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Ideology, Ethics, and Philosophical Discourse in Eighteenth Century Iran

Intellectual biography as a discipline assumes that the life and thought of an individual can shed light on an epoch. In some cases such a claim is justified, especially where the epoch is obscure and the thinker genuinely representative of the culture of a profession in a city or region. I shall argue the validity of this principle with regard to eighteenth century west-central Iran and Mohammad Mehdi Niraqi (d. 1794), a prominent Imami Shi'i religious scholar who wrote prolifically and authored a huge three-volume work on ethics. Most of his voluminous writing remains in manuscript, but enterprising scholars in Najaf published the book on ethics, *Jāmi' as-sa'ādāt* (Compendium of Happiness), and it has recently been reissued in Beirut.¹

The political turmoil of eighteenth century Iran at least partially explains the difficulty modern historians have in understanding its cultural history between the fall of the Safavids in 1722 and the rise of the Qajars around 1785. The confusing succession of rulers during these decades included Afghan tribal chiefs, the self-styled emperor, Nader Shah, the interregnum of 1747-1763 during which local pastoral nomad leaders and landed magnates exerted merely provincial authority, and the rise and fall of the Shiraz-based Zand viceregency over most of Iran. Such instability proved devastating to the written documents upon which historians like to depend. The many wars and sieges destroyed government archives, libraries, and books; and hundreds of thousands of refugees left cities such as Isfahan and Shiraz from the 1720s on, leading to the loss of memoirs,

1 Mohammad Mehdi Niraqi, *Jāmi' as-sa'ādāt*, ed. Sayyed Mohammad Kalantar, intro. Mohammad Rida al-Mozaffar, 3 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'la li'l-Matbu'at, 1985); al-Mozaffar's introduction is the best modern biography; Niraqi is also noticed in Mohammad Baqer Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannāt fi ahwāl al-'ulamā' wa's-sādāt*, 8 vols. (Tehran: Isma'iliyan, 1972), vol. 7, pp. 200-203.

letters and other personal documents. Moreover, stable government helps assure the continuity of institutional support for various sorts of writing, bureaucratic and religious. With patricians displaced and the economy in shambles, patronage became greatly reduced. The new rulers often proved hostile to the majority, Shi'i culture of Iran, promoting either Sunnism (in the case of the Afghans) or an ecumenical mixture of Sunni and Shi'i emphases (in the case of Nader Shah). Such rulers expropriated endowment funds for seminaries and other Twelver Shi'i institutions, helping impoverish clerical intellectual life and also making the preservation of manuscripts less likely.² Niraqi's works, however, appear to have survived in abundance, many of them in family hands in Iran. The rich Iraqi collections also contain manuscripts by him.

I want to use Niraqi's work to raise and resolve three issues, all of them related to the question of prevalent cultural codes. First, I will look at the question of whether scholars have oversimplified the intellectual history of late seventeenth and eighteenth century Iran in depicting it as dominated by narrow literalist and scripturalist methods in religious scholarship. For in contrast to the scriptural literalists, Niraqi's approach is firmly grounded in the Greco-Islamic philosophical and illuminationist traditions. Second, I have argued that some religious thought of the ulama can be seen as ideology.³ I wonder if Niraqi's work can be analyzed so as to elucidate some of his attitudes toward various groups in society, despite the rather abstract tone of most passages. Finally, I wish to make better sense of the disputes in Safavid and post-Safavid Shi'ism over the permissibility of certain methods and disciplines in elaborating religious thought. Since this struggle centered on types of discourse, it seems to me legitimate to approach it with some tools deriving from sociolinguistic theories about discourse strategies.

The philosophical (or even theosophical) approach to ethics, employing Greek concepts and methods, possesses a distinguished pedigree in Twelver Shi'ism. Avicenna, Miskawayh, Nasirual-Din Tusi and Mohsen Fayz Kashani all produced ethical works that mixed Islamic scriptural moral concerns with Aristotelian and Platonic schemas and illuminationist mysticism. Scholars most often assume, however, that this rationalist-gnostic approach to ethics died out in the latter half of the seventeenth century, supplanted among Twelver scholars by an emphasis on the literal quotation of oral reports from the Prophet and Imams. The flights of metaphysical speculation, evoking the ghosts of the medieval Andalusian mystic Ibn Arabi and the Iranian philosopher-mystic

2 For the political and social history of eighteenth century Iran we have only a few published full-length academic works in Western languages, chiefly: Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958); Laurence Lockhart, *Nadir Shah* (London: Luzac & Co., 1938); and John Perry, *Karim Khan Zand* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

3 See Juan R. I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), esp. the introduction and chapter 6.

Avicenna, it is held, gave way to the compulsive compilation of huge collections of oral reports.

Historiography on eighteenth century Shi'ism in particular has concentrated on legal thought, seeing a hegemony of the literalist Akhbari school of jurisprudence in the first part of the century, followed much later by a revival of the rationalist Usuli school. This depiction partially derives from the biographies of two major thinkers in the canon of eighteenth century writers still studied by Twelver ulama, Shaykh Yusof al-Bahrani (1695-1772) and Aqa Mohammad Baqer Behbahani (circa 1705-1790). Al-Bahrani became an Akhbari, perhaps in the 1720s, and established himself in the Iraqi shrine city of Karbala as a powerful religious and educational figure. His ideas had implications both for the interpretation of law and for wider culture, since he attacked the study of philosophy, theology, and Greek logic and confined the sources of law to a literal reading of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams.⁴ In so doing he continued an intellectual tradition popular in the conservative shrine cities long before his arrival in Karbala. His younger contemporary, Behbahani, derived from Isfahan and studied in Iraq in the 1720s, but lived in southwestern Iran for thirty years before coming to Karbala to stage an intellectual revolt against al-Bahrani in the 1760s. Behbahani promoted the rationalist Usuli school, which allowed limited use of syllogism in legal reasoning and recognized the consensus of previous jurists as a source of law. Behbahani's Usuli revival in Karbala had a lasting impact, since he and his close disciples in Mamluk Iraq trained a whole generation of Iranian clerics who went on to gain high posts under the rising Qajars in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Iran.⁵

This sort of view, however, appears to limit the history of Twelver Shi'ism in the eighteenth century to events in the small Iraqi shrine city of Karbala. What sort of religious works, one wonders, did scholars produce in Iran--in Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashhad and Yazd--during the era of al-Bahrani's prominence in Karbala? Unlike specialists in literature or theology, historians are often impatient with the idea of a "canon" of great authors (such as al-Bahrani and Behbahani). Even minor writers can, they insist, help us understand the history of mentalities. The standard conception of eighteenth century Shi'ism, as I hinted above, is challenged by the intellectual biography of Mohammad Mehdi Niraqi, among others. This scholar studied in middle age with both al-Bahrani and Behbahani, but never acquired their authority. Both Niraqi and his son Ahmad produced major works on ethics in the tradition of Miskawayh and Tusi, as well as philosophical and gnostic writings. The existence of this oeuvre, elaborated in Isfahan and Kashan, comes as a shock to anyone familiar with the standard

4 For Shaykh Yusof and his place in Eastern Arabian Shi'i tradition see Juan R. I. Cole, "Rival Empires of Trade and Imami Shi'ism in Eastern Arabia, 1300-1800," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987), pp. 196-98.

5 Juan R.I. Cole, "Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722-1780: the Akhbari-Usuli Controversy Reconsidered," *Iranian Studies* 18, 1 (1985), pp. 3-34; and Juan R. I. Cole, "'Indian Money' and the Shrine Cities of Iraq, 1786-1850," *Middle Eastern Studies* 22 (1986), pp. 461-480.

historiography on eighteenth century Iranian intellectual history, and the concerns of the Niraqis raise important questions. Has the demise of the philosophical high culture of early seventeenth century Isfahan been greatly exaggerated? Can a continuity of philosophical speculation be seen from the Safavid era, through the politically fragmented eighteenth century and right into the nineteenth century and modern times?

The second issue I will raise, about Niraqi's attitudes toward social groups, concerns the ideological aspect of his writing. I have already argued elsewhere that the techniques of social history can provide insight into the changing position of the clergy in the eighteenth century.⁶ In studying thinkers, however, it would be perverse to ignore their thought. We must acquire an understanding of these writers' modes of discourse, the internal dynamics that shaped their conclusions. The task of isolating ideological elements in clerical discourse, suggested by such disciplines as the sociology of knowledge and the social history of ideas, requires both a social and a semiotic analysis of the semantic content of words describing social groups. I will suggest that the Platonic conception of "faculties" in which philosophical ethics was grounded provided a model for depicting social groups. Advances on the two fronts of codes and context must be built up on the foundation of many individual studies, and this look at Niraqi is meant as a first step.

