by him. Yet his position towards hadith is closer to an Akhbari position, albeit with clear Usuli influences, such as using the authentication categories. As will be seen in the following section, his position vis-à-vis the ahadith is much more complex than how it has been understood. Within his reading of *al-Kāfī*, Majlisī speaks of not just the intellect itself, but also hints at his own hermeneutic theory for dealing with hadith.

Chapter Two: Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī and *The Mirror of Intellectuals*

Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1110 AH/1699CE) was a prominent figure in the final period of the Safavid era, serving as Shaykh al-Islam, and both *Sadr-i khassa* and *Sadr-i ‘amma*. “in the very person of Majlisī the power of the ‘ulama and the authority of the sadr coalesced to produce a more homogenous ideology at the center of greater economic control by the clerical elite.”³⁹ Claimed by both Akhbaris and Usulis, he was a very influential figure in both the political and religious history of Safavid and post-Safavid Iran and Shī‘ī Islam, credited for establishing particularly strong Shī‘ī identity, with the popularization of particularly rituals and compiling an entire encyclopedia of extant Shī‘ī hadith known as the *Bihar al-Anwar*.

Thus it is surprising how scant the academic literature is on Majlisī, with only a handful of accounts of his life and works. He is said to be the “externalist extraordinaire” who crystallized the notion of Shī‘ī orthodoxy during the Safavid period, by “embodying the victory of the exoteric over the esoteric, of the zāhir over the bātin; of the letter of the law over its spirit, and of external submission to God’s laws over internal submission to God himself...”⁴⁰ His “lack of originality” is said to have “added nothing to the development of *fiqh* and *hadith* in the way that his predecessors such as Shaykh Karaki had done...then one begins to wonder whether Majlisī can qualify to be called an *‘ālim*...similar misconceptions exist, for example, concerning Shaykh Baha’i.”⁴¹ Additionally, he is seen as particularly anti-Sufi and anti-Sunni, setting in place particular religious policies set against Sufism and the forced conversion of Sunnism.

³⁹ Ibid, 127.

⁴⁰ Colin Turner, *Islam Without Allah?*, (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000) vii.

⁴¹ Ibid., 150.

Rula Abisaab questions these categorical positions against Majlisī, although it is clear that he did denounce particular aspects of Sufism, including denouncing “Sufi fraternities and tariqas...” However, it is not clear what his position on mysticism was, especially since he “praised the pristine ‘Sufism’ of Shī‘ī jurists like ‘Ali ibn Tawus, ‘a possessor of charismata and distinguished spiritual ranks (maqamat)’... For Majlisī, then, acceptable Sufism came to mean private spiritual revelations and a public expression of devotion, austerity and conformity to the *shari’a*.”⁴² Also, she complicates the view of Majlisī’s being a strict, and borderline violent anti-Sunni, stating that “It is unlikely that Majlisī used force in converting a presumed 1,070 Sunnites to Shi’ism in Syrian territories...” Ultimately, she says, “the language of conversion, like that of anti-Sufism, was a means to project a strong disciplinary state and to divert attention away from severe political and economic problems. The rhetoric of conversion also projected the growth of militant solutions to prevent the disintegration of the empire.”⁴³

Robert Gleave notes that in his *Biḥār* compilation, Majlisī generally keeps his own commentary to a minimum, and mostly cites the ahadith “as a way of collection without critique”. He notes that this was a “popular approach of some Akhbari jurists, in their attempt to maximize the available revelatory material.”⁴⁴ Although he had Akhbari tendencies, like his more lenient take on *isnād*, he can by no means be considered a full-fledged Akhbari, especially because of the way he approaches his *Mir’āt ul-‘ūqul*. This text has both commentary and *isnād*-criticism, where he attempts to “marry the pre-technical language of the report with the technical definition of muwaththaq [trustworthy]

⁴² Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire*, (New York: IB Tauris, 2004), 128.

⁴³ Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 128.

⁴⁴ Robert Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbarī Shī‘ī School*, (Boston, Brill, 2007) 264.

in later hadith criticism...⁴⁵ He was very much in support of the *isnād*-criticism tradition that emerged within Shi'ism, and would criticize others for their heedlessness to what was attributable, stating specifically in the book the nonsensical claim of “Those who state that the book was presented to the Imam because he lived in the same city as the representatives of the Imam.”⁴⁶ And although he would consider some of the ahadith as clearly stronger while others as weaker, he considered all of them admissible and actionable. In terms of *muwaththaq* (trustworthy) reports, Majlisī’s position was that they can “act as a basis for action, but it must also be ‘well-known’ amongst the Muslims.”⁴⁷ And instead of disallowing a hadith in which an unbeliever appears in its chain of transmission, he allows for it if the report was well-known among the community, and thus, he argues, it must have been transmitted from Muslims before being accepted. After all, even an unbeliever can be just or truthful, and yet to verify the authenticity of the hadith, we must also prove it is *muwaththaq* (separate from its possibly faulty chain of transmission) and *mashhūr*. In this way, as Gleave points out, Majlisī really is a “marginal” Akhbārī because although he accepts uṣūlī categories, he loosens them to fulfill akhbārī principles.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid, 265.

⁴⁶ Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Mir’āt ul-‘uqūl fī sharḥ akhbār āl al-rasūl*, 22. The entire passage reads: “And the truth in my opinion is that it is permissible to act upon that which appears from the hadith in the likes of those reliable uṣūl works that have been inherited. Yet, this does not preclude referring to the isnad chains, to prioritize some of them over others. All of them being reliable does not negate all of them being strong (in chains). As for the resolve of some of the foolhardy, that the entirety of al-Kāfī was presented to the Qā’im, peace be upon him, because it was (written) in the city of the direct representatives (of the Imam), one fears not that the intelligent would fall into this error.”

⁴⁷ Gleave, 265.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 264-6. In addition to Majlisī’s approach to hadith, there is also Majlisī’s approach to the Qur’an, on which Majlisī’s position was that “the Qur’an can be read and understood perfectly well without akhbar...discovered through the usual techniques employed by the mufasssirun...” but one cannot gain an “understanding of the significance of a Qur’anic verse within the context of the true Imāmī faith. To gain the significance of the verses, the reader needs the akhbār...” Although the reader can understand a level of meaning “inherent in the words used or the grammatical constructions employed. This process will not,

Majlisī's Hermeneutics

In approaching Majlisī's reading of *al-Kāfī*, we must take into account a number of issues: 1. what is the role of the individual reader's intellect when approaching the Imam's words? 2. What are the boundaries of readings that one must account for when making sense of the words of the Imams? 3. In what instances is it possible to use the individual intellect in interpreting the words of the Imams? 4. Is there a certain linguistic boundary between what the Imams say and what they intend or mean? 5. How does the reader approach what is intended?

At the most basic level, Majlisī finds there to be a direct connection between what the Imams intended and what they said, with little need for interpretation in most cases, even if in most cases what the Imams said may not make much sense to our individual intellects. He on one level accepts that we will never fully understand all that the Imams intended, and so if we are to reinterpret what the Imams said because we believe something was said allegorically or that the Imam said something but meant something else, this takes the authority away from the words of the Imams to what the intellect of the particular individual would allow. This would be difficult to argue because the issue of wilayah on the one hand calls for a complete obedience to the Imams even if we may not understand, and on the other hand, because the knowledge of the Imams far surpasses ours. We probably will not fully understand what the Imams ever intended, and so the only thing we can hold onto for religious certainty are the words themselves. Now the call for literalism does not simply mean that the individual sayings are taken, however difficult it may be to make sense of, in complete isolation from the larger context of those

however, enable th reader to understand those phrases such as ahl al-dhikr and al-rāsikhūn fīl-‘ilm refer to the Prophet and the Imams.” Ibid, 243-4.

sayings, both in terms of *isnad*-criticism and other ahadith. In fact, there are a number of occasions where other ahadith are used to clarify or even expand upon what was intended by a particularly difficult hadith, such as for the first hadith about the creation of the intellect. As I will discuss in a later section, this hadith has cosmogonic implications, and has enjoyed quite a few variant readings by other commentators. Majlisī, after outlining a number of general categories of definitions regarding the intellect, compares the hadith to other cosmogonic ahadith and attempts to make sense of all of them together, finally presenting the possibility that the intellect is equated with the light of the Prophet and the Ahlul-Bayt. This is not particular to Majlisī (Mullā Ṣadrā also has a certain identification between the two), and is a far cry from other literal commentaries, like Astarābādī's, where only particular words of the hadith is defined.

This points to a larger issue in Majlisī's literalism, namely that the meaning of the text does not necessarily tell us the significance of the words of the Imams. As Gleave points out, the significance of the word (who a particular title refers to) cannot necessarily be attained from the words of a particular hadith. It may be possible to attain this significance through using other ahadith.⁴⁹ This means that much of what would be interpreted allegorically would not be allowed by Majlisī, because it strays from what the Imam said. Ultimately, if the Imam said something, he meant it, and so we cannot grasp at anything other than the words themselves.

Yet what is most apparent from Majlisī's commentary is how much of it is comprised of him explaining the linguistic dimensions, both semantic and syntactic aspects of the hadith, which is where the argument for his literalism comes from. Interestingly, in this aspect of his commentary, he is willing to use any sources available

⁴⁹ Gleave, 161.

to him, including those from Sunni authors⁵⁰. Indeed, he is said to fall on the side claiming the least interpretation as possible because of the direct connection between what the Imams said, and what they intended, and a disregard for what the reader thinks he knows about the Imams intent as much as what the Imams are actually saying. Now this has a number of implications: 1. For Majlisī, there is a hierarchy in authority between the words of the Imams and the individual intellect, where the Imam’s words always takes priority over the individual’s intellect 2. The Imam’s words have such depth of meaning that it is impossible to understand all of the various aspects of their words 3. Because there is a direct connection between the words the Imam used, and the intent of the Imams, if we are to understand what the Imams intended, we must explore the depth of the words as much as possible, with all the variant and possible meanings of the words. This last point has provided a way for Majlisī to give a number of variant interpretations for some of the ahadith that still allows for his literalist approach but at the same time gives a depth to the words beyond what was otherwise evident. As will be seen when examining some of the particular ahadith within his commentary, he uses these definitions of the words to their full effect, such that one hadith takes on a number of different possibilities.

