

selves innovators.

It is difficult to believe that during Shaykh Ahmad's lifetime he was considered the founder of a new school of thought within the Shī'ī framework. However, as time went on and the nature of his ideology received greater intellectual attention, a group of fundamentalist 'ulamā perceived a radical distinction between his views and the established doctrines of the Shī'a and increasingly differentiated themselves from the Shaykhīs. The Shaykhī school, then, gained more group solidarity as it developed historically, reacting as a group against the main body of the Shī'a when it encountered social and intellectual opposition.

Shaykh Ahmad states that his views were based on understanding and knowledge derived, in dreams, from communications with the imāms; that he received the Truth from them; and that whatever he learned was in accordance with the Traditions of the imāms.<sup>62</sup> He acknowledges himself to be in opposition to the leading philosophers (ḥukamā) and theologians (mutakallimīn) on most theological questions, however, he asserts that his doctrinal positions are rooted in, and fundamentally in accordance with, the Traditions which derive this authority from the imāms. Shaykh Ahmad believed that it was impossible to name a Tradition that was against his own sayings. Therefore, since the majority of the philosophers' and theologians' views were in disagreement with the views of Shaykh Ahmad, they were consequently in disagreement with the Traditions of the imāms. He goes

on to say that the majority of the theologians and philosophers do not know the true meaning of the sayings of the imāms, which they interpret in a way contrary to the intent of the imāms.<sup>63</sup> Although he asserts that the main source of his knowledge and understanding is his dreams, he endeavors to base his understanding in the Qur'ān and the Traditions.<sup>64</sup> The combination of these two sources is supported by personal reasoning.

To clarify Shaykh Ahmad's approach, Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, in the Dalīl al-Mutahayyirīn, states that the source of Shaykh Ahmad's knowledge was not only his dreams, but the Qur'ān, Sunna, and Traditions of the imāms as well. In addition to these sources, Shaykh Ahmad used his intellect and personal reasoning. Sayyid Kāẓim points out that Shaykh Ahmad has applied both the external reasoning and its internal meaning.<sup>65</sup> To distinguish between the Shaykhīs and the philosophers, Sayyid Kāẓim states that philosophers use the intellect (reasoning) in discussing theological problems, whether or not the result is in accordance with the Sharī'a. In contrast, we (the Shaykhīs), he states, are not among those who rely only upon intellect. We consider the intellect as one tool, then we consider the clear (muḥkamāt) verses of the Qur'ān if they are in agreement with our rational reasoning. Then we consider the Traditions, that is, only the musallam (indisputable), mashhūr (well-known, evident) and ghayr mutashābih (unambiguous) Traditions, and not all of the Traditions, if they are in agreement with

rational reasoning and the Book. Then we consider the Madhhab,<sup>66</sup> if it is in agreement with the three others. Then we consider the law of the universe (al-āyāt al-murattaba fi al-āfāq wa al-anfus)<sup>67</sup> as the fifth tool to reach to the Truth.<sup>68</sup>

Sayyid Kāẓim believes that while reason alone is insufficient for establishing any regulation, if the content of a weak Tradition, weak either because of its text or its chain of narrators, is not in contradiction with the Book, Sunna, and Ijmā', then reasoning can be the arbiter of the validity of such a Tradition.<sup>69</sup>

Regarding the validity of Traditions, Sayyid Kāẓim believes that there are two kinds of mutawātir<sup>70</sup> (successive) Traditions: al-mutawātirāt al-ma'nawīya (spiritually successive; that is, relating to the sense of import of a Tradition as opposed to literal Traditions) and al-mutawātirāt al-lafẓīya (literally successive). The spiritually successive Traditions are undoubtedly reliable, but the literally successive Traditions, although on the authority of the imāms, are not reliable because of the possibility that the imām had practiced dissimulation (taqīya)<sup>71</sup> for himself or for his community.<sup>72</sup>

From the Shaykhī point of view, the Uṣūlīs' approach towards jurisprudential problems is justified. According to Sayyid Kāẓim, the Book, Sunna, Ijmā', and Reasoning (or Book, Ḥadīth, Sunna, and Reasoning)<sup>73</sup> are the legislative sources.<sup>74</sup> But the Shaykhīs, unlike the Akhbārīs, do not

believe that the whole body of Traditions are substantially valid. Traditions, however, are undoubtedly valid as secondary support.<sup>75</sup>