Finally, I would like to address the general question of the social and linguistic meaning of conflicts over the permissible range of religious thought. There is no denying that the late Safavid period witnessed a recurrent struggle within Twelver Shi'i thought, over the number of cultural codes upon which religious scholars could legitimately draw in establishing a discourse about God and in deriving legal judgments from scriptural texts. Literalists wished to restrict religious discourse to a single code, drawn unreflectively from the Qur'an and the oral reports of the Prophet and the Imams. Rationalists wanted to import Greek logical and philosophical systems, with which they could elaborate genres or disciplines such as dialectical theology, Aristotelian ethics, metaphysics, and the principles of jurisprudence; these codes, they thought, should coexist with and be interwoven with the scriptural ones. Mystics wished to employ, in addition, illuminationist and Sufi codes that would allow a more ecstatic sort of discourse about the believer's relationship to the divine. Beyond asking if many of these codes may not have survived among clerics in Isfahan long after the early seventeenth century, I also wish to pose the question of how to understand the social conflicts involved with the struggle over permissible codes. I will argue an analogy between speakers of a single language and their resentment toward the multilingual, on the one hand, and users of several cultural codes, on the other. Moreover, I will suggest a similarity between the School of Isfahan's mixing of several codes (Qur'anic, Neoplatonic, Peripatetic, Illuminationist, Sufi) and the tendency of bilinguals and multilinguals to engage in "code-switching" or the

6 See Cole, "Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran."

alternation between two or more languages, sometimes within a single sentence.⁷

The Cultural Ambience of Isfahan

Before considering his life and work, it is necessary to raise some questions about Niraqi's discourse community of 30 years--the clerical networks of post-Safavid Isfahan. What sort of religious ambience did Niraqi encounter in this city on his arrival from the small town of Niraq around 1730? Although Western scholars without access to the manuscript libraries of Iran and Iraq are still not in a good position to answer this question fully, a general impression can be achieved, even at second hand. Isfahan in the high Safavid period conjures up for historians of culture the School of Isfahan, a combination of rationalist theology, Avicennian philosophy, scholastic Sufism, and illuminationism exemplified during the first half of the seventeenth century by the work of Sadra Shirazi, Baha' ad-Din al-Amili, Mir Damad, and Mohsen Fayz Kashani. As Newman has recently demonstrated, moreover, the members of this cultural movement often had strong ties to the Safavid state and argued vigorously for an expansion of the role of the Imami clerics in standing proxy for the Hidden Imam.⁸

It is often argued, however, that late Safavid Iran witnessed an increasing influence from the literalist, scripturalist Akhbari school of jurisprudence, along with a suppression of Sufism and philosophy. Arjomand remarked that, "the impact of the culture of the mandarins of the clerical estate, *i.e.*, the philosophical tradition, on the outlook of the Shi'ite hierocracy did not prove lasting. In the subsequent generations, one was not to find mojtaheds who, like Baha'i and Mir Damad, were also gnostic philosophers."⁹ Momen has written that from the time of Shaykh al-Islam Mohammad Baqer Majlesi (d. 1699), "Sufism was divorced from Shi'ism and ceased to influence the stream of Shi'i development. Philosophy was also down-graded and ceased to be an important

7 See John J. Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), ch. 4, "Conversational Code-Switching."

8 For the School of Isfahan, see generally Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), pp. 145-151; Henry Corbin, *La Philosophie iranienne islamique aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1981); S. H. Nasr, "Spiritual Movements, Philosophy and Theology in the Safavid Period," in P. Jackson and L. Lockhart, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), esp. pp. 666-697; Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975); James W. Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Andrew Newman, "Towards a Reconsideration of the 'Isfahan School of Philosophy': Shaykh Baha'i and the Role of the Safavid 'Ulama'," *Studia Iranica* 15 (1986), pp. 165-199; Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *Baha' al-Din al-Amili and his Literary Anthologies* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1989).

9 Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, p. 145.

part of studies at the religious colleges."¹⁰ Momen says elsewhere of the school of Isfahan: "After being vigorously attacked by the orthodox ulama during the course of the 18th century, it began to re-emerge in the course of the 19th century."¹¹

Among the figures often mentioned as Akhbaris from the middle of the seventeenth century are Mohammad Taqi Majlesi the Elder in Isfahan, al-Hurr al-Amili of Mashhad, and Molla Mohammad Taher Najafi and, surprisingly, Mohsen Fayz Kashani in Qom.¹² Since most strict Akhbaris forbade the study of the rational sciences, including philosophy, philosophical theology, and the principles of jurisprudence, Akhbari dominance would have taken Safavid high culture in a new direction, away from the illuminationism and rationalism of the earlier School of Isfahan, and toward a literalist fundamentalism. In such an atmosphere, Momen suggests, the mammoth collection of oral reports from the Prophet and the Imams, *Bihār al-anwār*, was compiled by Shaykh al-Islam Mohammad Baqer Majlesi the Younger in the late seventeenth century.

Without wishing to deny the vitality of Akhbarism in some places among some scholars, I feel it is necessary to bring into question some of these assumptions. First of all, this argument rests on the biographies of a very few individuals. Second, it is surely necessary to distinguish between Qom, with its millenium-old emphasis on the study of oral reports, and more cosmopolitan cities like Isfahan. Moreover, one wonders how representative the scholars named were of local ideas. Mohammad Taher of Qom was intellectually formed in the conservative environment of Shi'i Iraq, and al-Hurr al-Amili came into Iran already an Akhbari from what is now southern Lebanon.

Another crucial observation is that Akhbarism simply was not a monolithic movement. The Akhbari scholar Mirza Mohammad Zaki Khan of nineteenth-century Lucknow pointed out that a middle path between strict, literalist Akhbarism and thorough-going, rationalist Usulism had been adopted by a number of scholars, beginning with Mohammad Taqi Majlesi (d. circa 1659), a Safavid Shaykh al-Islam and Friday prayer leader in Isfahan.¹³ A similar conclusion has been reached recently by Etan Kohlberg.¹⁴ Akhbari scholars could be divided into liberals, like Molla Mohsen Fayz, and conservatives such

10 Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 116; Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, pp. 151-59, presents a similar picture of "The Final Onslaught and Triumph of the Hierocracy under the Leadership of Majlisi."

11 Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, p. 218.

12 Etan Kohlberg, "Aspects of Akhbari Thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in Nehemia Levtzion and John Voll, eds., *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), pp. 133-160.

13 Mirza Mohammad Zaki Khan Akhbari, "Majmū'eh-ye rasā'el-e taḥqīq-e maslak-e akhbāriyyin va uṣūliyyin," Lucknow, Nasiriyyah Library, Usul al-Fiqh Shi'ah, Persian MS. 28, foll. 4b-5a.

14 Kohlberg, "Aspects of Akhbari Thought," especially pp. 136-146.

as Mohammad Taher Qommi. The liberals were often mystics, or even belonged to Sufi orders. They advocated the use of opinion (*ra'y*) in interpreting the Law. They recognized the Qur'an as an independent source of law in addition to the oral reports of the Prophet and the Imams. And they argued for the need of laymen to follow (*taqlid*) the rulings of trained jurists. Liberal Akhbaris were just as open to the study of philosophy and theosophy as were Usulis. Only the strictly conservative Akhbaris rejected mysticism and the rational sciences altogether.

Isfahan cannot be shown to be dominated by conservative literalists in the late Safavid period. Mohammad Taqi Majlesi the Elder can only in a very marginal sense be considered an Akhbari, and he certainly was not a conservative one.¹⁵ He gained a reputation as the follower of the literalist Akhbari Mohammad Amin Astarabadi largely because of a casual remark in a book written in 1655 not long before his death, showing appreciation for the work of Astarabadi. It is worthwhile quoting the passage at length. Majlesi the Elder explains that the Imams practiced pious dissimulation, so that oral reports transmitted from them cannot always be taken at face value. Their close companions knew which reports reflected dissimulation and which were true, but because of persecution this knowledge was lost by later generations, as were many books of oral reports. In the end, only a few such books survived, largely containing oral reports transmitted by only one believer in each early generation (it was preferable that a report be shown to have been transmitted by more than one source, so reinforcing the likelihood of its accuracy). Heretical schools arose among the Twelvers, and the ability to distinguish among oral reports disappeared. He continues,

Disputes arose among the Shi'is, and each practiced according to his own conclusions (*yafi*) from the Qur'an and hadith, and followers emulated them. Then about thirty years ago the great and erudite scholar Mohammad Amin Astarabadi began studying and comparing the oral reports from the sinless Imams, and denouncing the use of individual opinion and analogy. He knew the path of the companions of the sinless Imams, writing the *Favā'id-i madaniyyeh* and sending it to this land. Most of the people of Najaf and the exalted shrine cities thought well of his approach, and they had recourse to the oral reports. The truth is, most of what Mawlana Mohammad Amin said is correct.¹⁶

Akhbari apologists always excerpted just this much from the book when claiming Majlesi the Elder as one of their own. But let us quote the rest of the passage, which gives a much different final impression:

15 For Majlesi the Elder see Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannāt*, vol. 2, pp. 118-23; and Said Amir Arjomand, "Religious Extremism (*Ghuluww*), Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran: 1501-1722," *Journal of Asian History* 15 (1981), pp. 24-28.

16 Mohammad Taqi Majlesi, *Lavāmi'-e šāhibqirāni*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Baradaran-i 'Ilmi, 1963), pp. 37-38.