One final point about Majlisī’s hermeneutics that requires mention is that while he does critique the allegorical interpretation of other authors, he is not entirely innocent of the same allegorical interpretations. Majlisī has a particular reverence for the “early scholars”, the scholars of the early community, such as Shaykh Mufid and Shaykh Saduq, and he, as is customary, gives them much praise. However, there are a number of

⁵⁰ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 1:25. He makes clear some of different uses of Sunni sources, including linguistic references, ahadith those authors who were either Shi‘i-leaning or had less extreme views against Shi‘ī views, among others.

instances where he challenges their stating that the intent of the hadith was allegorical and not literal. However, there are other instances where Majlisī himself makes use of these allegorical readings of some particularly difficult hadith which were difficult to make sense of otherwise.⁵¹ This raises an interesting issue: firstly, why does Majlisī criticize other scholars and their readings, and secondly, what are the instances where he himself reads a hadith as allegorical? For one, we must make sense of Majlisī's giving priority of the Imam's words over our own intellect: for Majlisī there are many things that our limited intellects cannot possibly comprehend, such as other worlds where reality is very different from our own, such as dimensions of creation that allow for intellect to speak, act or for Gabriel to present to Adam what seems to be beings called intellect, piety, and religion, namely a dimension of intellect wherein what may seem impossible to us from our vantage point, and hence our reliance on reinterpretation, is possible in reality. Of course, from our vantage point, it may seem impossible for there to be objective beings called intellect, piety or religion, but who said the Imams' words, or even external reality, were ever limited by our vantage point? If we provide for the possibility that external reality is not necessarily limited to how we understand it, and that the Imams, whose intellect and perception of reality is complete from all its various dimensions, then we must allow for this possibility that they indeed meant what they said, even if what they said may conflict with our normal experience of reality. This readjusts not only our perception of reality, but as well our reliance on our own intellect when faced with the complete intellect of the Imams.

⁵¹ Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 3, 319. This issue is pointed out by Abdul-hadi Fiḡhizadeh, "Majlisī wa ta'wīl riwāyāt" in *Islam-pajūhī*, 2 (1385): 81-99; for a more complete account of his hermeneutics, see Kamran Izadimubarakah, "Uṣūl naqd matn hadīth wa fahm ān dar biḡār al-anwār," *Maqālāt wa barresīha*, 79 (1385) 11-32.

In a way then, this is a question of the authority of our readings: based on what authority are we establishing an allegorical meaning to the hadith in question? If we are to say that the hadith in question does not cohere to our understanding of reality, then we are stating that our understanding of reality is correct, and hence we must reinterpret the hadith to “fit” our understanding of reality, hence allegorical interpretations. Majlisī states that wherever there is no need for allegorical interpretations, having established the primacy of the authority of the hadith, we must take the hadith as is, and preclude any judgment of the hadith we may have. Now if in cases where this hadith contradicts other equally or even more valid authoritative sources, namely other ahadith or even the most basic principles upon which the community is established, then, and only then, do we utilize interpretation to make sense of the hadith.

Yet this position brings up a number of issues: if we say that we should accept the primacy of the hadith, because of its connection to the Imam as the ultimate authority, over our own intellect or flawed understanding of the world, then how do we understand the hadith in the first place? This is where the semantic and syntactic analysis of Majlisī comes in, where if we are to have any access to the hadith, so far as it is said in a language that we understand, the language is our most direct access to the hadith corpus, hence the reliance on the linguistic interpretation of the hadith. And because of this, Majlisī attempts to account for the vast semantic field of each word that is used to make sense of the hadith. Because our primary connection to the Imams are their words, we must look to the words of the Imam to attain our understanding not just of the world, but also the intellect.

Commentary

Majlisī begins his commentary on the *Usūl al-Kāfī*, which he titles, *Mir'āt ul-'uqūl*, with an extended commentary on the introduction of al-Kulayni. In the first hadith, he outlines the various categories of intellect that the ahadith in this section are referring to, for “the narrations of the chapter of *'aql* are on the expressing of the essence of the intellect and the different views of and terms for it.”⁵² He firstly presents the original uses of the word. Majlisī begins by making clear: the intellect is used to refer to “comprehend and understanding of things”. Yet the term itself has been used in variant ways:

1. As the power of discerning and distinguishing between the good and the evil as well as the reasons to do certain things and to refrain from other things. It is the ethical faculty that understands good and evil actions as such.⁵³
2. Beyond just the theoretical faculty of understanding why some thing is good or evil, the intellect is also a “state or inclination of the soul” of someone who commits to that discernment and acts upon the distinction, choosing the good from the evil (this is a common theme throughout the ahadith, where intellect is not simply “intellectual” or theoretical as we may understand it, but is bound to action as well). Conversely, there are traditions, and one in particular, where this is juxtaposed with ignorance and the inclination towards evil acts.
3. The faculty that one uses on a day to day basis to order and improve one’s life. This as well has an active element to it, however it does not just pursue the good and evil as such, in so far as it is subjective and personal. Another distinction is that this use of the word “intellect” refers to the “tool” man uses, as opposed to the faculty that impels man, with the causal chain reversed here (i.e., what we *use* to attain the good life).

⁵² Majlisī, *Mir'āt ul-'uqūl*, , 25.

⁵³ Ibid.

These various senses of the word intellect primarily refer to ethics and morality, in so far as we know what these are and we are impelled to commit to them within our lives. These for Majlisī are the prime meanings of the intellect as understood in the ahadith. Most of the ahadith outline the ethical and moral implications of the intellect, how they refer to proper and improper conduct, as well as how they relate to the religious law. The next few senses of the intellect Majlisī lays out are its non-ethical implications:

4. The theoretical intellect, used to understand various ideas, concepts and “theories”. Of course, this intellect varies greatly from one person to the next, and he presents the classic hierarchy of the 4 levels or stages of this intellect: “*‘aql al-hayūlānī* (material intellect), *‘aql bil-malakah* (habitual intellect), *‘aql bil-fi’l* (actualized intellect) and *‘aql al-mustafād* (acquired intellect), and they have attributed these names, without constraint to the soul (when found) in these various levels...and what is apparent is that it is one faculty, and its names vary based on what is attributed to them and for what you make use of it.”⁵⁴

5. The intellect as a logical category, i.e., the differentia that separates humans from animals.

6. Finally, and most controversially for Majlisī, the intellect is used to refer to the “Active Intellect”. This meaning of intellect is denied by Majlisī on two accounts: firstly if it is understood as an uncreated simple substance (*jawhar^{um} mujarrad^{um} qadīm^{um}*) while it is completely separate from matter, essentially or accidentally. The fundamental issue here is that such a being would rival the uncreatedness of God and would be a separate entity that would entail partnership unto God, hence “negating many of the requirements of religion, from the creation of the world and otherwise, and of that which it would be

⁵⁴ Ibid, 26.

disreputable to mention.” The second set of philosophers who assert this Active Intellect, claiming to be muslim state that the Active Intellect is a created entity. This as well is unacceptable because there is no reference to such an entity in the revealed sources, ultimately of no reference whatsoever of “any simple existent (*mawjūd^{um} mujarrad^{um}*) other than God, Exalted is He.” Because there is no reference to such an entity, it remains primarily on the level of conjecture and thus unacceptable, especially in relation to the ahadith. Even other interpretations of the Active Intellect, where it is on the microcosmic level (in relation to the human soul) and that “it is related to the soul, as the soul is related to the body. Such that the soul is “belief” for the body, and the body is its material organ. In the same way, the intellect is a concept (*ṣurah*) for the soul and the soul is its material body, and the body is derivative to the soul.”⁵⁵ This as well must remain on the level of conjecture and cannot be proven.

Having outlined these uses of the term “intellect”, he states that most of what the ahadith refer to in *al-Kāfi* are actually referring to the first two definitions, and the rest having possible but secondary import in understanding the meaning of intellect. Yet there remains the question of what the hadith meant by the creation of the intellect, which he continues to address throughout the commentary on the first hadith.

Creation of Intellect

Attempting to make sense of this, along with other traditions that talk about the “first of creations”, namely traditions about the Prophet (and by him) where he states that “The first thing God created was the light of your Prophet...”⁵⁶ Having said this, and denying this posited reality of the simple “Active Intellect”, Majlisī states that one

⁵⁵ Ibid. 27.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 27.

possible approach to this hadith is by understanding the “Intellect” as actually referring to the Prophetic light, within which is contained the light of the Imams. But what proceeds is more interesting: Majlisī having denied the possibility of such a being called the Active Intellect, states a number of alternatives to this philosophical reinterpretation of the Intellect. As will be seen, the intellect is seen on two levels: one on the microcosmic level, while the second on the macrocosmic. The former is seen by Majlisī as providing the individual with the various means of the understanding stated above.⁵⁷ He states that by creation, it could mean its estimation, determination, by God, or that it could mean its creation “within the soul, and characterizing the soul by it (the intellect).”⁵⁸ So on the one hand, there is the creation of the intellect in the soul, and its proper functioning therein. It provides the soul access to that proper discernment between good and evil, inclining the soul towards good and away from evil, and ordering one’s life to attain that “goodly life”. This of course, is usually what is understood by the intellect, as a source of individual understanding and comprehension.

The remainder of the hadith then is regarding the soul and its attaining the higher levels of “responsibilities, perfections, and ascensions of the intellect.” The hadith then would attain an allegorical meaning for the completion of the soul: “speaking” means it allows the soul to “comprehend the sciences”, its “coming forward” means it is that which allows one to “attain the world and (or) the hereafter, happiness and (or) misery together, it is the means of employment when understanding the truths of issues...”

⁵⁷ Ibid 27. He says “Then know that the available traditions in these regards, are mostly, in terms of their apparent meaning in the first two meanings, such that they do not refer to the first, but rather the second are more prominent and apparent. Some of the ahadith give the possibility of referring to some of the other meanings. For some of the meanings, the intellect indicates beneficial knowledge itself that is inherited for salvation. It is needed to attain happiness.”