On the basis of these established methods for reaching the Truth, it is evident that Shaykh Aḥmad was neither an Akhbārī nor an Uṣūlī, although he made use of the methods of the two groups. Shīrvānī rightly points out that Shaykh Aḥmad was an 'arīf (gnostic, saint) among the 'ulamā and an 'ālim among the 'urafā.<sup>76</sup>

Sayyid Kāẓim appreciates the approach of those Shī'ī 'ulamā through the centuries who were not merely concerned with the superficial aspects of law, but were illumined by an inspiration which came to them through their piety. Sayyid Kāẓim gives the names of some of them: Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Nu'mān Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭosī (d. 460/1067), Ḥasan b. Sadīd al-Dīn 'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325), Muḥammad b. Makkī (known as Shahīd al-Thānī) (d. 966/1558), and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī (d. 993/1585).

Sayyid Kāẓim regards his teacher, Shaykh Aḥmad, as the man who exposed the innovations of the Ṣūfīs and pointed out the misunderstandings of the theologians. Sayyid Kāẓim believes that Shaykh Aḥmad followed in the path of the Prophet and glorified the significance of the station of the imāms.<sup>78</sup>

For Sayyid Kāẓim, the 'ulamā are the deputies of the imāms among the people and, in the absence of the Ḥujjat

Shaykh Ahmad's manuscripts in the libraries of Iraq and Tehrān University.

The author of the Fihrist has categorized the 132 works of Shaykh Ahmad into nine chapters according to the main subject of the work:

1. Works on divine theology and virtues
2. Works on doctrines and refutation of his opponents' views
3. Preaching and mysticism
4. Works on principles of fiqh
5. Works on fiqh
6. Commentaries on the Qur'ān and Traditions
7. Works on philosophy and practical wisdom
8. Works on literature
9. Other works<sup>84</sup>

A glance at Shaykh Ahmad's works shows that the majority were written in response to the religious, theological, and philosophical questions of his students, followers, other scholars, rulers, and other individuals whose identity is not known. These works of reply usually have as titles the name of the questioner. Thus the work entitled Risāla-i Bahrānīya was composed in response to the questions of Sayyid Ḥusayn b. Sayyid 'Abd al-Qādir Bahrānī. In such work, Shaykh Ahmad answered varied questions in different fields of Islamic sciences. Some questioners asked him up to seventy different questions. As a result, very rarely is a work devoted to one specific subject.

Since often people asked him the same question, it is not unusual to encounter the same response in several works.

Shaykh Ahmad also wrote commentaries, and it was for this that he became best known. Although he did not write a commentary on the entire Qur'ān, he did write them on a number of Quranic verses. He also wrote commentaries on several Traditions attributed to the Prophet and the imāms. Of the latter, the Sharḥ al-Ziyāra is the most important.

Shaykh Ahmad was the leading nineteenth century religious commentator on the works of Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640), his commentaries on the Mashā'ir and the 'Arshīya being of special importance. Shaykh Ahmad also wrote commentaries on the Risāla-i 'Ilmīya of Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ (d. 1091/1680) and the Tabṣirat al-Muta'allimīn of Ḥasan b. Sadīd al-Dīn 'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325). Shaykh Ahmad also wrote commentaries on some of his own earlier works: for example, his Sharḥ-i Fawā'id was a commentary on his earlier work, the Fawā'id.

The majority of Shaykh Ahmad's works are undated; of those works which do bear a date, is not clear whether the date refers to the work's composition or its copying at a later time. Furthermore, the place of composition is usually not stated. Therefore, a chronological arrangement of his works, which could have shed light on his life and the development of his ideas, is impossible. The earliest date on a work of Shaykh Ahmad's is 1197/1782. Written at the request of Shaykh Mūsā b. Muḥammad Ṣā'igh, this work is

(Proof, i.e., the Hidden Imām), the interpreters of the word of God. People are divided into two groups: the muqallids (imitators) and the mujtahids (leaders, strivers),<sup>79</sup> but ijtihād is not an absolute necessity for the community because it is against the Traditions of the imāms, and the text of the Qur'ān does not indicate the necessity of such an institution. He says that much knowledge is required to reach the rank of ijtihād and that very few people have achieved it.<sup>80</sup>

#### The Works of Shaykh Aḥmad

In nearly fifty years of scholarly activity, Shaykh Aḥmad produced an extensive body of works devoted to questions in all areas of Islamic studies. Indeed, he was one of the most prolific authors of his time. The study of his works, his approach, his sources, the influence upon him of his predecessors, and his intellectual contribution to Islamic thought in general and to the religious attitude of the Persians in particular, is an enormous task which is yet to be undertaken.