In sum, my own approach is a middle course between extremes, and I have demonstrated this approach gradually in my *Rawdat al-muttaqin*, and, God willing, I will also recall it to mind in the course of this commentary. Its essence is that it is permissible to act according to the conclusions reached by someone who knows the favored path of the People of the House through assiduous study of their sayings, and who can reconcile these, and who is upright--or rather, has given up this world. Indeed, it is incumbent that the layperson act according to the conclusions of such a one. For under these circumstances, they have not merely acted according to his words, but have acted according to the words of God, his Messenger, and the sinless Imams.¹⁷

Majlesi the Elder, in short, finally reached the conclusion that laypersons must emulate a knowledgeable cleric, a position held by Usulis as well as by liberal Akhbaris such as Molla Mohsen Fayz. Conservative Akhbaris such as Astarabadi, it must be emphasized, rejected the requirement of such emulation, saying that all Twelvers should emulate the Imams. Majlesi the Elder was also clearly committed to a rational science of oral reports involving the weighting of some against others, another procedure rejected by strict Akhbaris. Mohammad Taqi Majlesi emphasizes that he follows a "middle way," suggesting no strong allegiance to either the Usuli or Akhbari schools.

Moreover, both Majlesi the Elder and his son Mohammad Baqer wrote on rationalist subjects like dialectical theology, and so cannot be categorized with strict Akhbaris such as al-Hurr al-Amili who forbade such subjects. The same holds, of course, in regard to Molla Mohsen Fayz, who, whatever his approach to legal interpretation, was no scriptural literalist in any other area of culture. Mohammad Baqer Majlesi, it is true, denounced the school of Isfahan and persecuted both Sufi brotherhoods and intellectuals who took their inspiration from Sufi gnosis (*'irfān*). But despite his prominence and power, Majlesi the Younger hardly controlled religious culture in Isfahan. It seems unlikely that such witch-hunting continued after his death in 1699.

Not all clerical Shi'i writers have agreed with the generalizations about universally increasing Akhbari dominance in the late seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century. An Arab Imami, Yusuf Muhammad Amr, has argued that although an Akhbari movement dominated Karbala in this period, Najaf partially escaped Akhbari influence, and Isfahan remained almost untouched by it, a majority of scholars there steadfastly adhering to Usulism. Henry Corbin has also discussed rationalist thinkers of the early eighteenth century in Isfahan and elsewhere in Iran, such as Fazel-e Hindi, an Avicennian who was killed in Isfahan in 1722; Molla Na'ima Taleqani (d. after 1739), a theosopher who

17 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

survived the siege of Isfahan but then emigrated to Qom; and the philosopher Molla Abd ar-Rahman Damavandi (d. circa 1737).¹⁸

A sense of the breadth and sophistication with which scholars pursued the rational sciences, including the Usuli principles of jurisprudence, in the last decades of Shah Sultan-Hoseyn's Isfahan can also be gained from the list of works that Mohammad Ali Hazin Gilani (circa 1691-1767) wrote.¹⁹ Gilani was no outsider to the clerical and royal establishment, but a prominent young member of Isfahani society with strong links to the shah's court by the time he was in his twenties. An advocate of the Usuli school of jurisprudence, he defended the principle of *ijtihad*, or the derivation of Islamic law through the use of applied reason. He did, however, criticize too extensive a use of analogy in law (most Usulis forbade it where it was not mandated by the scriptural text). He also wrote on commonplace subjects such as ritual law and oral reports. But beyond such concerns, expected of a Twelver cleric, he commented on medieval works by the philosopher Avicenna and the illuminationist Suhrawardi, defended the Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi to his detractors in Karbala, and wrote on the concordance of philosophy with the Islamic revelation. He had things to say about geometry and Aristotelian physics (as had his father, Abu Taleb Gilani), and about al-Kindi's work on psychology in the Greek tradition. He appears to have recognized the differences between Neoplatonism and the peripatetics, and attempted to reconcile them. He wrote a book of advice to the shah in the "Mirror for Princes" vein. Nor was Hazin's vast erudition limited to Islam and the Greco-Islamic philosophical tradition. He described Zoroastrian ideas on the beginning of the world, discussed prophecies of Mohammad in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, and refuted the Christian notion of persons in God. He also authored four divans of poetry, and, after his flight to India in the 1730s, lived in Delhi and ultimately settled in the Hindu pilgrimage city of Banaras. Since in India he concentrated on poetry, many of the religious works mentioned above appear to have been composed between 1715 and 1734, during Hazin's Iran period.

Hazin may not have been a typical late Safavid thinker, but he and the thinkers Corbin studied represented at the very least an important, continuing intellectual tradition in the capital. It seems clear, then, that late Safavid Isfahan, a wealthy and populous city of around a quarter-of-a-million inhabitants, supported a cosmopolitan religious and intellectual establishment, wherein thinkers supported by the court became competent in a wide range of cultural codes in addition to the transmitted sciences of scripturalist Islam. They studied and wrote on peripatetic, neoplatonic, illuminationist, and Sufi themes, exhibiting, in addition, an interest in Avicennian science and medicine.

18 Yusuf Muhammad Amr, *al-Madkhal ilā usūl al-fiqh al-ja'fari* (Beirut: Dar az-Zahra', 1981), pp. 161-166; Corbin, *La Philosophie iranienne islamique*, pp. 300-393. Cf. Nasr, "Spirituality," pp. 695-96 for "The later hakims of the Safavid period."

19 Mohammad Ali Kashmiri, *Nujūm as-samā'* (Lucknow: Matba'-e Ja'fari, 1302/1884-85), pp. 286-91.

The Life and Works of Niraqi

Niraqi, on arriving in Isfahan around 1730, began studying with scholars whose interests sound remarkably like those of Hazin. Niraqi's favorite teacher, the master of philosophy and rationalist theology Esma'il Khaju'i, lived through the Afghan siege of Isfahan in 1722. Unlike many Isfahani ulama who fled the capital for the shrine cities of Iraq or for the bejewelled courts of India, Khaju'i remained in a devastated Isfahan until his death in circa 1759. Niraqi appears to have remained there with him, as well. Among his other teachers were Shaykh Mohammad Mehdi Harandi and Shaykh Mohammad, son of the Avicennian physician Hakim Mohammad Zaman. Both were masters of the philosophical sciences (*hikmah*), and Niraqi's son singled them out along with Khaju'i as the most important of his Isfahan-era teachers.²⁰

Unfortunately, I have been unable to ascertain in what seminaries Niraqi studied or taught, or anything about his institutional connections. The city's institutions certainly were disrupted in the eighteenth century. Isfahan probably declined from a population of 250,000 or so in 1720 to only 20,000 in the aftermath of the Afghan siege and conquest of 1722.²¹ But, as I have noted elsewhere, a certain amount of continuity can nevertheless be perceived from the Safavid period, and Isfahanis often made their peace with the short-lived conquerors who succeeded one another so rapidly, so that their city's population gradually grew to some 50,000 by the end of the century. A branch of the Majlesi family continued to provide contenders for the post of Friday prayer leader, for instance. And one cannot assume that all the wealth of the landed clerics was usurped. Nader Shah himself made some use of prominent Isfahani clerics, appointing Mohammad Baqer Hezarjaribi (d. 1790) to an official judgeship, and the emperor was said to have shown great respect to Khaju'i himself. One suspects that patronage formed one element of such "respect."²²

Seminaries, then, continued to exist, though perhaps reduced in number and student and faculty population by ninety percent, like everything else in the former capital. The ten percent were able, nevertheless, to carry on a fairly lively intellectual life. Religious studies went on, and Isfahani relatives of oral reports from the Prophet and the Imams bore special prestige in that many of them could trace their transmission of these reports through the widely respected Mohammad Baqer Majlesi. On the other hand, despite the assertions of Arjomand and Momen quoted above, scholars continued to cultivate the old Isfahani specialties of the philosophical sciences, theosophy, theology, and other

20 al-Mozaffar, "Hayât al-mu'allif," introduction to Niraqi, *Jâmi' as-sa'âdat*, vol. 1, p. 6.

21 Population estimates given in Perry, *Karim Khan Zand*, p. 238.

22 For Khaju'i's biography, see Khvansari, *Rawdat al-jannât*, vol. 1, pp. 114-19; for Hezarjaribi, see Mohammad Ali Mu'allim Habibabadi, *Makârim al-âthâr dar ahvâl-e rijâl-e dowreh-ye qâjâr*, 2 vols. (Isfahan: Matba'-e Mohammadi, 1958), vol. 1, pp. 235-39; for some of the points made about continuity see also Cole, "Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran," pp. 7-9, 17.

rationalist branches of knowledge. Sufi mysticism left its mark even on the religious establishment, influencing at least one major leader of Friday prayers. One of Khaju'i's students, Molla Mehrab, was notorious for his belief in the Sufi doctrine of the oneness of being, considered heretical by many legalist clergy, and he had to hide his identity when he visited the conservative shrine cities.²³

A modern biographer has referred to Niraqi as a "self-made man" (*'eṣāmī*), which appears to mean that he was a first-generation cleric rather than deriving from an old family of divines.²⁴ His father, Abu Dharr, served as a minor functionary of the Safavid state in the Kashan district of west-central Iran, wherein was located the family's ancestral home, the village of Niraq. We do not know when Mohammad Mehdi Niraqi was born into this family of lower-level bureaucrats, but he probably came to Isfahan to study in 1730 or so, and was then, most likely, around fifteen years old. He formed a life-long affection for his teacher Esma'il Khaju'i, with whom he associated for thirty years. Khaju'i devoted much of his teaching effort to theosophical and philosophical works in the tradition of the School of Isfahan. Niraqi's stint studying religion was not unusual for members of the urban intermediate strata, and many sons of officials or merchants went to seminary for a few years before returning to a secular occupation. Occasionally, as in Niraqi's case, the avocation of religious study became a vocation.