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Ultimately, the intellect allows for culpability in actions and responsibility.⁵⁹ He gives other possibilities for understanding this as well: as “the first thing ordained of the characteristics attributed to the spirit, and the first natural disposition imprinted on the soul...” or as referring to the souls, “which are created before the bodies.” Yet he also does state that this part of the hadith is not found in authoritative ahadith and “(could?) have been taken from sunni akhbār, for what appears from most akhbār is that the first creation is ‘water’ or ‘air’...”⁶⁰

The hadith seems to also have macrocosmic import; after all, the hadith does state that it was the “first being” that God created. But having denied what the philosophers purport, what exactly does Majlisī take this first creation of the intellect to mean? He presents a very interesting reading of the first hadith that speaks of the light of the Prophet and Shī‘ī cosmogony, equating the two. The entire excerpt will be cited here because it not only lays out what the philosophers got “wrong”, but also what an alternative commentary attributing the Intellect to the Imams would sound like. He begins with stating that any of the necessities philosophers state for having the first creation from which all else is created have already been posited by the Imams, albeit with the truth of the matter, that it actually is the Ahlul-Bayt that fulfill this function:

“Most of that which is stated/posited about these intellects has already been stated about the spirit of the Prophet and his family in a different way in *mutawatir akhbār*: they (the philosophers) posit the primordially of intellect, yet the primordially of the creation of their (the Ahlul-Bayt’s) spirits, either in terms of all of creation or in terms of all spiritual entities, has already been posited in *mutawatir akhbār*. And as well, (in terms of) their positing the intellect’s role as that first extension of being through which all things were made to exist, or being a condition for causing all other things to exist, it has already been posited in the *akhbār* that they (the Ahlul-Bayt) are the final cause of all creation, and that if not for them, God would not have created the cosmos. And they posit the intellects’

⁵⁹ Ibid, 28.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

being the intermediary for the effusion of knowledge and inner knowing (understanding, *ma'ārif*) in the souls and spirits, yet it has already been stated that all knowledge and truths of understanding effuses through them (the Ahlul-Bayt) to the rest of creation, even to the angels and prophets.⁶¹

The truth of the matter, according to Majlisī, is that the first thing God created was the Ahlul-Bayt, not a separate primordial philosophical entity called the Active Intellect. This of course should not just be seen as a renaming of the Intellect as something else. Rather Majlisī disallows the many implications of the philosophical Intellect that are considered by him to be blasphemous. He simultaneously asserts the necessity of belief in the Imams and referring back to them, not only as the source of knowledge, but as well because they are the source of all creation and the intermediaries for anything that God sends upon the rest of creation:

What are grasped through the *mustafīd akhbār* are the following positions: That they, peace be upon them, are the intermediaries between creation and the Truth for the effusion of all the merciful (bounties) and sciences and perfections for all of creation. And whatever can better attain that connection will be better effused with perfections from God, Exalted is He. And when one journeys on the ascetic and philosophizing (theoretical) paths...the truth of this matter appears to him deformed and confused and he errs, and thus they (the philosophers) posit the intellects...⁶²

In the next section, Majlisī again goes back to the hadith and begins his direct commentary of the hadith, stating:

Thus as an analogy to what they said, it could be that the intent of intellect would be the light of the Prophet, from which is branched out the lights of the Imams, and its being made to speak, in reality, or by making it a place for the infinite sciences/disciplines and by “come forth” is intended its ascent in the levels of perfection and its gravitation to the highest level of proximity and [the intent of] its “going back”, [would be] either its descent to the bodies, or its being commanded to complete creation after (attaining) the pinnacle of perfection. For it is necessary to descend from the highest level of proximity in order to interact

⁶¹ Ibid, 27.

⁶² Ibid, 28.

with creation. God alludes to this when He says ‘He has revealed to you a reminder, a messenger.’⁶³

This of course is vastly different from a purely literalist reading of hadith. He presents an esoteric reading of the hadith, which as will be seen is quite similar to the reading of Mullā Ṣadrā, albeit with significant differences. He does this however not by going against his own hermeneutic theory of understanding the hadith on its linguistic level; rather through the use of other ahadith, he is able to not only clarify the linguistic ambiguities to a certain extent, but as well determine the significance of the hadith, i.e., who is the Imam referring to when he says the “Intellect”, or when God said “Go back” or “Come forward.” This is different from the primordial “Active Intellect” in his view because it still establishes the intermediary state of the Ahlul-Bayt, not as separate entities that existed primordially with God. Also, it posits a direct relationship between the ultimate truth in the worldly domain, and the religious truth of Shī‘ī Islam as told by the Imams’ ahadith, disallowing a separate extrapolation from the ahadith.

Spiritual Dimension- Hadith 14

The spiritual dimension of the intellect is best exemplified by Majlisī in his commentary on hadith 14, the hadith of the armies of Intellect and the armies of Ignorance. Here he presents the intellect not only on its macrocosmic level, but as well its parallel microcosmic one, within the soul of individuals. This battle rages between the different armies of intellect and ignorance within man. Ignorance could refer to the inclination within man towards evil. In this way, intellect then would be the inclination towards good. Majlisī also allows another interpretation: that ignorance could actually be the material body, whereas the intellect is the soul, *nafs* which is opposed to it. Majlisī

⁶³ Ibid, 29.

also provides a third possibility: that intellect and ignorance could have a more prehistoric relation, between Adam and Satan, the latter leading the former away from truth and towards evil:

The topic of intellect and ignorance. The intellect here may mean the previous meanings. Ignorance is either that force which calls towards evil, or the body if by intellect was intended the nafs (soul). And it may also mean Iblis, because he opposes the masters of completed intellects from the prophets and the Imams (peace be upon them) in guiding creation, and it strengthens (this probability) because it also entered in this way in the (story) of the opposition of Adam and Iblis after his rebellion. What He gave there was similar to these armies, and I have mentioned it in the book of *Bihar*. And this means that these are the armies of intellect and his companions, and those are the soldiers of ignorance and their masters.⁶⁴

Later on in the hadith itself, there is a direct reference to the spirit being the “first creation among the spiritual entities.”⁶⁵ In explaining this, Majlisī continues with his linguistic analysis of the verse, providing two separate accounts, one in terms of the spiritual bodies (*rūḥ*), the other in terms of a gentle breeze of the spirit (*rawḥ*). Here he states the following:

And when he speaks of the “Rauḥāniyyīn/Rūḥāniyyīn”, this refers to the subtle bodies and the simple substances, if it is said of them (as such). He said at the end of the hadith: the “spiritual” angels, it is narrated with dhamma on the *rā*’ as well as with the *fathā*, for it is related to either *ar-rāwh* and *ar-rūh*, and it is the breath/breeze of the spirit. The alif and the nūn here are additions to show relationality. He intends this to mean they are subtle bodies that cannot be seen by the eye.⁶⁶

Soteriological Dimension- Hadith 3

The soteriological dimension is commented upon by Majlisī in terms of the second definition of the intellect that he provided—that inclination towards doing good and rejecting evil that is within all people, and is strengthened by increasing good actions

⁶⁴ Ibid, 66.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

and refraining from evil ones. He presents what may be a less likely interpretation for *'aql* in this hadith as well, namely smartness or intelligence as it is commonly understood. This conception of intellect does not necessitate good or evil, and is a means by which we attain one or the other. So the hadith would be interpreted to mean if one uses intellect to attain good and the favor of the Merciful, then it becomes “that by which [God,] the All-Beneficent is worshipped and the gardens are earned.” This allows for that “trait in Mu‘awiyah” to be confused with what is used to attain heaven, for if it is used in the wrong way, it becomes cleverness and devilry:

It appears that here it refers to the second meaning from those that we mentioned before; although, as it is apparent, other meanings are also possible. It has been said: it is meant here that by which man is commonly considered intelligent, and that is the faculty that distinguishes between falsehood and truth, and the harmful from the beneficial, when this faculty is not immersed in the army of Ignorance. And when the armies (of Ignorance) prevails, the smart individual who is discerning is not called “*‘āqil*”, where he does not act upon that which his astuteness and discernment necessitates, rather he uses it (to attain) the objects of desire for the armies of Ignorance.

And he (pbuh) said, that is cleverness, meaning craftiness/cunning and quickness in mind; and this is excellence in opinion and goodness in comprehension, and if it is used to attain the objects of desire for the army of ignorance, it is called devilry. He stated, “It is devilry.” after he said, “It is cleverness.”⁶⁷

Eschatological Dimension- Hadith 21

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the hadith refers to the return of the Mahdi, the messianic figure within Shi’ism. In this hadith, the Imam refers to the particular function of the Mahdi to “perfect” intellects. This hadith is quite different from how the function of the Mahdi is usually described in Shi’ism, which is usually through terms of peace and justice, although there are other ahadith that do speak of him perfecting or opening various chapters of knowledge that were previously unknown, or possessing particular

⁶⁷ Ibid, 33.

books that contain knowledge. As for the means by which he does this, the hadith states “Through his hand, God will unify their intellects...” The pronoun “his” is somewhat unclear as to who is being referred to (God or the Mahdi) and Majlisī notes both cases. As for how or why, Majlisī points to either because of the mercy of God, or through the attribute of power that he (the Mahdi or God) possesses. Although Majlisī does not explain why the meaning of power is a stronger possibility in his opinion, it may be because references to the “hand of God” in the Qur’an and other ahadith usually do allude to the power of God not His Mercy.⁶⁸ As for how to make sense of “unifying intellects”, Majlisī understands it either as a collective joining of intellects or the collecting of the intellects of each individual. The final result, namely the “bearing witness to the truth” will be the same, so long as their intellects are perfected, which itself will allow them to strive for the truth. Yet here Majlisī prefers the latter, although he does not give any particular reason for it:

The pronoun used in “his hand” either refers back to God or the *qā’im*, peace be upon him, and in both cases, it is an allusion to mercy and compassion, or to power and appropriation, and the truth is probably the latter (set of possibilities).

And he gathers by it their intellect: there are two possibilities: the first, that he gathers their intellects collectively so that they bear witness to the truth and differences do not appear between them, and that they concede to affirming (the truth). The second possibility: that he gathers the intellects of each of them to make them abide by the inner powers of the intellect. And it wo not disperse due to them (the powers of the intellect) being dispersed as it was mentioned. But the first is more apparent (closer to the meaning). And the pronoun “by it”, refers to the hand; and the (other) “by it”, refers to the result (the intellect), or to the *qā’im*, peace be upon him. *Al-ahlām* is the broken plural form of *al-ḥilm* meaning the intellect.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Al-Mā’idah 64, or al-Fath: 10, where in the former the Jews are said to declare the hands of God as being “fettered”, although here it could also be referring to the Mercy of God, for in the continuation it speaks of the “outspread” of the Hands of God “He expends how He will and what has been sent down to thee from thy Lord will surely increase many of them in insolence and unbelief...” The latter verse speaks of fealty and oaths, which it is not clear how this refers to power either.

⁶⁹ Majlisī, *Mir’at*, 80.

Chapter 3: Mullā Ṣadrā and His Commentary on *Uṣūl al-kāfī*

Mullā Ṣadrā, the 16th-17th century Islamic philosopher, is commonly seen as culminating Islamic philosophy, theology, and mysticism up to his time. His work is said to represent “a synthesis of the millennium of Islamic thought which preceded him.”⁷⁰ Although he would produce many volumes of works on very different subjects, the essence of his philosophy can be described as the “Gnostic experience of Being as Reality.” Mullā Ṣadrā had a particular vision of reality in which he “saw the whole of existence not as objects which exist or existents but as a single reality whose delimitations by various quiddities gives the appearance of a multiplicity which ‘exists’ with various existent being independent of each other.”⁷¹

The issue of the intellect is primarily an issue of being for Mullā Ṣadrā, and deals with the following: firstly, his perspective on being; secondly, the relation between intellect and being; thirdly, the relation between intellect and love. The first deals with the primacy of being, the relation between being and Absolute Being, as the first instantiation of being through emanating from Absolute Being. The second deals with the Intellect as perfection and being as perfection, and the unity between intellect and being. Finally, the last issue is the relation between the Absolute Being and being (as in, what is the relation that persists between Absolute Being and being), primarily in terms of the first instantiation of being and the love between the Absolute and the closest being to It, i.e., the first instantiation of being or the Intellect. This final issue also deals with the Muhammadan Reality, which is another dimension of the same reality as the Intellect.