Abū al-Qāsim Ibrāhīmī, the sixth leader of the school, devoted the second volume of the Fihrist to the works of Shaykh Aḥmad and other leaders of the Shaykhī school. In the first chapter of this volume he provides information on the length, place, and date of publication, number of chapters, and the name of the questioner for each work. He

describes 132 works<sup>81</sup> but does not comment on their quality. In the introduction to this volume, Ibrāhīmī gives the sources of information. He mentions four lists,<sup>82</sup> which are:

1. A list arranged by Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī with a short description of each work. Some of the works mentioned in this list are not extant.

2. A lengthy list of the works of Shaykh Aḥmad and other leaders of the Shaykhī school prepared by 'Abd al-Majīd Fāḥiqī and including the number of lines, the questions, and brief answers given to the questions posed in each work.

3. A short list of the works of the first four leaders of the school, provided by an unknown author, which is used as the foundation for the information in the Fihrist.

4. A list of the works of the Shaykh prepared by Muḥammad Ṭāhir Khān, the author of a treatise on the life of Shaykh Aḥmad. Bibliographical information in this treatise is basically derived from the list of Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī.

Ibrāhīmī has used these four lists as primary sources for his list of Shaykh Aḥmad's works in the Fihrist. Therefore, the Fihrist contains the most comprehensive list of the works of Shaykh Aḥmad, although it does not go beyond providing bibliographical information on each work.

In addition to the four sources given above and the Fihrist, the booklet Fihrist Taṣānīf al-'Allāma al-Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, by Riyāḍ Ṭāhir,<sup>83</sup> contains a brief biography of Shaykh Aḥmad followed by a list of 104 of his works, as well as references to the location of some of

a short treatise of twenty-six lines on the birth and advent of the expected Qā'im, in curious language.<sup>85</sup> The last dated work of Shaykh Aḥmad is a treatise dated 8 Sha'bān 1239/1823, which responds to the questions of Shaykh Ya'qūb b. Ḥājj Qāsim Shīrvānī and in which Shaykh Aḥmad elaborated previous statements on matter and form.<sup>86</sup>

The language of Shaykh Aḥmad is complicated by technical terms, allegorical expressions, and extensive gnostic terminology. This was probably one reason why Shaykh Aḥmad himself, his successors, and many others after them found it necessary to write explanations on his works.

Shaykh Aḥmad wrote some works for the intellectual elite (*khawāṣṣ*), and others for laymen. Those works which he wrote for the elite have a rather allegorical and ambiguous tone, whereas those he wrote for a general audience are more straightforward and, in content, closer to common beliefs. Therefore, since the tone of each of Shaykh Aḥmad's works depended upon the audience for which the work was intended, a great deal of familiarity with the circumstances under which a work was written is required in order to come to a solid and mature understanding of his doctrines.

The extensive number of Shaykh Aḥmad's works does not permit providing a sketch of each work here. The topics he discusses are also too numerous to fully list. Hence, only a cursive examination of his works which incorporate the distinguishing features of his thought is attempted.

### Sharḥ al-Ziyārat al-Jāmi'a

This work is a commentary on the Ziyārat al-Jāmi'a written at the request of Sayyid Ḥasan b. Sayyid Qāsim al-Ḥusaynī al-Ishkavarī al-Jīlānī in 1230/1814. The Ziyārat al-Jāmi'a is a prayer of visitation of the holy shrines of the imāms, related on the authority of Imām 'Alī b. Muḥammad Naqī (the Tenth Imām, known as Imām al-Hādī) (d. 254/868) and is recorded by Ibn Bābawayh (Shaykh Ṣadūq)<sup>87</sup> and Shaykh Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭosī.<sup>88</sup> The prayer is well known among the Shī'a, and several Shī'i scholars have written commentaries on it.<sup>89</sup>

In the Sharḥ al-Ziyāra, Shaykh Aḥmad quotes the text of the prayer phrase by phrase, gives the meaning of each phrase, and then discusses its theological and religious aspects.

Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī began a commentary on the Sharḥ al-Ziyāra, but as he himself states, he realized that he was unqualified for the task and therefore left his commentary unfinished.<sup>90</sup> Sayyid Kāẓim states that Shaykh Aḥmad was inspired and directed by the imāms while he wrote the Sharḥ. According to Sayyid Kāẓim, Shaykh Aḥmad revealed some of the secret and esoteric nature of the prayer and brought together in this work the ẓāhir (external), i.e., sharī'a (religion) and the bāṭin (internal), i.e., ḥaqīqa (reality).<sup>91</sup> An unpublished abridgment of this book was made by Mīr Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥā'irī Shahrestānī (d. 1315/1897), entitled Talwīḥ al-Ishāra fī Talkhīṣ Sharḥ al-Ziyāra.<sup>92</sup>

The Sharḥ al-Ziyāra of Shaykh Aḥmad is a collection of the most important theological problems in Shī'ī thought. The "Ziyāra" itself is a master work in expressing the status of the imāms and Shaykh Aḥmad explains its status as such. The Sharḥ al-Ziyāra was published in 1267/1850 and in 1276/1859 in lithography in Tabrīz.

#### Sharḥ Tabṣira

One of the earliest of Shaykh Aḥmad's works, this commentary on the Tabṣirat al-Muta'allimīn fī Aḥkām al-Dīn, a well-known work of fiqh by 'Allāma al-Ḥillī,<sup>94</sup> is the treatise Shaykh Aḥmad presented to Baḥr al-'Ulūm and for which he received his first ijāza.<sup>93</sup>

#### Sharḥ 'ala al-Risālat al-'Ilmīya

The Risālat al-'Ilm is a theological treatise by Fayḍ Kāshānī on the knowledge of God. Shaykh Aḥmad wrote a commentary on this work at the request of Mīrzā Bāqir Nawwāb<sup>95</sup> in Kermānshāh in 1230/1814.<sup>96</sup> This Sharḥ was published in the Jawāmi' al-Kilām.<sup>97</sup>

#### Sharḥ al-Mashā'ir

Al-Mashā'ir is a work of Mullā Ṣadrā. Shaykh Aḥmad wrote a commentary on this work at the request of Mullā Mashhad b. Mullā Ḥusayn 'Alī Shabestarī. This work deals with the philosophical question of the essence of Being. The Sharḥ al-Mashā'ir was written in 1234/1818.<sup>98</sup>

#### Sharḥ al-'Arshīya

Al-'Arshīya is another work by Mullā Ṣadrā. Shaykh Aḥmad wrote a commentary on it in Kermānshāh at the request of Mullā Mashhad b. Mullā Ḥusayn 'Alī Shabestarī.<sup>99</sup> The commentary consists of two volumes; the first, written in 1234/1818, regarding mabda' (God) and the second, written in 1236/1820, regarding the ma'ād (return). The Sharḥ al-'Arshīya was published in 1271/1854 and 1279/1862.

#### Fawā'id

This general theological work, which Shaykh Aḥmad wrote in Yazd in 1211/1796,<sup>100</sup> deals mainly with three Beings: Being of God (wujūd al-ḥaqq), Being of Unlimited (wujūd al-muṭlaq), and Being of Limited (wujūd al-muqayyad). The Fawā'id consists of twelve Fā'ida. In 1233/1817, at the request of Mullā Mashhad b. Ḥusayn 'Alī, Shaykh Aḥmad wrote a commentary on this work entitled the Sharḥ al-Fawā'id. In the Sharḥ al-Fawā'id, Shaykh Aḥmad defines the terms he has used in the Fawā'id. The book was published in 1272/1855 and 1287/1870. In the Sharḥ al-Fawā'id, seven Fā'ida are added to the twelve Fā'ida of the original work.

In addition, two of Shaykh Aḥmad's students have written commentaries on the Fawā'id. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Semnānī, who wrote his commentary in 1233/1817; and Shaykh Mullā Kāzīm Semnānī. Both commentaries exist only in manuscript form.<sup>101</sup>

## Ḥayāt al-Nafs

This book was written on the five principles of Islamic belief, i.e., tawḥīd (oneness of God), ʿadl (justice), nubuwwat (prophethood), imāmat (imamate), and maʿād (return). The book's epilogue concerns the necessity of belief in the advent of the promised Qāʾim. The work was written in 1236/1820<sup>102</sup> and published in the Jawāmiʿ al-Kilam in 1273/1856. This work was translated into Persian by Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī.