During the period a young man spent poring over Qur'an commentaries and works of Islamic law he often lived in penury, even if from a wealthy background. The family expected the boy to subsist on the small stipends provided by the seminary or by teachers or patrons, or to eke out a meager living moonlighting as a copyist, apparently as a way of acquiring self-discipline. For those who wished to become professional clerics, such experiences provided "that sense of learning won through many ordeals which provided a background much admired in a successful Mollah."²⁵ The ideal of the starving student generated many anecdotes about hardship. It is said of Niraqi that he could not, as a student, afford oil or wax for his evening study and lucubrations. He therefore studied in the outhouse attached to his seminary, which was kept lighted all night. Too proud to let others know of his grinding poverty, he pretended, when anyone came into the outhouse, to be relieving himself. Or once a shopkeeper from whom he bought necessities took a liking to him and, noticing his frayed garments, bought him some clothes. Niraqi shortly thereafter returned them, explaining that he felt an unbearable sense of inferiority while wearing them,

23 The prestige of Isfahani relatives of tradition is apparent in the biography of Hezarjaribi, cited above; Mu'allim Habibabadi, *Makārim al-āthār*, vol. 1, pp. 127-29 also notes the accusations against Imam-Jom'eh Zayn al-Din Ali Khvansari Isfahani (d. 1787) that he had Sufi leanings; the information about Molla Mehrab comes from al-Mozaffar, "Hayāt al-mu'allif," vol. 1, p. 5.

24 al-Mozaffar, "Hayāt al-mu'allif," vol. 1, p. 3.

25 Roy Mottahedeh, *The Manile of the Prophet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), p. 96; pp. 94-98 sum up the vicissitudes of a seventeenth-century cleric's life, that of the Akhbari Ne'matu'llah al-Jaza'eri.

particularly when he came into the donor's shop.²⁶ The anecdotes about young Niraqi, preserved in family manuscripts, emphasize the contradictions in the apprenticeship of a divine, the humiliations he must bear even while approaching the exalted sacred texts, and Niraqi's own choice of private humiliation over the acceptance of charity from strangers.

Since one cannot imagine a good economic or social reason for this enforced immiseration of sons of the intermediate strata upon their enrollment in seminary, we might further consider cultural causes. Structural anthropologists argue that where humans believe in a divine other world distinct from the material world around them, they posit intermediaries between the two. They depict these intermediaries as having attributes of both dimensions, so that they can act as bridges.²⁷ These figures, whether prophets bothered by visions, or bleeding god-men, or monstrous mixtures of animal and human, stand at the intersection of two realities. The Twelver Shi'i clergy, in the absence of the hidden Imam, also functioned to some extent as intermediaries between the invisible and the visible world. By making crushing poverty part of their initiation into the world of religious learning, they emphasized their otherworldliness. This special appreciation of heroic poverty in youth had the undoubted benefit of not requiring a punishingly ascetic style of life in middle age.

Niraqi, then, left the impression on contemporaries of a serious-minded student, an ascetic, willing to cut himself off from the comfortable world of the intermediate strata for the sake of spiritual learning. A final anecdote underscores these attributes. While he was in Isfahan, his father, Abu Dharr, was killed in Kashan. His brothers wrote him, informing him of the death, and requesting his return home so that the inheritance could be divided up. Niraqi, however, had, in keeping with his ascetic bent and desire to be cut off from the mundane, begun refusing to read his mail. He deposited all letters, unopened, under his bed. The same fate befell a second entreaty from his brothers. Finally, in exasperation the brothers wrote to Esma'il Khaju'i, asking him to contact their unresponsive sibling for them. Khaju'i, fearful of delivering a shock to his student, told Niraqi that his father was wounded and he had best hurry home. Niraqi refused to take the hint, however, saying that he would nevertheless persevere in his studies in Isfahan. Khaju'i had no choice but to tell his stubborn pupil the whole truth about Abu Dharr's demise. Niraqi continued to insist on remaining in Isfahan. In the end, Khaju'i ordered Niraqi home to take care of his obligations. Niraqi obeyed, but hurried to Kashan, had the estate divided up, and set out on the back-breaking return trip to Isfahan the very next day after his arrival.²⁸

Again, the anecdote informs us of Niraqi's asceticism, his isolation from the practical world. Yet perhaps it tells us more than was intended. Niraqi's refusal

26 al-Mozaffar, "Hayât al-mu'allif," vol. 1, pp. 11-12.

27 Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), pp. 10-11.

28 al-Mozaffar, "Hayât al-mu'allif," vol. 1, pp. 12-13.

to go to what he thought was his father's sickbed seems to indicate that he lost little love on the old man, nor does he appear to have squandered much affection on his brothers. The change of family profession from bureaucrat to cleric, and of dwelling place from Kashan to Isfahan, would make even more sense if we conclude that Niraqi did not get along with his family. Of course, his disinterest in being present for the division of the estate does also indicate a genuine ascetic disregard for worldly goods.

Niraqi lived in Isfahan, teaching, researching and writing, for thirty years, keeping a close association with his mentor, Esma'il Khaju'i. It appears that he stayed with Khaju'i until his teacher's death in 1759, living through the savage repression by Nader Shah of the revolt of 1744, the fluctuating uncertainties of political rivalry after the emperor's assassination in 1747, and both of Karim Khan Zand's conquests of the city in the early 1750s. Around 1759 Niraqi went to Karbala, where he studied oral reports with the Akhbari revivalist Shaykh Yusof al-Bahrani. He was by then middle aged and an accomplished author in his own right, of course. Many ulama enjoyed studying the transmitted sciences, such as oral reports, with their peers, since that often gave them an additional expertise and enlarged or reinforced the chain of transmission that linked them to the Prophet and the Imams. On Aqa Mohammad Baqer Behbahani's arrival in Karbala in the early 1760s, Niraqi switched to studying with him. As an Isfahani rationalist, he would have found the Usuli Behbahani a more congenial teacher.

Mohammad Mehdi Niraqi then returned to his homeland, settling in Kashan for the last twenty-five years of his life. Karim Khan Zand had by now firmly integrated this city of 20,000 into his stable, increasingly prosperous state. In this center for the production of silk stuffs and carpets, Niraqi wrote a book in 1766 in Persian on commercial law for lay merchants, and in 1772 he wrote a work on the principles of jurisprudence entitled *Anis al-mojtahedin*. In Kashan he founded a center for religious study that survived him, and raised a son, Ahmad, who would become a prominent Kashani *mojtahed* or jurispudent in his own right. In 1793, Niraqi visited Najaf with his son Ahmad, dying there the following year and being buried in Imam Ali's shrine city. His son stayed on to study with the Usuli greats.²⁹

Let us consider Niraqi's 32 books.³⁰ He wrote seven on basic questions in Islamic law or fiqh, including matters of ritual purity, pilgrimage, prayer and commercial intercourse. He authored five works on principles of religion and principles of jurisprudence, approaching both in a rationalist manner and defending *ijtihad* and consensus in the interpretation of law. But his greatest output lay in the area of the philosophical sciences and metaphysics. He addressed issues in being (*wujūd*) and quiddity (*māhiyyah*), produced a

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6; Mu'allim Habibabadi, *Makārim al-āthār*, vol. 2, pp. 360-64; for Kashan's commodities, Perry, *Karim Khan*, p. 247.

³⁰ The most complete listing is given in al-Mozaffar, "Hayāt al-mu'allif," pp. 13-16.

commentary on Avicenna's metaphysical opus, *ash-Shifā'*, discussed the theosophy of illumination in his *al-Lam'at al-'arshiyyah*, wrote on natural sciences, composed two works on cosmology and cosmography, and authored a huge three-volume work on philosophical ethics, as well as writing on Greek geometry and on mathematics. He also contributed to the fields of imamology and elegy for the imams, collected his sermons into a manuscript, and wrote on rhetoric. In short, this Twelver contemporary of Shaykh Yusof al-Bahrani sounds more like an intellectual heir of Molla Sadra or Hazin Gilani than of Ibn Babuyeh and Mohammad Amin Astarabadi. Nor does Niraqi appear to have been unusual in his interests for an Isfahani thinker of the eighteenth century.