⁷⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Mullā Ṣadrā: his teachings” Chp. 36 of *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, (London: Routledge, 1996), 643.

⁷¹ Ibid. 646.

Each of these issues presents itself throughout his discussion of the ahadith pertaining to the intellect, and arises in various ways throughout his commentary.

Life and Works

Mullā Ṣadrā was born into an aristocratic family in Shiraz between the years 979-980 AH (1571-2 CE) and later on would journey to the Safavid capital of Isfahan to study with some of the preeminent scholars of his time, including Mir Damad, with whom he would master philosophy, and Shaykh Baha’i, who would teach him the revealed sciences.⁷² Yet after a while he would be forced to move to a small village near Qum called Kahak, both due to an “inner urge to go into solitude...” and a need “to evade the outward pressures that he was undergoing at that time.”⁷³ His philosophy became quite famous even during his time, but his understanding was not purely on the theoretical realm, but as well on the practical. There are different accounts as to when and with whom he began his spiritual life. After a long period of seclusion in Kahak, Mullā Ṣadrā, at the behest of Allāhwirdī Khan moved to Shiraz and taught various subjects at the Khan school. He died on a return trip from Hajj, in the city of Basra in the year 1050 (1640 CE), having completed only two sections of his *al-Kāfī* commentary.

He was an incredibly prolific writer, and lists of his writings are of course available. His philosophical and theoretical works have been the sources of much inquiry to the unfortunate expense of his works on the “*naqlī*” or religious sciences.⁷⁴ And although Mullā Ṣadrā utilizes ahadith and speaks of the intellect throughout many of his works, he focuses on them in particular for his commentary on the *Usūl al-Kāfī*,

⁷² He begins his commentary on al-Kāfī stating his lineage of teachers (213), and continues to praise Shaykh al-Bahā’ī throughout, stating “our Shaykh al-Bahā’ī and our authority in the naqlī sciences, may God give his soul peace and pleasantness.” 198.

⁷³ S.H. Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī*, 35.

⁷⁴ For a list of his works, see *ibid.* 39-50.

presenting a multivalent description of the intellect, its meaning and function, as well as a particular hermeneutics for reading hadith scripture. Yet because of his synthetic perspective on the various sciences, and “because Mullā Ṣadrā considered both of these types of sciences [the *aqlī* and the *naqlī*] to be intimately related, and derived from the single source of knowledge, the luminous Divine Intellect, he has dealt extensively with religious problems in his theosophical works and vice versa.”⁷⁵ In the midst of commenting on a hadith, he argues for a complex theological issue, or presents a philosophical perspective, or even unveils the inner spiritual significance of a particular act of worship. Thus the commentary itself becomes a means to attain the full import of what the Imams meant, which would ultimately include all of these various levels of significance.

Hermeneutics

Mullā Ṣadrā’s reading of the revelatory text, both Qur’anic and hadithi, is not simply on the level of its exoteric function as determining the law, nor even on the level of virtues and ethics. Rather, because the Qur’an and the ahadith call toward spiritual development and realization, they must as well be read with these references in mind. His hermeneutic requires a spiritual self-preparation to accept the esoteric and spiritual images of the text, a self-preparation that includes spiritual reflections and a cleansing of the soul. A number of issues are relevant when exploring Mullā Ṣadrā’s hermeneutics for in particular his hadith commentary: firstly, the status of the Imams and their ahadith according to Mullā Ṣadrā, and in particular this collection (*Usūl al-kāfī*) among all others; and secondly, what he himself understands his commentary work to be. One important point to note is that Mullā Ṣadrā sees the process by which one uncovers the true depths

⁷⁵ Ibid. 39.

of the Imams' words as parallel to that of the Qur'an, not only in being parallel in esoteric meaning and the need for *ta'wīl* for the true meaning of the ahadith (along with the Qur'an), but as well the process by which the *ta'wil* is done, and the processes he undertook to attain that esoteric meaning. This helps us because he does not lay out his entire hermeneutic theory in his hadith commentary, and it allows us to refer to his Qur'anic commentary to fill in the large gaps that are left, especially since the Mafatīh are seen as providing "the keys which will allow one to access the hermeneutical perspective Ṣadrā adopts in his Qur'ān commentaries."⁷⁶ His understanding of the Qur'an and the hadith as parallel indeed opens up many possibilities for comparisons between the two, although it is beyond the scope of this work.

In stating the purpose for writing the commentary, Mullā Ṣadrā begins with the praises of God and the Prophet, along with remarks on the highest ends of life not being a life of pleasure or even good outward actions without knowledge. He states that the best ahadith that have been narrated, "and the most precious gem-like words that have been connected together and have been reported to us...are the ahadith of the book of *al-Kāfi*, which were collected and written by the guardian of Islam and the trusted scholar among scholars, the shaykh of the world, the scholarly and virtuous mujtahid, Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī..."⁷⁷

He continues by stating the purpose of writing the commentary, stating that he wanted to spread these brilliant jewels of knowledge to his brothers in faith, "and to extract these precious stones for the wayfaring seekers, and to comment upon them to ease the difficulties and to remove the kernel from the husk...and to make the true

⁷⁶ Mohammed Rustom, *The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mulla Sadra*, (Albany: State University of New York Press: 2012).

⁷⁷ Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ* 167.

meanings of those ahadith available, so that it may become a comprehensive book for the fundamentals of religion, unveiling the details of the secrets of certainty...”⁷⁸

And his commentary, came not only as a request by his “brothers and dear friends” but as well as a result of his conviction that this sort of “unveiled knowledge which is unveiled from the world of secrets should not remain behind the curtain, and the plentiful lights which emanate from the Light of lights should not be veiled and hidden.”⁷⁹ Until this point, it seems that Mullā Ṣadrā’s reason is quite different from the reason he gives for his Qur’an commentary, which Mohammed Rustom in his *Triumph of Mercy* states as, “result of spiritual experience which compelled him to bring forth what he knew of the Qur’anic sciences.”⁸⁰ In the next few sections however, he begins to present the parallels between the Qur’anic and the hadithi texts and the way their meanings were uncovered to him.

On the one hand he states that the source of his knowledge is the same, for both his knowledge of the Qur’an and the ahadith: “Therefore, God from what He made me drink from the knowledge of the Qur’an and ahadith, and the drunkenness of the ta’wil of the ahadith...” Later he makes this connection between the various levels of the Qur’an and ahadith even more clear, stating that “the knowledge of the hadith, just like the knowledge of the Qur’an is comprised of an exoteric (dimension) and an esoteric (dimension), a general and clear, a tafsir and a ta’wil, a sturdy (*muḥkam*) and an ambiguous (*mutashābih*) an abrogating and an abrogated.”⁸¹ All the various levels of

⁷⁸ Ibid. 168.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 169.

⁸⁰ Mohammed Rustom, *Triumph of Mercy*, 11.

⁸¹ Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ* 171.

meanings posited for the Qur'an, even the level of abrogation, or the level of ambiguity and sturdiness, are all posited for the ahadith. He continues:

“And just as in the Qur'an the esoteric and unveiled knowledge is found, a knowledge which is the special characteristic of the people of God, and his select who are the ‘people of the Qur'an’, in it [the Qur'an] the knowledge of the angels and (previously revealed) books, and the prophets and the knowledge of the Hereafter and the Resurrection of the souls and bodies are also obtained, just as are found the stories (of the previous prophets) and the laws and the knowledge of the halal and haram, of contracts and marriages... (in the Qur'an can be found) all that which every person understands and benefits everyone, [except that] these are for this world, and those for the Hereafter, these for the bodies, and those for the spirits, ‘An enjoyment for you and your flocks.’⁸²” The knowledge of the ahadith is in the same manner. It has two parts: the knowledge of the world, and the knowledge of the Hereafter. Knowledge of transactions and knowledge of unveiling, and understanding [the latter] is exclusively for the people of God, and they are those referred to in His Words, The Most High: “and whosoever possesses knowledge of the Book.”⁸³ ...⁸⁴

Thus the knowledge of the Qur'an is paralleled to the knowledge of the ahadith; they both can be used to understand simply the legal rulings that a Muslim must abide by, and be confined to those, which he later accuses the majority of doing and denying the esoteric meaning. Or they could be explored to their fullest extent, and attain that kernel that is already present within those revealed texts. Yet, as will be seen by his later explanation of the Intellect, this parallel between the Qur'an and the Prophet and Imams is not simply understood on the level of a hierarchy of meanings, but rather as their being various dimensions of the same being, that is, the various dimensions of the First Instantiation of Being that is also the Intellect.

In addition, the reading of the text, be it Qur'anic or hadith text, then does not simply become a means by which we gain information about what the Qur'an or the Imams said, but rather one must also be cognizant of at what level the Imams are

⁸² Qur'an, 79:33

⁸³ Qur'an, 13:43

⁸⁴ Mulla Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ*, 171.

speaking, and at what level the words of the Imams must be understood. Ultimately, the question becomes, what is the purpose for reading the text of the Imams? If we are reading the text to gain knowledge of the legal rulings on the level of actions, then that is what we would be searching for in the text, and that is knowledge we gain from the text would be confined to. The reading of the exoteric scholar, in Mullā Ṣadrā reaches such a point, that he not only looks for and “safeguards the sayings and the ahadith, and the biographies of the transmitters, and are busy with knowing the branches and offshoots which are peculiar and far from the mind...But as well he has no knowledge of the foundations of religion that are derived from the Qur’anic verses and the ahadith of the Prophet of mankind and djinn, and the glorious Imams...”⁸⁵

Having established the parallel between the Qur’an and the ahadith on the level of meaning, we can turn to the processes used for uncovering that meaning. For Mullā Ṣadrā, the search for meaning and knowledge goes beyond devotion to the Qur’an and the Imams, and becomes in itself a spiritual experience that is later presented in the form of a commentary. This is clearly present in his Qur’anic commentary, *Maḥāṭib al-ghayb*, which even the title is said to have been chosen through an opening due to the commentary being a “a new opening from God”⁸⁶ (*fathun jadīdun min Allāh*). The commentary was a result of new knowledge gained of the divine realities with which he commented and interpreted the meanings of the Qur’an. His hadith commentary as well is a result of an opening, where he states “[God] inspired me to quench the thirst of the seekers with a sip, and present a spangle for the heart of the wayfarers, so as to revivify through it the soul, by means of the drinking of the sip, and to brighten the hearts with the

⁸⁵ Ibid. 171.