## NOTES

1. The following are the major sources: Maḥammad Bāqir al-Mūsawī al-Iṣbahānī, Rawḍāt al-Jannāt fī Aḥwāl al-ʿUlamā wa al-Sādāt, 8 vols. (Tehrān: Ismāʿīliyan, 1390/1970), vol. 1, pp. 88-94; Muḥammad ʿAlī Mudarris, Rayḥānat al-Adab (Tehrān: Khayyām, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 78-82; and al-Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn, Aʿyān al-Shīʿa (Beirut: Maṭbaʿat al-Inṣāf, 1960), vol. 8, pp. 272-282.
2. See in The Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2d ed., s.v. "al-Aḥsāʾī" by A. Bausani; Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, s.v. "Shaikhī" by C. Huart; ʿAlī Akbar Dehkodā, Lughat Nāma-i Dehkodā, s.v. "Aḥmad Aḥsāʾī".
3. Abū al-Qāsim Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist-i Kutub-i Mashāyikh-i ʿIzām, 3d ed., (Kermān: Saʿādat, n.d.), pp. 132-143.
4. Ḥusayn ʿAlī Maḥfūz, Sīrat al-Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī (Baghdād: Maṭbaʿat al-Maʿārif, 1957), pp. 9-22.
5. This translation was published along with the Risāla-i Tadhkirat al-Awliya in Kermān in 1383/1967. References to this translation are made under the title of Risāla-i Shaykh ʿAbd Allāh throughout this work.
6. Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn (lithography, n.d.).
7. Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, p. 311.
8. Ḥājj Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kermānī, Hidāyat al-Tālibīn, 2d ed. (Kermān: Saʿādat, 1380/1960).
9. Murtaḍā Mudarrisī Chahārdehī, Shaykhīgarī, Bābīgarī az Naẓar-i Falsafa, Tārīkh va Ijtimāʿ (Tehrān: Furūghī, 1345/1966).
10. Murtaḍā Mudarrisī Chahārdehī, Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsāʾī (Tehrān: ʿilmī, 1334sh). This work, with very little addition, was republished in Tārīkh-i Falāsifa-i Islam (Tehrān: ʿilmī, 1336sh), pp. 52-106; "Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsāʾī," Yādghār, vol. 1, no. 4 (Jan. 1944), pp. 30-47; "Ḥājj Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kermānī," Sīmāy-i Bozorgān (Tehrān: Amīr Kabīr, 1335sh), pp. 173-204.
11. Jamāl Zādeh's articles were published in Yaqhmā, vol. 14, no. 9, pp. 402-409; no. 10, pp. 440-448; no. 11, pp. 488-493; no. 12, pp. 538-543. The series ended with the biography of the fifth leader, Zayn al-ʿAbidīn Khān Kermānī.

12. A. L. M. Nicolas, Essai Sur Le Chéikhisme, vol. 1: Cheikh Ahmed Lahçahi; vol. 2: Séyyèd Kazem Reçhti; vol. 3: La Doctrine; vol. 4: La Science de Dieu (Paris: Paul Gauthner, 1910-14).
13. de Gobineau, Les Religions et les Philosophies, pp. 23-39.
14. Edward G. Browne, "The Bābis of Persia. II. Their Literature and Doctrines," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 21(1889): pp. 884-885, 888-892. In his introduction to the Kitāb-i Nuqtatu'l - Kāf (Leyden: Brill, 1910) pp. xx-xxiii, Browne briefly discusses the major beliefs of the Shaykhīs.
15. 'Abdu'l-Bahā, A Traveller's Narrative, trans. Edward G. Browne (Cambridge: University Press, 1891), vol. 2, pp. 234-244.
16. The work, with its translation into Persian by Fereydoun Bahmanyar, was published in Tehrān in 1967.
17. Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, p. 132.
18. According to Zayn al-'Ābidīn Shīrvānī in his Bostān al-Siyāha (Tehrān: Kārkhāna-i Ḥabīb Allāh, 1897), p. 522, Ahsā is the original name of the country, but it is also called as Laḥsā and Ḥasā. Thus the people of the county are known as Laḥsāwī or Ḥasāwī as well as Ahsā'ī.
19. Risāla-i Shaykh 'Abd Allāh, pp. 17-18.
20. Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, p. 132.
21. Ibid., p. 133.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 136.
24. Risāla-i Shaykh 'Abd Allāh, p. 8.
25. al-Ajurrūmiya fī Qawā'id 'Ilm al-'Arabīya, a textbook in Arabic grammar, written by Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ajurrūm; the 'Awāmil, a textbook in Arabic grammar, written by 'Abd al-Qāhir b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jurjānī.
26. Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, p. 136.
27. Chahārdehī, Tārīkh-i Falāsifa-i Islam, p. 62.