Niraqi's "Compendium of Happiness"

I will now attempt to use Niraqi's work on ethics to examine how he employed diverse cultural codes to create a religious vision of the moral life. I will also be interested in how Niraqi related even a highly abstract ethical system to his society. Niraqi's attitudes toward monarchs, other clerics, Sufi mystics, and the wealthy tell us much about his values. My use of this book for the purpose of eliciting the attitudes of a particular era, it might seem, could be faulted. It can be objected that Niraqi's work is not particularly original, that he based it largely on Molla Mohsen Fayz Kashani's reworking of al-Ghazali's *Ihyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) and other sources. I would meet this important objection in several ways. First, the idea that a work should transmit previous authorities rather than initiating an original argument is common to pre-print manuscript culture all over the world. Often, an author made a personal statement in what he chose to transmit and what he omitted. Moreover, few authors resisted the temptation to embellish, as well as to edit, the tradition, so that original thoughts often lie buried in works that are otherwise largely derivative. Second, literary theorists have stressed that even modern novelists largely rearrange and weave together literary codes already elaborated within their culture. All literature, they argue, consists of a scissors-and-paste job, the selective quotation of or reference to previous texts and conventions known to the audience, which they call "intertextuality." The contribution of most authors lies not in developing a new code or system, but in manipulating codes and genres already familiar to the audience.³¹ Of course, the use of unacknowledged and extensive quotation typical of medieval works constituted a rather heavy-handed approach to the manipulation of conventions. But the idea of the continuing operation of intertextuality in modern writing suggests that Niraqi's own extensive quotation of and reference to other sources need not render his writing without interest or suggest he was engaged in a wholly different enterprise than twentieth century writers on ethics. Finally, that the

31 For the text as an interwoven set of literary codes, see Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, tr. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974) and J. Kristeva, *Semeiotike* (Paris: Seuil, 1969). For useful discussions of these issues see Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 139, and the same author's *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), chapter 5.

intertextuality of Niraqi and his audience included ethics in the Ghazalian and philosophical modes is in itself an interesting datum.

The conventions of writing on ethics and polite culture (*adab*) demanded that the author begin with a statement of purpose. Niraqi, in his, says that since moral advice was scattered among many books, which were often inaccessible, he felt it necessary to assemble such advice in one place so that it might be more easily available to all. He continues, "I have therefore gathered together in this book the essence of that which was revealed in the true Revelation, along with the cream of that which the mystics (*ahl al-'irfān*) and philosophers expounded, in a manner such that the eyes of seekers are attracted."³² The book begins with an announcement of deliberate cultural code-switching, an art cultivated by practitioners of polite letters on the grounds that quotations from diverse genres were less likely to pall than uninterrupted expository prose. Literalist advocates of a scriptural monocode might find blasphemy in the juxtaposition of Qur'an verses and sayings of the Imams with ethical maxims drawn from Plato, Aristotle, Avicenna and Miskawayh, but rationalists such as Niraqi delighted in such diverse intertextuality, and thought their audience would, as well.

The solidly philosophical and theosophical basis of Niraqi's ethical system is demonstrated by his adherence to the doctrine of moral and intellectual perfection through the cognition of the realities of things. In the tradition of Avicenna and Miskawayh, the cultivation of the philosophical sciences was necessary, along with the curbing of extreme emotions and vices, for moral perfection. Niraqi explains that when the seeker loses his desire for material things altogether he is filled with divine knowledge (*al-ma'ārif al-ilāhiyyah*), as well as by ecstatic feelings of divine bliss. At this point the realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) of things take root in the believer's intellect. "When he has reached this goal, he is ready to attain the highest stage, the vicinity of the host on high, which is ineffable." (Jāmi', 1:68). Medieval Muslim authors, such as Miskawayh, identified this highest stage of human beings' moral evolution as the first angelic plane, and they referred to those few who attained it as divinized (*muta'allihūn*).³³ Niraqi keeps the general schema of the philosophers, wherein the cognition of universals plays a part in the salvation of the soul, leading the believer close to the divine.

Niraqi's beliefs about the power of Islamic and theosophical teachings to change character lead him to come down on the "nurture" side in the controversy over whether character is inherent or learned. He admits that some aspects of character, particularly the theoretical faculties, cannot be easily changed, and archly comments that quickness of mind cannot be altered, as is proven by some students. Because the study of ethics aims at improving character, upon which true life for human beings depends, Niraqi argues that this branch of knowledge is the most noble and the most beneficial of all. (Jāmi', 1:53-59).

32 Niraqi, *Jāmi' as-sa'ādat*, 1:34. Hereafter references to this work will be given in parentheses in the text.

33 Abu Ali Ahmad ibn Mohammad Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, ed. Constantine Zurayk (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1966), pp. 69-70, 169.

Niraqi organized his work in an original fashion, treating each vice or virtue according to the human faculty that generated it. He recognized the three Platonic faculties of the soul, as well as a fourth. These included the angelic intellectual faculty, the leonine irascible faculty, the beastly appetitive faculty, and the demonic faculty of cunning. Despite some pejorative adjectives, Niraqi recognized that each faculty produced virtues when controlled and made moderate, and vices when allowed to go to extremes. The dynamics of his ethical psychology do not, then, differ from the Greek tradition. He noted that the purpose of ethics is not to abolish any of these faculties, but to keep them to the mean, avoiding excess. The destruction of the irascible faculty, for instance, would have the unfortunate effect of making holy war or jihad against the infidels impossible. (Jāmi', 1:58, 61.)

Niraqi's approach to ethics stands within the philosophical tradition of Avicenna, Miskawayh, Tusi, Molla Mohsen Fayz and other Twelver thinkers who switched scriptural and Greek philosophical codes. He accepts Greek ideas about the psychology of vice and virtue and about the definition of virtue as a mean. He propounds the "scientific mysticism" of the Avicennian tradition, which sees the cognition of universals as a way of perfecting the soul. He cultivated the study of metaphysics and the natural sciences, which aids in this cognitive ability, not only for secular, but also for theosophical purposes.

Pride and Social Groups

Obviously, a short study such as the present one cannot aspire to analyze the whole of Niraqi's massive three-volume opus on ethics. But in keeping with my concerns both with the social history of ideas and with the elaboration of cultural codes, I will focus on the way in which he relates ethics to contemporary social groups and the place he gives to the study of ethics as a cultural code. Of course, many of his discussions of particular vices and virtues have an abstract purpose in identifying from which of the faculties they derive and how they arise from shifts on the spectrum of moderate to extreme. But he treats some vices more concretely, talking of the manner in which specific occupational groups fall liable to them. The best example here is pride or conceit (*ghurūr*). Here he follows in a general way the discussion of this issue by the seventeenth-century Akhbari, Molla Mohsen Fayz Kashani, in his reworking of al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'* entitled *al-Mahajjah al-baydā'*; but Niraqi's organization of the material and his emphases are often quite different.³⁴

The definition of such pride, or, literally, self-deception, is to think one is doing the right thing when one is really giving in to passions. This surrender to the lower impulses occurs because of two ethical errors. First, the soul believes that it is doing good, when it is not. Second, the soul gives in to its love of things pleasing to the appetitive and irascible faculties, such as high position, in the

34 Mohammad Mohsen Fayz Kashani, *al-Mahajjah al-baydā' fi tahdhib al-ihyā'*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-A'lami li'l-Matbu'at, 1983), vol. 6, pp. 291-357.

mistaken belief that they will result in an eternal reward. The first error is a disorder of the intellectual faculty, deriving from a misperception of evil as good. The second is a disorder of the appetitive and irascible faculties, in which they are allowed to go to extremes rather than being curbed. The opposite of pride is knowledge and self-denial (*zuhd*). (Jāmi', 3:3-4, 31).

Niraqi specifies seven groups of people who are especially prone to the sin of pride. The first consists of unbelievers or non-Muslims. Non-Muslims who attain great wealth often make the argument, he says, that their wealth is a sign of God's love for and pleasure with them. Niraqi energetically disputes this quasi-Calvinist doctrine. Rather, he argues, a vast accumulation of material goods signals abasement, since God protects his loved ones from the things of this world--just as a kind father forbids a sick child rich and tasty foods. The cure for this sort of pride, he concludes, is the realization that success in this world is a sign of abasement, whereas detachment from material things can help one receive divine grace and draw near to God. (Jāmi', 3:9-10.)

Even if Niraqi here is transmitting received ethical tradition rather than originating a new argument, his inclusion of this passage indicates that it possibly held special relevance for his own, contemporary society. He lived at a time, certainly, in which thousands of old, established Twelver families in the Isfahan district were displaced and reduced to penury. Although the Armenians of Julfa and other mercantile non-Muslim groups also suffered during the eighteenth century, the general downward mobility of Twelver families may have highlighted the existence among the Christians of at least some very wealthy individuals. Armenian merchants, after all, had a mercantile network that stretched from Isfahan into the Ottoman Empire and Europe, on the one hand, and into Bengal and points east, on the other. Niraqi perceived non-Muslims' persistence in unbelief as an example of overweening pride, and their ability to point to worldly success at a time of economic hardship for most Iranians only compounded their haughtiness. His repetition of this old argument is, perhaps, an attempt to justify the pious poverty into which so many Twelvers had fallen as a true sign of God's grace, and to stigmatize wealthy Christian merchants as having been forsaken by the Deity to disport themselves as they pleased. The ascetic, world-denying thrust of his comments suggests a Platonic code, but, as we shall see, Niraqi's discourse is more complex than that.