⁸⁶ Rustom, *Triumph of Mercy*, 12.

presence of that spangle.” Thus the opening occurred and he was able to “extract those meanings from their potentiality to their actuality and (finally) their perfection...”⁸⁷

However, there is still much to be desired in terms of an actual hermeneutic. Is there a discernible hermeneutic that Mullā Ṣadrā points to? Firstly, although Mullā Ṣadrā does not articulate his hermeneutics in full, as mentioned above, there are ways of filling in the gaps. This is made possible because of the strong parallel he makes between the Qur’an and the hadith texts. Of course he does mention his perspective throughout his *al-Kāfi* commentary. In fact, we are given quite a bit of insight into his perspective from his introduction and his commentary on the introduction of al-Kulayni. He states that “I took the meanings out of their hiddenness and brought them into existence and outward proof; I brought to work my thought upon it and expended my time in gathering the disparate and strange terms, and I asked God to increase my strength, and to lift me by his generosity the burden from me, and to expand my breast for its finishing...”⁸⁸

In addition, the following statement about the ways of understanding the Qur’an can also be said about understanding the Intellect and the ahadith about it: “In order to penetrate the Qur’an’s deepest levels man must therefore penetrate his own deepest levels. This can only be done when he engages in a *ta’wīl* of his soul, that is, when he causes his soul to return to its true Origin.”⁸⁹ He makes the analogy of the ahadith of the Imams as pearls, where he states, “for a long time I would contemplate their secrets and mysteries, and would reflect on its vast oceans of bases and foundations (for religion), until I extracted those individual pearls (from their shells and their crusts)” through

⁸⁷ Mullā Ṣadrā, 169.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Rustom, 29.

“burhan and fikr” by the light of insight and inner knowing (irfān).”⁹⁰ Additionally, the process of uncovering Qur’anic meaning is fundamentally by uncovering the inner realities: ta’wil of the Qur’an is ultimately ta’wil of the soul: “Since the Qur’ān’s levels correspond to the levels of being, and Ṣadrā notes that the levels of man correspond to the levels of the Qur’ān, the more man penetrates being, the more “real” he becomes and the more he understands of the Qur’ān. Put differently, we can say that the more he understands the Qur’ān, the more intensely he “is.””⁹¹ Now of course the existence of the Prophet and the Imams are parallel not only to the inner intellect, but as well the Qur’an, in so far as they are a realization of the Muhammadan Reality, which will be discussed below. But also, if we are to truly understand the intellect, because it is directly related to being, rather is being, the more it is developed, the more one can “be” in the true sense. And this internal being is reflected in the outer world by the Prophet and the Imams, “for they are the outward proofs from God towards His creation, and they enjoy the same station in the compound human world as the intellectual proof enjoys in the simple intellectual world because of their luminous essences and the illustriousness of their interior.”⁹² Of course, to be able to bring out these inner possibilities, both for understanding the inward and the outward, he posits a number of spiritual requisites that a person must fulfill, along with a certain etiquette that must be abided by when approaching this knowledge. The former, the spiritual prerequisites include: “(1) Have patience and purity (2) Continuously profess the *shahāda* or statement of God’s oneness

⁹⁰ Mullā Ṣadrā, 168.

⁹¹ Rustom, 29.

⁹² Mullā Ṣadrā, 365. He continues by stating that exterior is illumined by their inner lights: “The prophets and those who enjoy the same position as [the prophets]...are in a way that their internal luminosity has permeated and brightened their exterior and their bodily form has been illumined by the light of their hearts.”

(3) Undergo spiritual discipline...” among others. All these spiritual prerequisites are meant to show the importance of the spirit in the process of ta’wil; indeed “without meeting these basic spiritual prerequisites, *ta’wil* is impossible.”⁹³

One common critique made of Mullā Ṣadrā’s reading is that it is an exegesis based on his own opinion (*tafsir bi-ra’y*). He is portrayed as willing to attribute particular meanings to the ahadith without explicit reference to the Qur’anic verses or other ahadith for those references. His critics ask: Is he simply reading the text and interpreting the text at will, or is there some scriptural grounds for his reading? And if he does have scriptural grounds for his reading, what is it?⁹⁴ Yet what is interesting is that Mullā Ṣadrā himself prohibits and denies the type of exegesis based on one’s own personal preferences or opinions (*tafsir bi-ray*), stating that this in reality conceals the truth. In so far as he sees his own commentary, Mullā Ṣadrā does not see it as being a matter of his opinion about the text somehow outside or other than the text; rather whatever he states about the text is indeed a truth revealed as an opening from the text itself and a truth about the ta’wil of the soul. Thus, his remark that “In order to attain this goal I would consult my soul [*nafs*], casting aside the arrows of my own opinion.”⁹⁵

Mullā Ṣadrā’s Commentary on *Usūl al-Kāfī*

Mullā Ṣadrā’s commentary on *al-Kāfī* is fundamentally a philosophical and spiritual pursuit, where each of the ahadith functions as an opening to present a spiritual and philosophical dimension of the issues discussed in the hadith text itself. In particular for the book of Intellect and Ignorance, not only does he speak of both the microcosmic

⁹³ Rustom, 13. He also lists Ṣadrā’s “‘practical’ understanding of how to benefit from the Qur’an...” or the etiquette towards the Qur’an (16-7).

⁹⁴ For example, see Ali Abidi Shahrūdī, “Naqd wa taḥqīqī dar zamīneh-ye shuruḥ kāfī” *Keyhān-i Andīsheh* (17) 81-104.

⁹⁵ Rustom, 11.

and macrocosmic intellect, not only of the various definitions of the intellect, in both the substance of the intellect and the intellectual method, but as well the esoteric dimensions of even the canonical prayers and the other obligatory rites, as well as the virtues.⁹⁶ Indeed it is in a sense an ideal place for him to expound on both philosophical and theological arguments. Yet his commentary is not simply a hodge-podge of various subjects that he loosely strings together. Rather, there is a direct connection between everything from his theological, philosophical, and ethical discussions, all of which are connected through the various meanings of the intellect that he posits, and all of which, ultimately coincide at one level.

Although he elaborates on the intellect in his various writings, he presents a particularly extensive exposition on the term in the commentary on *al-Kāfī*. Initially he divides the various levels of the intellect, as we saw with Majlisī and presents them in the same horizontal fashion. These are the various ways he determines the term “intellect” is used, generally and in the ahadith. There are some that he later makes explicitly references to in the particular hadith commentaries. They are:

1. Instinct/natural faculty- the differentia that separates humans from animals. This is different from the logical intellect; rather it is the basic faculty that allows for understanding and thought. This is not at all different between a highly intelligent person and one not so intelligent, a person sleeping or awake, conscious or not. He compares this form of intellect to the natural faculty present in animals which is what they use when they freely move and attain experiential information about the world. This is the case with the category of animals, regardless of whether particular animals can or cannot move. “And in the same way, this intellect is a natural faculty in humans through which

⁹⁶ Especially in his commentary on hadith 14.

humans have the capability of attaining theoretical knowledge, such that no one should say: a human in his natural capacity is equivalent to a rabbit and there is no difference between the two.” He also states that it is this intellect the “philosophers refer to in their books of proof and they mean by it the faculty of the soul by which certainty of the necessary first principles are attained, not by the senses or thinking, rather through the innate faculty and naturally, such that it’s not clear where or how this understanding was reached.”⁹⁷

2. The intellect of theologians- This is the rational and logical intellect, used by the dialectical theology, “and they say, this the intellect approves, and this it denies. And what they mean is the first levels which is available to all, or rather to most people...from this form is attained necessary knowledge like knowledge that two is two times one, and a thing that is equal to something is the same, or that it is impossible for one body to be co-located in two places.”⁹⁸

3. Ethical intellect- the faculty that separates right and wrong action, which contains the ability to discern good from evil. This is the “part of the soul that by attending to right beliefs and by gaining lengthy experience, is slowly attained...”

4. Intelligence- the everyday use of the term, i.e., what we normally and on a regular basis call intelligence or “smarts”. This would be both considered quickness and depth in comprehension, “even if it may be used for worldly goals and base desires, such that it commands towards bad action. The common people will call however has this (type of intellect) an “intellectual” person, and Mu‘āwiyah is considered as one of the

⁹⁷ MS, 223.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 224.

‘intellectuals.’”⁹⁹ Thus there is no intrinsic sense of rightness or wrongness to this particular meaning of intellect; rather it is primarily a tool used to attain goals, whether they be for good or evil. Probably the reason Mu‘āwiyah ibn abī Sufyān is singled out here is because of the third hadith, mentioned in the introductory chapter about his faculty, termed “devilry”, which is “similar to intellect, but it is not intellect.”¹⁰⁰ And thus Mullā Ṣadrā also says “But the people of the Truth (*ahl al-Ḥaqq*) do not term this as “intellect”, rather they name this something else, like cleverness, devilry and similar to these.”¹⁰¹

5. The philosophical/theoretical intellect (*‘aql al-naẓarī*)- the intellect that is able to understand and attain the universal forms. universal concepts, comprehend meanings and interconnections of things, enter into argumentative discussion and have abstract thinking. Once perfected, this faculty allows one to gain access ultimately to the Active Intellect.

6. The Active Intellect- This is the first intellect or the first effusion or emanation of being which has a direct relation to the first principle; the first instantiation of being that God created when He said “Be.” In fact, it is not related, referenced or attributed to “anything other than its Origin, and that is God, the Self-Subsistent, and it is not attributed to any subject in terms of an accident, nor a material body, like a concept, nor a body like the soul. It does not have any potentiality, nor in its essence does it contain non-existence or contingency from any angle.”¹⁰² This is however different from other

⁹⁹ Ibid. 225.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kaḥfī*, 11.

¹⁰¹ Mullā Ṣadrā, 225.

¹⁰² Ibid., 227.

usages of the “Active Intellect” within Islamic philosophy, however Mullā Ṣadrā uses the same term (*‘aql al-fā‘il*).

These are various homonymous meanings of intellect, and although there is a certain priority to some of them and a hierarchy, they are at one level referring to different things, and have a horizontal relationship to each other. Now Mullā Ṣadrā does not posit an essential difference between the various usages of the intellect, for there is also a different type of relationship that the realities behind these usages of the term intellect could have. This is the hierarchic relationship between the various terms, where upon the perfection of some of these uses, particularly the ethical intellect and the theoretical intellect, there is the ability to transcend these individualized and separated levels. Particularly for the theoretical and ethical intellect he states the various gradations of the intellect: Firstly, potential (*bil-quwwah*); habitual (*bil-malakah*); actualized (*bil-fi‘l*); acquired (*mustafād*).

The potential intellect is when the intellect has not been cultivated at all, and is only receiving some information without attempting to understand them except on the particular level. This is “the soul, in terms of its origin and its initial existence, it has not (attained) perfection nor perfected intellectual concepts, nor even close to it; yet it has the possibility of extracting the essences of all existents and their concepts.”¹⁰³ It is a faculty of the soul, or “even the soul itself that through general knowledge or first perceptions has been prepared to separate those concepts of the existents from their external material bodies, and unite them, a way of uniting with them, a unity of the body with the concept in accord with our own view and the view of the some of the great philosophers.” Then comes the actualized intellect, where the “intellect, the intellecter and the intellected are

¹⁰³ Ibid.

united, without differentiation of howness, which would cause a multiplicity in essence and being, rather different dimensions in understanding and meanings of terms (applied to them)...”¹⁰⁴ The final level of the intellect, the acquired intellect is the level of the intellect where it has complete control over all the universals and attains a direct connection to the Active Intellect, “for once it ponders upon the Active Intellect it is able to see them as being present. For so long as it remains in terms of attachment and reflection confined to this world, it cannot be permanently immersed in the witnessing of the First Truth or constantly connected to Him...and for him in this world is the natural disposition to be connected only from one dimension.”¹⁰⁵

These four levels of intellect, really the unveiling of the intellect and rising to the source of intellect (or being) is done not only through some pure form of intellection, but rather is combined with a spiritual practice that Sadra sees as absolutely crucial to his theosophy. Indeed he condemns those who on the one hand deny this reality, and others, who although accepting wholeheartedly this reality do not expend any effort to attain it.¹⁰⁶

The ethical intellect also has a gradation, the attaining of which is crucial not only for self or spiritual perfection, but is a means of attaining the theoretical intellect. The first stage of strengthening the ethical intellect is to purify the outward,

“through the rites of worship and abstaining from the prohibited; second is the purification of the inward from ugliness, until the soul is as brilliant as a mirror, so that the truths appear within it in the form of examples and concepts. Third is to witness the entirety or most of knowledge, and fourth is to become *fānī* from the self and to see all things as emerging from the Truth and returning unto Him, And this is behaving according to the Divine Behavior, as it has been stated by the Prophet: ‘Affect in accord with the Divine Ethics.’”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 226.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 227

¹⁰⁶ Mullā Ṣadrā, 172-3.

Indeed the two are seen as complementary, rather united, and ultimately “...unite in this final end.”¹⁰⁷ Yet one important distinction he makes between the theoretical intellect and the ethical intellect is that he sees the theoretical intellect as intrinsically valued, for it comprises of the beliefs and understandings (as well the transcendent experiences one must have of that reality). The analogy he gives, and his intellectual anthropology is, he states, the analogy of the body to the spirit, where the body acts but as a means for the spirit; various other analogies also come to mind, like the kernel and the husk among others. Thus, the highest level of ethical intellect is the attaining of *fanā’* (extinction), where one conditions and re-creates himself and his ethics according to the ethics of God.

There is also a gradation in the innate intellect each individual begins with, that natural intellect we are endowed with (*al-aql al-maṭbū’*) and based on this one can attain the various levels of perfection, and the acquired intellect (*al-aql al-maṣnū’*) the attained or worked intellect. He also states that some philosophers consider the Active Intellect as being multiple and not unitary, having parts and quantity. Yet it is not a quantity because the Divine Realm is not a realm of multiplicity because multiplicity is a function of a lower realm, of the realm of “matter and movement”. Rather, these are various levels of existence as the emanations and different intensities of light. “Thus they are like various lights and rays of perfection and proximity in relation to the Light of lights.”¹⁰⁸

This brings us to a crucial issue on the nature of the Active Intellect. The Active Intellect is in reality the primary context of the various gradations of the Intellect, and on one level is the various intellects—the various gradations of the particular intellects

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 228.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 228.

emanated through its descent, and all the various gradations of intellect return back to it through its ascent. On the first level, he states it is the first, most perfect creation of God and the closest to God, “the second being in the realm of Being...” This refers to the Intellect being the first instantiation of being from God, mentioned here from His Mercy, and the rest of the cosmos descends from it.¹⁰⁹ Yet he states that other ahadith state otherwise, that the Prophetic Light, the Pen, the Divine Spirit and the Karūbī Angel¹¹⁰. He reconciles these different ahadith by first stating that “These are all various attributes and adjectives for one thing, referred to by different terms, because each attribute is referred to by another name; thus the names are many but the named is one essentially and existentially.” Here he is distinguishing between the Intellect and all other creation by stating its utter simplicity and lack of parts, accidental qualities or its independence from all other beings other than God. In the next few lines he lays out the hierarchy of beings even further:

“And in summary fashion: there are three different types of essential creatures (maj‘ūlāt al-jauharī) in terms of their levels of existence: The highest and first is that which does not depend upon anything except God, and does not see anything other than Him, and is not associated with anything other than Him, The Most High. And the second: is that which does not depend upon anything, in the root of its existence except upon Him, the Most High, but for the completion of its being, must rely upon other than Him, and must attain its existential perfection after it has been existentiated and, in a way, also contains it before its existentiation. And the third: is that which depends upon other than God for both issues, I mean here in the root of its existence and its completion. The first of these is the intellect, the second the soul, and the third the body or a part of it.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ For a more in-depth study of Mullā Ṣadrā’s view on the “first instantiation of being” in his commentary works, see Rustom, *Triumph of Mercy*, especially chp. 1, “Qur’ānic Hermeneutics”.

¹¹⁰ These are the angels that are “near the Divine Throne”, in exegesis of Surah Ghāfir: 7; see, for example, Muhammad ibn Muhammad Ridhā Qummī Mashhadī, *Tafsir kanz ul-daqa’iq wa baḥr al-gharā’ib*, vol. 11 (Tehran: Sāziman-i chāp wa intishārāt-i vizārat-i irshād islāmī, 1990), 357.

¹¹¹ Mullā Ṣadrā, 216.

Mullā Ṣadrā presents various points in this summary fashion: firstly, he describes the quiddity of the Intellect, and its relation to the Real¹¹²; secondly, its relation to all other beings below it, which depend upon it for their completion; and finally, a parallel or reflective relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm in terms of the Intellect. Unfortunately in his commentary he only gives us a little more about the essence of the Intellect: “the most honorable possible existents and the greatest creations is the Intellect, as you know, for it is the first of the existentiated beings, and the closest to the Divine and the most Beloved of Him, and because of that, He said, ‘I did not create any being more beloved to Me than you.’”¹¹³ This final line is of course a reference to the first hadith in *al-Kāfi* where God is speaking to the Intellect after He has created it. Now here he makes it clear that the Intellect is the highest and greatest creation, and as well, being the first instantiation of being, all of being necessarily derives from it. He later provides a proof of the greatness of the Intellect through the proof of the “Law of Higher Possibility”¹¹⁴ where he states that from this it becomes clear that “other existents emanate from it.” This means that all other existents attain being through it and its emanations. Thus there is a particular aspect of “intellection” to being, and a particular dimension of being that allows it to be named intellect. Being, then, and intellection are different attributes that refer to the same reality. This would As well, there is a direct

¹¹² Of course, quiddity here is not referring to quiddity in the general sense, as opposed to being, r as delimiting and ultimately lacking being; rather quiddity in the specific sense: as Mohammed Rustom states: “It is important to distinguish between two types of quiddity: there is (1) quiddity in the most specific sense (al-māhiyya bi-ma‘nā al-akhaṣṣ), and (2) quiddity in the most general sense (al-māhiyya bi-ma‘nā al-a‘amm). The first type of quiddity is simply the answer to the question, “what is it?,” whereas the second type is a thing’s essence proper, th at is, that by virtue of which it is what it is. Being does have a quiddity in the most specific sense, since if we were to ask what being is, we can answer “being.” But being does not have a quiddity in the most general sense since it escapes all definition, and that because it does not have a genus or differentia.” 171

¹¹³ Mullā Ṣadrā, 217.

¹¹⁴ *Qā‘idah al-imbkān al-ashraf*

connection between Intellect and Divine Love, whereby it becomes the closest being to the Divine, not just existentially, but also in terms of love. So the question then is, why and how is intellect connected to both being and love?

Mullā Ṣadrā states that the intellectual dimension of this first instantiation of being is that “Love follows the comprehension of being because it is utter good; and whatever thing’s existence is more complete, its goodness is also greater, and thus comprehending it is stronger and happiness by it is more abundant. Thus the being who is the happiest by His Own Existence is The First Real, for He has the Strongest Comprehension of the Greatest Thing to be Comprehended.”¹¹⁵ Thus love is connected to goodness, and that which its existence is greater can be more easily comprehended, loved, has the most amount of goodness, and can contain the most happiness. Because existence is the basis of all goodness, and existence is the root of all that can be comprehended, existence then is the thing that connects all things to it and it is connected to all things necessarily. And in this way, each of the separate names are actually referring to one unitary reality, which is the first instantiation of being. But as well, to ascend the levels of existence then would also be possible through the intellect. Thus Mullā Ṣadrā’s vision of man’s ascent as well begins with first the lowest level of the intellect, the potential intellect. It must attain the higher levels of the intellect, both the ethical and the theoretical, from the potential to the habitual to the actualized then the acquired until it can attain a connection with the First Intellect from which it attains being on the one hand, and knowledge on the other.

Creation of the Intellect

¹¹⁵ Mullā Ṣadrā, 217.

Almost all of the discussion above on the Intellect as the first instantiation of being was in the first hadith. Yet Mullā Ṣadrā presents other dimensions to the Intellect, including one that parallels Majlisī's reading: the Intellect as the Muhammadan Reality. Of course, Mullā Ṣadrā's interpretation of this dimension has significant differences from Majlisī's. Yet the equation is ultimately the same; both see a significant parallel between the ahadith on the creation of the Intellect and the creation of the Muhammadan Reality; both see a parallel between the love God speaks of towards the Prophet and the love towards the Intellect; and both see the path of the Prophet, and the path of the Intellect as ultimate one.

First, Mullā Ṣadrā makes the connection explicit, stating, "All of the attributes that are used to distinguish the Intellect, the exact same are used for the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him and his progeny."¹¹⁶ In addition, he states that the great Sufis name the Intellect the Muhammadan Reality, because of it is "the completion of his existence, may Allah's blessings be upon him and his family, from which he was instantiated and to which he will return...." Interestingly, not only is this a perspective from the ahadith, but Mullā Ṣadrā hints here, by mentioning the great Sufis who may or may not have had access to this hadith, that there are as well other ways of discovering this Muhammadan Reality. Here he connects once again, both the Intellect and the Muhammadan Reality, to that initial state of undifferentiated being, each of which is a different dimension of that same reality. Of course being emanates at many different levels, and so Mullā Ṣadrā presents the Muhammadan Reality as well in its many different instantiations. At the highest and most perfect level, it is the closest thing to the Divine, and so the Muhammadan Reality is the most Beloved, a love that he states

¹¹⁶ Mullā Ṣadrā, 217.

is in reality a love of His own Essence, and the closest created being to that Essence is the Muhammadan Spirit. At the level of the self, the Prophetic Reality is also equated to the spirit, for it is not delimited by the “darkness” or non-existence that defines corporeality and physicality, and when it is such, it is also called “light”, if “light is existence and darkness is non-existence, for it (light) is apparent by its essence, and enlightens other things...”¹¹⁷ Thus any dimension of the soul that is connected to that also benefits from the light of the Prophetic Reality, and it can be said to exist at a higher order than the existence of the corporeal body.