The second contingent of the prideful is supplied by corrupt believers. These hold that merely because of their faith God will forgive their misdeeds. Some may also have too much pride in their high station, for instance the Sayyeds or descendants of the Prophet who do not live up to their lineage. Niraqi insists that God loves the obedient and hates the rebellious, without regard to ancestry. Attempting to live on one's ancestor's righteousness, he remarks, is like trying to live on the food they ate. (Jāmi', 3:11-12.) Here, again, a dimension of social conflict appears to underlie this attribution of the vice of pride to Sayyeds in particular. Said Arjomand has demonstrated that the mojtaheds of Safavid Iran had had to struggle against the charismatic Sayyeds for leadership and control of

religious resources.³⁵ Niraqi, like Behbahani and several other major mojtaheds of the eighteenth century, made no claim to Sayyed status (as is witnessed in the preference for such titles as "Aqa" and "Molla," as opposed to "Mir"). Niraqi, as a first-generation cleric from a family of provincial Iranian bureaucrats, was clearly at a disadvantage within Isfahan's religious establishment in his competition with clerics from old ulama families of Sayyed background. The inclusion of this passage, echoing the traditions of the prophet about the criterion for prominence in Islam being piety rather than lineage, bolstered his own position.

The third group prone to pride is the religious scholars or people of knowledge. Niraqi follows Molla Mohsen Fayz in saying that one of their more common prideful practices is deliberately to restrict their range of knowledge for some worldly purpose. For instance, some study the rational sciences such as theology, but eschew philosophy, concentrating instead on dialectical debating techniques so that they can show off their sparring ability in gatherings. Some make the mistake of specializing in narrow preliminaries, such as grammar or logic or poetry, asserting haughtily that knowledge of the divine Law or philosophy depends on these skills. They remain unaware, Niraqi complains, that one should devote oneself only sparingly and as required to the means, focusing instead on the goal. Then there are the lawyers within the ulama, who restrict themselves to the art of commercial transactions in law and the judgment of court cases between litigants, exerting themselves only in handing down decisions. They neglect dogmatics and ethics, and perhaps even other issues in law such as ritual worship, and ignore their own hearts' need to acquire virtues. Some ulama very nearly achieve the roundedness necessary to virtue, but fail at the last moment. Some, for instance, master all the branches of the Islamic revelation except metaphysics (*al-'ilm al-ilāhi*) and ethics, failing to preserve themselves from sin both internally and externally. Some go further and master all the sciences, both rational and revelational, and outwardly obey the law, but inwardly neglect the attributes of the heart. Within these ulama, Niraqi laments, traces of the satanic remain about which they remain unaware. (Jāmi', 3:15.)

Niraqi's discussion of the foibles of the ulama is not very original, but it is worth briefly reviewing for what it tells us about the criticisms he thought worth preserving. Unlike Molla Mohsen Fayz, Niraqi discusses the faults of ulama under the heading of haughtiness or *ghurūr*. Aside from pridefully restricting the range of their religious culture, ulama fall into haughtiness in some other ways. Some prideful ulama secretly desire to become close to rulers and nobles, though outwardly they avoid doing so, because being seen as sycophants would detract from their station in the eyes of the common people. Hypocritically, despite the yearnings in their hearts, they then consider their own avoidance of the mighty to be the essence of piety. Prayer leaders often fall into pride. They think of themselves as those who spread and exalt the divine Word. But if someone enters the mosque who is more learned and pious than they, they are furious. They allow a sordid admixture of love for high position and

35 Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, pp. 144 ff.

leadership in their pious intentions. Niraqi thought it rare to see a prayer leader whose reason for leading prayers was simply a desire to draw near to God. (Jāmi', 3:19). Sermonizers form the fourth group of the supercilious. They are particularly given to false pride and hypocrisy. Some urge good qualities on people when they themselves possess fewer of them than ordinary Muslims. (Jāmi', 3:21-22.)

Not only the religious leaders, but also the followers could fall victim to pride. Worshipers sometimes went to extremes in worrying about ritual pollution, or fasted, prayed, and made the pilgrimage ostentatiously. (Jāmi', 3:23-25.) The penultimate group in this list of the chronically prideful are the self-proclaimed mystics or *mutaṣawwifāh* (as distinct from genuine mystics or '*urafā*'). These include wandering mendicants such as the qalandars, with their noisy horns and antinomian ways. Some self-proclaimed mystics accept the wrongfully gained wealth of tyrants and kings, justifying it casuistically by saying that all wealth ultimately belongs to God. They claim the highest ranks of divine knowledge and certainty, even going so far as to assert ability to perform miracles and reception of revelation (*wahy*) from God. They deride the ulama as veiled from discourse about the Deity, and lord it over the lay believers, whom they dismiss as hired labor. Some deliberately commit public sins in order to achieve "humility." Although some have genuinely begun a spiritual regimen of strict discipline, they do not complete the journey. Ignorant that God is hidden in seventy veils of light, they think they have arrived at the divine presence after piercing only one or two veils. Those who pretend to be mystics dress and act in the same manner as the true mystics, foolishly hoping that outward imitation might result in inward illumination. (Jāmi', 3:25-29.)

Finally, Niraqi closes his discussion of the prideful with a few words about the wealthy. Some of these build mosques, seminaries, Sufi convents, and bridges with illicitly gained wealth out of a desire to immortalize themselves rather than with any pious motive. They vainly hope thus to win the forgiveness of God. Another sort of prideful wealthy person only gives to the needy if he can make sure they know the source of munificence, so he can attain fame as a philanthropist. The stingy are also afflicted with a sort of pride, refusing to spend money on their families or on pious duties such as performing the pilgrimage. (Jāmi', 3:30-31.)

These passages, some original and some edited from Kashani, suggest that Niraqi supports an attitude of world-rejection. He often links desire for wealth and high position with hypocrisy. Indeed, he depicts the possession of great affluence in itself as a sign of debasement and God's abandonment. Christian merchants are misled by their wealth into the false and sinful conclusion that God loves and approves of them, and the Muslim wealthy are tempted to attempt to bribe God with philanthropy into forgetting their moral lapses. Nor do the powerful escape criticism. Niraqi uses "tyrants and kings" (*ḡalāmah wa salāṭīn*) with a parallelism that suggests he sees them as identical, and suggests that it is sinful to accept patronage from such tainted sources. The very temptation to become close to kings constitutes a major source of clerical hypocrisy. The powerful

Sayyeds, a caste of hereditary prominence in Muslim societies, does not escape his criticism for their assumption that piety can be had through lineage. Niraqi's ethics therefore have a built-in sociological bias against the values of the wealthy and powerful, for whom wealth and power are inherently good and signs of God's favor. Niraqi, as a middling sort of person, appears to be loading the dice against those who considered themselves his social betters.

Niraqi proves critical, moreover, of his peers in the religious professions as well, painting them as driven by petty jealousies and a desire for popular acclaim. He thinks very nearly all leaders of prayers afflicted by such vices, and discovers them in sermonizers as well. He also finds many of his colleagues insufferably narrow in their religious culture, yet convinced that they have mastered the essentials. He denigrates the self-proclaimed mystics, whether wandering mendicants or Sufi pirs who assert their own divinity and access to revelation. Even the worshippers who follow men of religion often fall victim to pride and hypocrisy.

Yet the portrait of Niraqi that emerges from these passages, as hostile to the wealthy and powerful (as well as to wealth and power), hypercritical of the ulama establishment, and anti-Sufi is something of a caricature. It must be tempered with many reservations. For instance, along with the image of the king as a grasping tyrant, many passages talk in a much more favorable manner about monarchs. Niraqi writes that "The most noble sort of justice is that of the king, which is also the best sort of politics." Elsewhere he observes that a man needs a king to protect him from rogues. (*Jāmi'*, 1:121-22, 2:364). He also provides a place for merchants and the wealthy in the scheme of things, saying that God inspires merchants with a desire for wealth in order to assure food supply, since this desire causes them to endure the hardships of travelling over difficult terrain with foodstuffs from regions of abundance to those of scarcity. The reprehensible aspect of desire for wealth is only charging usurious interest. (*Jāmi'*, 3:263.) For all his ascetic ardor, he does allow that a person needs at least a modest position in life. He cannot do without a servant to wait on him, a friend to help him, a king to protect him from the oppression of the wicked. He must therefore attain the sort of social position that will inspire loyalty in his servant, constancy in his friends, and a desire to defend him in his monarch. This sort of position is, like permissible wealth, a means to an end, not loved for its own sake. Niraqi observes that one keeps a toilet and a wife in one's house for the satisfying of needs, but one is hardly in passionate love with them for themselves. (*Jāmi'*, 2:364-65). In the same way, a certain amount of wealth and position are ethically allowable, but only as means. In the introduction to his book, Niraqi notes that the Islamic philosophers generally supported an Aristotelian position that virtue and happiness apply to the body as well as the soul, and concurs as long as such bodily comforts are seen as means rather than ends. (*Jāmi'*, 1:70-71.) Just incidentally, the analogy concerning wives speaks volumes for male conceptions of matrimony in eighteenth century Iran!

Niraqi proves in the end, then, to be an Aristotelian after all in his attitude toward wealth and this world. He depicts the ideal style of life as that of the

propertied intermediate strata. The poor masses have too little wealth and position to gain the sort of respect that allows a virtuous and rewarding life, whereas the truly rich and powerful are unduly tempted to see their treasures and authority as ends rather than means.