As for the prophetic level, Mullā Ṣadrā presents the Muhammadan Reality as an inward reality present for all the prophets, and a reality they must all attest to, being on the one hand the cause of the prophetic arch. In his luminous form, he was with all the other prophets inwardly, and was brought externally, as the cosmic arch continued. On the other hand, we can understand the arch of creation through his being. Indeed, it is the Muhammadan Reality that when God commands the Intellect to “Come forward”, it is a command to the Prophet to descend and provide light (existence) to all that which exists. As a Mercy upon all of creations, he descended to the world. Thus the Prophet states “‘We are the last and the first.’ Meaning last in terms of the external and appearing, like a fruit; and the first in terms of creation and existence, like a seed. So he is the seed and the cultivation of the entire contingent world.”¹¹⁸ Upon the Divine Command of “Go back,” the Prophet fulfilled this command on his ascension (*mi’rāj*), the command meaning, “Go back” unto your Lord.

Spiritual Anthropology

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 217.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 218.

As for the hadith of Adam, where he chooses intellect over devotion and decency, Mullā Şadrā expounds on a number of points not found in Majlisī’s commentary. Firstly, there is the response of devotion and decency to Gabriel when they are told to “Go away and leave intellect [with Adam.]’ Thereupon they said, ‘Gabriel, we have been ordered to remain with intellect wherever he may be.’”¹¹⁹ Mullā Şadrā states that when decency and devotion respond, they are not simply stating a law they are abiding by; rather it was an existential command (*amr^{um} takwīn^{um}*), whereby there is not even the possibility of disobeying. This issue is of the same order as creation, where none had a say as to whether they would be created or not. He refers to the verse of creation, “The only words We say to a thing, when We desire it, is that We say to it Be, and it is...”¹²⁰ There is no say as to our being created; we have no choice as to whether to be created or not. In the same way decency and devotion are existentially tied to intellect, and must “remain with intellect wherever he may be.” If true, this would mean that if the intellect was not chosen, then the other two would not have stayed with Adam either. This is corroborated by later ahadith where an Imam is told about the religiosity of an individual, and he asks about the person’s intellect, as a means of determining his true religiosity.¹²¹ The same goes for decency as well, where it is said to be attainable by habituation, as opposed to the intellect, a “gift from God.”¹²²

This leads him to his more important point, an interesting discussion between these three dimensions of humankind and Mullā Şadrā’s spiritual anthropology. He presents a clear hierarchy between the three dimensions, establishing a clear primacy for

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 220.

¹²⁰ Qur’an al-Naḥl: 40.

¹²¹ Hadith 19, among others.

¹²² Hadith 18.

the intellect. He begins with the three levels of the human potential: firstly, there is the level of understanding. This is the level of the intellect, the faculty of understanding truths, and if we are to “term them based on their effects and their acts,”¹²³ then as well the understanding of truths themselves. This simply means that the term “intellect” is used to refer to both the means and the results, or ends, of understanding. The next level is that of decency: it is that faculty that is “affected by what is given it through the heart”, and in terms of its results, as the effects of the heart. These effects of the heart can either be caused by a “weakness of the heart”, where man responds to the created world, whether it be people, the self, or otherwise, and to act in accordance to the created world; or it could be decency with respect to God and His Magnificence and His Augustness (*‘adhmah wa haybah*). Finally, there is devotion, that faculty by which good action is done and bad action is avoided, or the avoiding of the bad and the doing of the good.¹²⁴ However, beyond defining these three, a number of questions still remain: why is Adam presented with these three dimensions as opposed to a plethora of others? Why is intellect chosen as the greatest among the three? And why are the other three existentially commanded to follow the intellect “wherever he may be”?

He states that in relation to the world, man is either the subject or the object. If he is the subject, then this is referred to as devotion, because he is the one committing the action—devotion being defined primarily on the level of actions, both good and bad. If man is on the objective side of things, then he can either be receiving intellectual concepts, which if good is called the intellect; if he is the object of good other than intellectual concepts, received through the heart, then it is termed decency. He states that

¹²³Mullā Ṣadrā, 221

¹²⁴Ibid.

out of all of these, the intellect is the greatest: it is the only dimension that can discern the truth and separate it from falsehood, and is not simply on the level of actions, nor on the level of feelings. It allows for complete belief and the attainment of God, knowing why and how to love God. Once the intellect is attained, the heart will feel the Magnificence and Augustness of God and will automatically lead to decency. Once the intellect is attained, one will also attain proper devotion because of knowing why to act and why to follow God's commands in terms of action.¹²⁵

Internal Hierarchy

It is primarily in the commentary on this hadith where he states the relations between the various uses of the term intellect stated above regarding the concept of the intellect, thus much of his commentary here will not be repeated. However, it is in this hadith where he very briefly mentions the unity of the intellect, the intellector and the intellected, an issue he unfortunately does not explain in depth. He states, "at the moment of intellection the form of the intelligible, the possessor of intellect, and even the intellect itself become united in such a way that one *is the* other as long as the act of intellection lasts."¹²⁶ This is understood in terms of his position on the transcendental unity of being, and the intellect's existential dimension.¹²⁷

Another important issue he discusses regarding this hadith is the meaning of "good and bad" intellect. When within the hadith, there is confusion as to "what was the trait in Mu'awiyah", it seems a little difficult to understand how there could possibly be a

¹²⁵ Mullā Ṣadrā, 222.

¹²⁶ Mullā Ṣadrā, 227.

¹²⁷ For more on his position on the unity of the intellect, the intellector and the intellected, Ibrahim Kalin's *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mulla Ṣadrā on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), esp. Chp. 2 "Mulla Ṣadrā's Theory of Knowledge and the Unification Argument."

bad intellect. After all, evil and ignorance is seen as non-existential, while intellect and good is primarily being. Thus having a “bad” intellect seems to be a contradiction in terms. Mullā Ṣadrā resolves this by stating that the intellect referred to in this hadith is not the same intellect referred to in other ahadith, which is the understanding of intellectual concepts and the determination of good as opposed to evil. Intellect here is used to refer to an analytical talent and the speed of understanding, in line with the fourth usage he provides for “intellect”. The speed and accuracy of understanding can either be used towards positive beliefs and views about the world, or towards negative and evil beliefs about the world; however it does not determine the good from the bad belief necessarily. This explains why there is confusion in the hadith: this intellect is referring to thinking and the speed of understanding the subjects and issues pertaining to the bases of opinions and beliefs. Thus, it can be used either towards positive or negative beliefs and views.¹²⁸

Eschatology of Intellect

In this hadith, Mullā Ṣadrā continues with his reading of the intellect, but turns his attention to the eschatological implications of the hadith. He firstly begins with a definition of *al-qā'im*, the name of the Mahdi; he understands *al-qā'im* as meaning “he exists by a type of existence that does not suffer withering or sickness...rather indeed he lives and dies according to the Will of God...” Being a Twelver Shī'ī, Mullā Ṣadrā believes that the *qā'im* is the 12th Imam, who was born around 255 AH (869 CE) and continues to live until the end of time. This also serves as an answer to the question about his longevity.

¹²⁸ Mullā Ṣadrā, 228.

After a section where he cites Shaykh Bahā'ī, he returns to the hadith itself, and explains what it means to “unify their intellects, and through him, intellects will attain perfection.” Unifying and perfecting the intellects refers to the ability of people to both understand and attain a level of understanding such that they attain inspiration. They will return to their original states of understanding, where they will not be “drowning in the corporeal natures, and scattered between their senses and ravenous towards their wants and desires...”¹²⁹ but rather will have access to the intellect at a higher degree of its emanation. And because Mullā Ṣadrā understands the intellect ultimately as being, they will attain a higher level of perfection and being upon this uniting of their intellect. They will return to their origins, because of this divine blessing—from the world of multiplicity and division, to the world of unity and unicity.

The second issue he addresses is the why: why do the intellects of these people become perfected? Here he presents a very interesting historical account, where he unites the previous hadith regarding the proofs of God with an eschatological return to the initial higher intellect. He states that the prophetic cycle began with the ascent back toward the intellect, and thus you would have the various proofs (*al-ḥujjah*) like the staff of Moses and the healing of Jesus and the Qur'an of the Prophet. After the Prophet, the Imam states that the proof of God upon the people is now the intellect: by it the truthful are known and are accepted, and those who lie are known and rejected. He states that during the eschaton, the intellects would have increased to such an extent that there will be no need for a physical teacher, and the proof of God will be the internal intellect. The intellects

¹²⁹ Ibid. 559.

will be completed and they will be able to accept hidden inspiration and be guided internally without necessarily an external guide, “just as the friends of God are now.”¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Ibid. 567.

Conclusion

The thesis above is an attempt at explaining the various ways in which Imāmī Shī‘ī scholars have understood part of their hadith canon. On the one hand, there are the various ways in which the hadith themselves portray the intellect, with each hadith presenting different elements of what is referred to by a single name, “intellect”, but seems to have many significants. Yet each of our scholars presents a synthesized vision of these various dimensions, making sense of the disparate parts while simultaneously attempting to account for all of its complexity. And this synthesis arises out of a particular hermeneutic vision of how to approach the traditions at hand, of each of their respective positions vis-à-vis those ahadith, a dialectic between the sense of devotion towards staying “true” to the text, while simultaneously extracting a certain comprehensible meaning from the text. Simultaneously, the commentary tradition attempts to make the text accessible to its audience as a window into what the text could and should mean to them. And because it is dealing with a revealed text, particularly a canon, the purpose of the commentary is to reveal that ultimate truth that underlies the text itself. This ultimate truth attained by the commentator from the text must necessarily cohere with the truths available to the individual commentator, whether they be internal spiritual truths that are explored, qua Mullā Ṣadrā, or external truths, through the literal text or through reference to other revealed material, or something in-between these. To say that these truths somehow “fall away” from the original words of the revealed text would mean that the original revealed text is somehow a separate entity that has no relation to the truth that one understands and hence one has no access to the text, or that one has such close access to the text that no interpretive work is necessary. Some bridge

is necessary to allow the subject to have access to the text, and ultimately, this bridge or criteria for accessing the text must link the truths available to the subject to the meanings of the text.

And each of these hermeneutic processes have their own implications for the hermeneute and the audience. Mullā Ṣadrā allows the sort of direct access to the meanings of the ahadith because of the individual's ability to explore the spirit, which for him is the primary means of accessing and understanding any revealed text. This makes the hermeneutic process and the hermeneute both subjective and objective, for it is by exploring the subjective spirit that the individual is able to understand the objective revelation, and vice versa. Thus, one understands the meaning of the text only by undertaking the spiritual quest, a feat that is understood to be limiting for most. Thus, for those who are not up to the challenge, they must rely upon those who have explored the text and who have that direct access to the text itself.