Elsewhere in his volume Niraqi gives a different picture of the ulama and mystics. He views envy, with its root cause of love of this world, as an affliction of almost all social orders and occupational categories. Every group envies its peers and competes with them. Niraqi sees society as a zero-sum game, in which a gain for any player comes at the expense of a loss for another. Any one person can acquire more money or a higher post only by depriving someone else of it. Such an economic and sociological theory is incorrect if applied to preindustrial societies indiscriminately, since economic growth certainly occurred and outpaced population increases in some eras and areas. But one suspects that eighteenth century Isfahan may well have approximated such a zero-sum society, given the economic dislocations caused by constant warfare and political instability.

In any case, Niraqi saw a contrast between most professions and religious scholarship. The next world, after all, is infinite and cannot be used up, not at all resembling a zero-sum game. Religious knowledge regarding the next world retains this remarkable inexhaustibility even if gained in this material world. One who loves the knowledge of God, his attributes and actions, will not envy someone else who also comes to know these things. For religious knowledge is not used up by many knowers. One object of knowledge can be known by a million knowers, and each is delighted that the others know it. Such religious knowledge is enriched, rather than diminished, by the fellowship of sharing. The ulama concerned with the next world, then, experience no envy. Their object of devotion has taken them out of the sordid zero-sum game played by the worldly. The only ulama who might experience envy are the ulama of this world, who employ their knowledge to seek wealth and high position, which lands them back in the zero-sum game. The mystic knowers (*al-'ārifin*) are free of envy. (Jāmi', 2:209-10.) I stress the identity of the true ulama with the true mystics, since Niraqi frequently employs mystical and gnostic codes. He speaks of the highest stage of passionate love (*'ishq*) for God as the beatific vision (a Sufi doctrine legalist Imam rejected), and talks about union (*ittiḥād*) with God, quoting Persian poetry. (Jāmi', 3:146.)

Moreover, some ulama who possess high position and wealth may nevertheless not be blameworthy. "Whoever achieves fame loses this world and the next, except for those whom God has made renowned in order to spread his religion, without any need to seek fame." (Jāmi', 2:360.) Again, the author appears to be making a distinction between those ulama mature enough to employ wealth and power as means to good ends, and those seduced by them as goals in themselves.

Niraqi's vision of religious institutional life, moreover, requires ulama to hold various offices and provide leadership. He believes in the necessity of holding

Friday congregational prayers even during the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, which in turn implies the post of Friday prayer leader in cities such as Isfahan, a powerful and visible religious office.³⁶ In a passage on the sin of rebelliousness (*al-baghy*) against the proper religious authorities, he says that Jews, Christians, and the Quraysh polytheists have all been consigned to eternal damnation because of their refusal to obey the Prophet and the Imams. Likewise, some Muslims (the Sunnis) have done wrong to other Muslims. Such rebelliousness, he prescribes, can be overcome by contemplating Qur'an verses and oral reports concerning the necessity of obeying God, the Prophet, the wielders of authority, and others, including the ulama and Islamic legal specialists (*fuqahā'*), who serve as the deputies (*nuwwāb*) of the Imams in the time of the Occultation. (*Jāmi'*, 1:401.) Thus, Niraqi reveals his belief in *taqlid*, or emulation of ulama by lay believers, a largely Usuli doctrine. Its social implication is, obviously, a leadership position for Usuli mojtaheds.

This survey of attitudes toward various social groups demonstrates Niraqi's edited system of ethics to have a clear set of social biases. The best of men are those ulama who master all the sciences of revelation and philosophy, cognizing within themselves the universals and so attaining an almost angelic state. Such persons will have only middling wealth and status, enough to avoid shame but not enough to be seduced by this world. Yet even within the ulama, some pridefully restrict themselves only to the transmitted sciences of the revelation (one suspects he means the conservative Akhbaris), and so deprive themselves of an ability to cognize the universals which can only come from the philosophical sciences. Even some rationalist ulama are seduced by this world into becoming little more than demagogues in desperate search of authority over and recognition from the people.

Aside from the ulama and the sermonizers, other social groups often fall short ethically, caught up in the zero-sum game of eighteenth century economic and political competition. Non-Muslims are afflicted with pride and rebellion. Even the Muslim rich fall into hypocrisy and the illusion that salvation can be had for a price. Muslim monarchs are often tyrants and despoilers (especially in the eighteenth century?). Sayyeds begin depending on their lineage for charisma rather than cultivating a personal sense of piety. Ordinary worshippers seek to be seen of men rather than of God. The ethical ideal of the God-realized scholar has a social location in the literate intermediate strata to which Niraqi belonged. His ethics are not as abstract as it first appeared. Yet, as I shall attempt to show below in my conclusion, such a surface reading of Niraqi's text does not clear up all the anomalies and seeming contradictions. We must seek further for the models by which he depicts social groups and the dynamics governing that depiction.

36 Niraqi, *Jāmi'*, vol. 3, p. 360; for the eighteenth century controversy in Twelver Shi'ism over the legitimacy of Friday prayers during the Occultation, see Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, chapter 4.

Conclusion

I hope I have laid to rest the myth of a narrow, literalist Akhbari culture dominating eighteenth century Iran before Behbahani's Usuli revival of the 1760s and 1770s. Some scholars of post-Safavid Isfahan, from Hazin Gilani to Esma'il Khaju'i and Mohammad Mehdi Niraqi, kept alive the cosmopolitan religious culture of the School of Isfahan throughout the eighteenth century. These polymaths excelled in every science from hadith-reports from the Prophet and Imams to Avicennian metaphysics, from Euclidean geometry to illuminationist mysticism. Contrary to the monochrome picture painted by Momen and Arjomand in the works cited above, the Isfahani and Kashani scenes appear to have been religiously diverse and intellectually rigorous. Philosophy (*hikmah*) was not dropped from the Isfahani seminaries' curriculum, and one does indeed find gnostic-rationalist mojtaheds on the pattern of Baha' ad-Din al-Amili, in the very persons of Hazin, Khaju'i, and Niraqi themselves.

Two final tasks, which I set myself at the outset, remain somewhat unfinished. First, Niraqi's attitude toward social groups, his ideological model if you will, remains a bit obscure because so many seeming contradictions remain in the way he depicts these groups. Second, I want to work out the social and linguistic meaning of the struggle between literalist Akhbaris and the rationalists a bit more rigorously. As to the issue of the depiction of social groups, we have to ask whether Niraqi simply contradicts himself. Does he say in one place that kings are usurping tyrants from whom gifts ought not to be accepted, and in another that a sovereign's justice is the most valued sort, and a believer must strive to gain the respect of his monarch so as to receive his protection? Does he condemn wealth and the wealthy in one breath and praise merchants for providing food in the next? Are prayer leaders almost universally venal and yet are they both good and necessary? Are ulama both exempt from the pettiness of the zero-sum gain and yet subject to abasement through false pride? Is high position a curse or a blessing for the religious scholar? Are mystics charlatans or the only persons close to the angels?

One resolution of these contradictions, some of which are only apparent, would be to blame the *adab* method of quoting and excerpting from previous authors. Since Miskawayh and al-Ghazali did not always see eye to eye, drawing on both in the same compendium would open the way to many contradictions. But this approach requires the conclusion that the compiler had no sense of consistency, and did not weed out major contradictions when choosing or paraphrasing passages from diverse past works. Moreover, by insisting that the work can never overcome the atomization of information implied in the method of selective quotation, this objection reduces the text and its message to incoherence. Yet Niraqi, a man trained in logic and philosophy, seems unlikely to have produced or been satisfied with an incoherent treatment of ethics.

Rather, I believe that behind the seeming contradictions in Niraqi's views of society and ethics lies a coherent model that for the most part performs in a

consistent manner. This model is the faculties of the soul themselves. Lévi-Strauss and others have long since established the tendency of human beings to select an arbitrary set of natural symbols to represent social distinctions, a phenomenon in primitive societies called totemism. Thus (very simply put) lions are to eagles as tribe A is to tribe B.³⁷ Sociologist Barry Schwartz has argued that such analogies between natural conditions and societal divisions are employed by modern societies, as well. In particular, he has pointed to the use of spatial conceptions of "high" and "low" drawn from the physical world to indicate social dominance and inferiority. For instance, the U. S. electorate has tended to elect tall men president, and working classes are called "lower classes." In this case, he asserts, spatial differentiations are being used as "totemic operators" with which to think about social distinctions.³⁸

I would argue that the faculties of the soul functioned for Niraqi, and perhaps others in his intellectual tradition, as totemic operators. Here the "nature" being drawn upon is human psychology as understood by the Greco-Islamic tradition, which they considered, despite its locus in humans, as no less a natural given than animal behavior. Moreover, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to see a genuinely totemic aura about these faculties. I want to draw attention once more to the adjectives by which Niraqi characterizes them. The intellect is angelic; the irascible faculty is leonine or predatory; the appetitive faculty is beastly (*bahimiyyah*; the word indicates quadrupeds, but its plural implies livestock or cattle); and the faculty of cunning is demonic. Here we have a symmetry in that the two extreme terms are represented by supernatural beings, angels and demons, whereas the two middle terms are represented by the natural animal categories, predators and livestock. These adjectives reinforce my argument that there is something totemic about the way Niraqi uses the faculties to explain social vices and virtues.

I find scattered evidence that particular groups of people, in Niraqi's view, exemplify the dominance of specific faculties. One difficulty here lies in the difference between the generally Platonic schema Niraqi inherits and transmits overtly, wherein the intellective faculty is associated with the king or philosopher, and the quite different schema Niraqi subconsciously projects out of the social conditions of his own place and time, wherein kings were seldom philosophers.³⁹ If one follows the clues given by Niraqi's use of adjectives, it becomes clear that kings are actually analogous to the irascible faculty, with its characteristics of attack and self-defense. Ulama are symbolized by the

37 See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), especially chapter 2, "The Logic of Totemic Classifications."

38 Barry Schwartz, *Vertical Classification: A Study in Structuralism and the Sociology of Knowledge* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), pp. 28-29, 36.

39 The overt statement Niraqi makes is that the intellective faculty is like a king (*malik*) or philosopher (*hakim*), the irascible faculty like a dog, the appetitive faculty like a pig, and the faculty of cunning like a demon; see Niraqi, *Jāmi'*, vol. 1, p. 63. Such language reinforces my general argument about the totemic nature of these categories.

intellective faculty. Merchants are associated with the appetitive faculty. Now, it must be remembered that the faculties' ethical evaluation is determined by a scale that includes two extremes and a mean betwixt them. Thus, a human being whose irascible faculty has gone to an extreme of deficiency would be a coward, whereas an extreme of excess would produce a tyrant. Normal human beings, who do not usurp others' rights but prudently defend their own, have conditioned their irascible faculties to moderation. The same dialectic of two extremes mediated by a mean appears to apply to the social groups Niraqi discusses. An atrophy of the irascible faculty would prevent the king from leading a just holy war, whereas its uncontrolled expression would turn him into a despot. When the king acts in moderation, just as in the case of the irascible faculty itself, he provides protection to others in society from the Hobbesian war of all against all. If one sees the irascible faculty, on the Aristotelian scale of extremes, as a totem for the king, then Niraqi's seeming penchant for self-contradiction when discussing this institution evaporates. Kings are weak or oppressive or good depending upon where they fall on the scale of extreme and moderation, just as is the faculty that symbolizes them. Figure 1 expresses this argument with extension to other major social groups discussed by Niraqi.

FIGURE 1

Social Group	Faculty	Symbol	Extreme of Deficiency	Extreme of Excess	Golden Mean
ulama	intellective	angel	narrow	demagogue	polymath
Sufis	intellective	angel	antinomian	claims revelation	theosopher
kings	irascible	predator	cowardice	tyranny	protector
merchants	appetitive	livestock	(laziness)	usury	provider
infidels	appetitive	livestock	(abasement)	false pride	convert

This attempt to systematize clues spread throughout Niraqi's book is, admittedly, not without problems. Sometimes he does not identify a social group in terms of a single faculty or attribute, and sometimes he gives only one extreme and the mean, without specifying the other extreme. Further, these social groups are made up of human individuals who possess all three faculties, which could easily complicate the analysis. But I maintain that Niraqi's discourse about these

groups as groups betrays a tendency to employ the faculties as totemic operators. Like the faculties themselves, no social group is inherently worthless. Rather, it can become virtuous if it avoids the two extremes and attains a mean. This task might require a profound change in identity--Niraqi makes it clear that he thinks infidels can only attain virtue by converting. Further, ulama who restrict themselves to the transmitted sciences are not cultivating their intellectual faculties as they would be in studying metaphysics and philosophical ethics. By definition, the strict Akhbari school commits a vice in failing to cultivate the intellectual faculty, and conservative Akhbaris are therefore deprived of the mystical gnosis that lifts the theosopher to the realm of the angels. The Sufis, likewise, go astray if they forsake the rational sciences for an ecstatic antinomianism. On the other hand, there is no difference between an Usuli mystic knower and a true Sufi.

In thinking about these three camps of Twelver men of the cloth--the Akhbaris, Usulis, and Sufis, I would like to pursue the analogy I mentioned in the introduction with monolinguality and multilinguality. Sociolinguists have noted that persons who speak only one language tend to show suspicion toward the bilingual and multilingual. Those who command more than one language or code clearly are either "not from around here" or have fallen under foreign influences. Moreover, those who are fluent in more than one language tend to engage in code-switching. We have all heard Iranian immigrants to the United States mixing English words into their Persian sentences and vice versa. Again, the monolingual person shows disdain for this practice of code-switching, denigrating it with epithets such as "Penglish" or, in another example, "Franglais." But code-switching has been shown to be a highly sophisticated practice, wherein borrowings are subconsciously gauged according to social context, rather than a random bastardization of the languages involved. Only someone who genuinely controls both languages can effortlessly (and sometimes unwittingly) move from one to the other in the midst of a sentence. Bilingual or multilingual speakers tend to switch codes only when conversing with another person who is bilingual. Thus, a French-educated Lebanese switches back and forth from Arabic to French with persons who have received a similar education. Code-switching can emphasize social solidarity among a group with a shared experience of bilinguality, an experience which helps to define them as an elite (as in the case of the French-educated Lebanese) or as a marginal group (as in the case of, say, gypsies).⁴⁰

The analogy I propose is between monolingual communities and multilingual ones, on the one hand, and between scriptural literalists and cosmopolitan rationalists or mystics, on the other. Just as a language is a code governed by a system called grammar, I am suggesting, so the various religious disciplines mentioned above form part of cultural codes. Thus, dialectical discourse constitutes a code generated by a basic system of synthetic principles, and this way of thinking when switched with the scriptural code makes dialectical theology or kalam possible. Again, peripatetic philosophy is feasible only with

40 Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*, especially chapters 3 and 4.

the adoption of a code of communication generated by a system of demonstrative logic. Mystical and illuminationist thought often required the recognition of a code generated by deliberate contradiction, a blurring of the conceptual boundaries recognized both in common-sense discourse and in highly rational disciplines.

The strict constructionists, such as the conservative Akhbaris in Twelver Shi'ism or the Hanbalis in Sunnism, acted as a monolingual group. They wished to restrict discourse to those genres that could be elaborated by a common-sense, literalist approach to scriptural texts. They formed a social group, recognized one another, studied with one another, and often even intermarried with one another's families. Their approach required the least rigorous intellectual training and the least imagination, and it promised a minimum of doubt or cognitive dissonance. The divine scripture could answer all questions about human behavior unambiguously, if only the right passage could be found and literally applied, Akhbaris argued. As users of only a single code, Akhbaris or scriptural literalists manifested great distrust of those scholars who learned and accepted another cultural system, such as dialectical or demonstrative logic. On the other hand, rationalists or Usulis, as a class of clerical intellectuals, valued the freedom and mental challenge the learning of further cultural codes could bestow upon them. In the Safavid period, of course, the learning of multiple codes and code-switching attained something of a zenith in theosophists such as Molla Sadra, who drew on dialectical, demonstrative and mystical systems, mixing them together with the scriptural code. Such an ability required unusual intelligence and a high degree of training, and so attracted elite intellectuals and some clerics. Niraqi clearly belongs in this tradition, and in his work on ethics he self-consciously states that his definitions of virtue and the good are intended to be general enough to reconcile the views of three groups of scholars: the people of theoretical knowledge (*ahl an-nazar*), the people of ecstatic states (*ahl al-kashf wa al-hāl*), and the people of literalism (*ahl az-ẓāhir*). These are obviously the philosophers, the Sufis and the scripturalists such as the Akhbaris. (Jāmi', 1:72.) The strict constructionists with their monocode, however, proved unreconciled and generally pilloried Molla Sadra and the theosophers in his tradition.

Thus, the advocacy of a single, scripturalist religious code can function as a social control mechanism. If an Akhbari such as Yusof al-Bahrani forbade the study of rationalist subjects such as philosophy and theology, the prohibition had to be policed. This gave ulama of the Akhbari school a platform to assert dominance over rationalist scholars, and, indeed, to stigmatize them as sinners. The conservative Akhbari ideology possessed the advantage of having a populist appeal, giving lay believers the right to make many decisions that Usulis said only elite mojtaheds were qualified to make. The Arab Shi'is in Karbala, with their ties to the local Arab populace, appear to have employed their monocode to place immigrant elite Iranian scholars at a disadvantage. Niraqi's life and works help demonstrate the continued popularity in Isfahan, however, of a multiple code for religious discourse. Admittedly, this intellectual tradition was elitist, but enough of an elite survived 1722 to make its continuance possible. The rationalist-gnostic thinkers of Isfahan excoriated Akhbaris with their single code

of discourse as narrow and stunted, prevented by their scripturalist pride from ascending, through the mastery of metaphysics and the philosophical sciences, into the realm of the angels. At any one time and place, these two sorts of discourse, based on a single code versus multiple codes, were taken up by social groups as elements of identity and as means of differentiating themselves and even dominating other groups. Arjomand suggested an ethnic difference between Arab mojtaheds in Iran and local Iranian clerical notables who adopted Akhbarism in the seventeenth century. But the situation was far more complex than that, with ethnic groups, social classes, and even generational cohorts alternately adopting one or the other sort of discourse for their social and intellectual purposes.

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