Our other hermeneute, Majlisī, questions these premises: firstly, why do we need to have such a spiritual exploration if we already have that access through those who have explored the text, i.e., the Imams? If they have already presented the text to us, and we accept their infallibility, why explore the text further? Secondly, who can guarantee our proper exploration of the text, for it to not result in pure conjecture? After all, if our intellects are limited, how can we be sure there is not some truth that is beyond our limited intellects that may very well contradict our limited understanding of the text? The question then for Majlisī becomes, what is our primary access to the text considering our own limitations? His response is the words of the text and other traditions which may be brought to better understand the text. Otherwise, by attempting to further explore the text

beyond that which is given to us may result in “far-fetched results” that stray away from the text itself, and give primacy to our own understanding over the understanding of the revelation.

As can be seen, these two hermeneutes can be seen as on the exact opposite sides of the exegetical spectrum, with one prescribing a devotional approach to the text, while the other prescribes, what can be termed an interactive, intellectual, or subjective approach, with subjective here not intended as relative, rather as the subject having direct access to the underlying truths the revealed text calls to.

This hermeneutic tradition vis-à-vis *al-Kāfī* and in particular its discussion on the intellect has continued, and enjoyed a rise in the past century. With new editions of the *Usūl al-kāfī* being available, more commentaries have come to fruition, including in English.¹³¹ Continuing in the philosophical hermeneutic tradition, Mehdi Ha’iri Yazdi has written a commentary that both explores Mullā Ṣadrā’s commentary and his own philosophical commentary.¹³² Indeed *al-Kāfī* remains relevant to the community so long as the hermeneutes continue to present it to them. However the relation also seems to work the other way around: when there are issues that pertain to the intellect and to authority arise among the community, there is a return to *al-Kāfī* to attempt to understand and gain the scriptural authority that is needed for a particular position.

Yet, a number of questions remain: what is the relation between larger questions among the community, about social or political authority, the authority of interpreting the scripture, and conceptions of the intellect? There seems to be a correlation between eras

¹³¹ Rizwan Arastu, *Al-Kāfī: Intellect & Foolishness*. For an extensive list of commentaries on *al-Kāfī*, see Sa’idzadeh, Rasūl. “Kitāb-shenāsī tawṣīfī-ye shurūḥ al-kāfī.” *Rasekhūn*. (2013) 1-10. <http://www.rasekhoon.net/article/print-108357.aspx>.

¹³² Mehdi Hā’iri Yazdī, *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfī: kitāb ‘aql wa jahl, kitāb tawḥīd*, (Tehran: Anjuman-i Āthār wa Mafākhīr-i Farhangī, 2013).

when the position and definition of the intellect is questioned and a rise in the hadith commentaries on the intellect within *al-Kāfī*. How strong and what is the basis of this correlation, especially since this particular chapter of *al-Kāfī* enjoys such an exalted position within Shī‘ī religious life? Finally, what are the parallels or cross-currents with other linguistic communities, say between commentaries in Persian, Urdu, or other languages, or even other commentary traditions, within the larger Islamic commentary tradition or even non-Islamic traditions?

Bibliography

- Abisaab, Rula Jurdi. *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire*. New York: IB Tauris, 2004.
- . “History and Self-Image: The ‘Amili Ulema in Syria and Iran (Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries)” in *Distant Relations*. Edited by H.E. Chehabi, New York: IB Tauris, 62-95.
- Akhawan, Muḥammad. “Kulayni wa ‘aql garayī” *Ayinah pajūhī* (81): 267-81.
- Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali. *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*. Translated by David Streight. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Arastu, Rizwan. *Al-Kafi: Intellect & Foolishness*. Dearborn, MI: Islamic Texts Institute, 2012.
- Babayan, Kathryn. “Sufis, Dervishes and Mullas: The Controversy over Spiritual and Temporal Dominion in Seventeenth-Century Iran.” In *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. Charles Melville. New York: IB Tauris, 1996.
- Bar-Asher, Meir. *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shi’ism*. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Bayhom-Daou, Tamima. *Shaykh Mufid*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2005.
- Joel Blecher, “Hadīth Commentary in the Presence of Students, Patrons, and Rivals: Ibn Ḥajar and Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī in Mamluk Cairo” in *Oriens* 41 (2013): 261-87;
- . “In the Shade of the Ṣaḥīḥ: Politics, Culture and Innovation in an Islamic Commentary Tradition.” PhD diss., Princeton University, 2013.
- Buckley, R. P. “On the origins of Shī’ī *ḥadīth*.” *Muslim World* 88 (1998): 165-84.
- . “Ja’far al-Ṣādiq as a source of Shī’ī traditions.” *Islamic Quarterly* (1999): 37-58.
- Chittick, William, trans. *A Shi’ite Anthology*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981.
- Clarke, Lynda. *Early Doctrine of the Shi’ah, According to the Shi’i Sources*. PhD diss., Montreal: McGill University, 1994.
- Crow, Douglas. “The Role of al-‘aql in early Islamic wisdom with reference to Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq.” Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1996.

- Faṭīmī-Muwaḥḥad, Sayyid Hasan. “Gāmī seturg dar kāfī-pajūhī,” in *Fiqh-i Ahlul-Bayt* 15:60, 133-65
- Fiqhizadeh, Abdul-hadi. “Majlisī wa ta’wīl riwāyāt” in *Islam-pajūhī*, 2 (1385): 81-99.
- Gleave. “Between *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*: early Imāmī collections of *akhbār*.” *Islamic Law and Society* 8 (2001): 350 - 382.
- . *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shī’ī School*. Boston, Brill, 2007.
- . *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shī’ī Jurisprudence*. Boston: Brill, 2000.
- al-Husayni Jalali, Muḥammad Husayn. *Dirayat al-hadith*. Beirut: Manshūrāt Mu’assisah al-A‘lamī lil-Maṭbu‘āt, 2004.
- Izadimubarakah, Kamran. “Uṣūl naqd matn ḥadīth wa fahm ān dar biḥār al-anwār,” *Maqālāt wa barresīha*, 79 (1385) 11-32.
- Jambet, Christian. *The Act of Being: The Philosophy of Revelation in Mullā Sadrā*. Translated by Jeff Fort. New York: Zone books, 2006.
- Kāfī, Abdul-hosseini, “Maḥūm-i ‘aql az dīdgāh-i du shāriḥ-i usūl-i kāfī.” ‘Ulūm-i ḥadīth 26 (Winter 1381/2003): 96-119.
- Kalin, Ibrahim. *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mulla Ṣadrā on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Kamal, Muhammad. *Mulla Sadra’s Transcendent Philosophy*. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2006.
- Kohlberg, Etan. *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shī’ism*. Brookfield, Vt.: Gower Pub. Co., 1991.
- . “Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period.” In *Authority and Political Culture in Shi’ism*, ed. Amir Arjomand.
- . “Aspects of Akhbārī Thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*. Edited by N. Levitzon Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987, 133-60.
- al-Kulaynī, Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm. *Al-Kāfī*. 8 vols. Tehran: Dar ul-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1987.
- Madelung, Wilfred. “Al-Kulayni, Abu Ja’far Muhammad.” *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2, vol. 5.

- . “The Shi’ite and Kharijite Contribution to Pre-Ash’arite Kalām.” In *Islamic Philosophical Theology*. Edited by Parviz Morewedge. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979.
- al-Majlisī, Muḥammad Bāqir. *Mir’āt ul-‘uqūl fī sharḥ akhbār āl al-rasūl*. Dār ul-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah.
- . *Biḥār al-anwār*. 110 volumes. Beirut: Mu’assasah al-Wifā’, 1984.
- Mashhadī, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Ridhā Qummī. *Tafsir kanz ul-daqa’iq wa baḥr al-gharā’ib*, vol. 11 (Tehran: Sāziman-i chāp wa intishārāt-i vizārat-i irshād islāmī, 1990).
- Mazzaoui, Michel. *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbors*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003.
- Moris, Zailan. *Revelation, Intellectual Intuition and Reason in the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra: An Analysis of the al-Hikmah al-‘Arshiyyah*. New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003.
- Morris, James. *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Murphy, Tim. “Elements of a Semiotic Theory of Religion,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Leiden: Brill, (2003) 15: 48-67.
- Musa, Aisha. *Hadith as Scripture: Discussions on the Authority of Prophetic Traditions in Islam*,
- Nā’inī, Nahla Gharavi. “Jaygah-i ‘aql dar sharḥ-i usūl-i kāfī-yi Ṣadr al-muti’allahīn.” *Kheradnāmeḥ* 65 (Fall 1990): 83-106.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Expectation of the Millennium : Shiism in History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.
- . *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy*. Tehran: Imperial Academy of Philosophy, 1978.
- . “Mullā Ṣadrā: his teachings.” Chapter 36 of *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Newman, Andrew. *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi’ism: Hadith as Discourse between Qum and Baghdad*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000.

- . “Between Qumm and the West: The Occultation According to al-Kulayni and al-Katib al-Nu’mani”, in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honor of Wilferd Madelung*. Farhad Daftary and Josef Meri, ed.
- Rizvi, Sajjad. *Mulla Sadra and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being*, London/Abingdon, Routledge, 2009.
- Mohammed Rustom. *The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mulla Sadra*. Albany: State University of New York Press: 2012.
- Sa’idzadeh, Rasūl. “Kitāb-shenāsī tawṣīfī-ye shurūḥ al-kāfī.” *Rasekhūn*. (2013) <http://www.rasekhoon.net/article/print-108357.aspx>.
- Savory, Roger. “Intellectual life under the Safavids.” In *Iran Under the Safavids*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Shāhrūdī, Alī ‘Ābidī. “Naqd wa taḥqīqī dar zamāneh-ye shurūḥ kāfī” *Keyhān-i Andīsheh* (17) 81-104.
- Shīrāzī, Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm. *Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī*, 3 vols. Tehran: Mu’assaseh-yi Muṭali’āt wa Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, 1366
- . *Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī*, Persian translated by Muḥammad Khwājavi. Tehran: Mu’assaseh-yi Muṭali’āt wa Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, 1366.
- . *Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī*, vol. 1, <http://www.shamela.ws>.
- Smith, Jonathan Z. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Tabataba’i, Hossein Modarressi. *Crisis and Consolidation*. Princeton: Darwin Press, 1993.
- Turner, Colin. *Islam Without Allah?* Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000.
- Yazdī, Mehdī H ā’irī. *Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī: kitāb ‘aql wa jahl, kitāb tawḥīd*. Tehran: Anjuman-i Āthār wa Mafākhir-i Farhangī, 2013.