28. The complete title of the book is Masālik al-Afhām wa al-Nūr al-Munjī min al-Ḥalām, known as al-Mujlī.
29. Muḥammad Ma'šūm Shīrāzī, known as Ma'šūm 'Alī Shāh and Nāyib al-Ṣadr, Tarā'iq al-Ḥaqā'iq, ed. Muḥammad Ja'far Maḥjūb (Tehrān: Bārānī, 1345sh), vol. 3, p. 217.
30. Risāla-i Shaykh 'Abd Allāh, p. 18.
31. Mudarris, Rayḥānat al-Adab, vol. 1, p. 79.
32. Tabṣira is one of the main works of 'Allāma Ḥillī.
33. Risāla-i Shaykh 'Abd Allāh, p. 18.
34. For Muḥammad Maḥdī Baḥr al-'Ulūm's ijāza see Hājj Muḥammad Khān Kermānī's Risāla-i Behbahāniya (Kermān: Sa'ādat, 1351sh), pp. 23-24; Hājj Muḥammad Khān Kermānī's Hidāyat al-Mustarshid (n.p., 1312/1894), pp. 59-60; and Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn, p. 39.
35. For Ḥusayn 'Alī 'Uṣfūr's ijāza see Risāla-i Behbahāniya p. 26; Hidāyat al-Mustarshid, p. 56; and Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn, p. 40. According to Makārim al-Aḥār (vol. 2, p. 572) this ijāza was issued on the second of Jumādā al-Thānī 1214/1799.
36. A portion of Shaykh Aḥmad Damistānī's ijāza was published in Hidāyat al-Mustarshid, p. 57.
37. For Shahrestānī's ijāza see Risāla-i Behbahāniya, pp. 24-25; Hidāyat al-Mustarshid, pp. 57-58; and Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn, p. 39.
38. For Ṭabāṭabā'ī's ijāza see Risāla-i Behbahāniya, p. 27; Hidāyat al-Mustarshid, pp. 58-59; and Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn, p. 41.
39. For Shaykh Ja'far Najafī's ijāza see Risāla-i Behbahāniya, p. 25; Hidāyat al-Mustarshid, pp. 60-61; and Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn, p. 40.
40. Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, p. 150.
41. Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī, Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn, p. 20. See also Hājj Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kermānī, Hidāyat al-Ṭālibīn, pp. 63-65.
42. Mudarris, Rayḥānat al-Adab, p. 79.
43. Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, p. 133.
44. Ibid., p. 140.



45. Ibid.
46. Risāla-i Shaykh 'Abd Allāh, p. 13.
47. Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, p. 141.
48. Ḥājj Muḥammad Khān Kermānī, Risāla-i Behbahānīya, pp. 11-12.
49. Ḥājj Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kermānī, Hidāyat al-Ṭālibīn, p. 41.
50. Ibid., p. 43.
51. In the Rayḥānat al-Adab two phrases are recorded which have numerical values of 1242, for first: فزت بالفردوس and the second: رحم الشيخ أحمد (Rayḥānat al-Adab, vol. 2, p. 81).
52. For detailed information about the members of the Shaykh's family see Risāla-i Shaykh 'Abd Allāh, pp. 41-42.
53. al-Mīrẓā Muḥammad 'Alī al-Kashmīrī, Nujūm al-Samā fī Tarājim al-'Ulamā (Qom: Baṣīratī, n.d.), pa. 368.
54. Risāla-i Shaykh 'Abd Allāh, p. 23.
55. Ibid., p. 34.
56. Ibid., p. 37.
57. Ibid., p. 39.
58. A complete report on the nature of this dispute and its consequences is given in Muḥammad Tonekābonī's Qiṣaṣ al-'Ulamā (Tehrān: Islāmīya, n.d.), pp. 34-43.
59. Aḥmad Kasravī, Bahāyīgarī (Tehrān: Pāydar, n.d.), p. 18.
60. For a full description of the conduct of Shaykh Aḥmad see Ḥājj Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kermānī's Hidāyat al-Ṭālibīn, p. 84.
61. Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn, pp. 14-15.
62. Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, p. 141.
63. Ibid.
64. A full discussion of the Shaykh's sources would be a significant task requiring a great deal of research.

- It is not intended here to study his sources of knowledge and information or even to provide a full list of works used by the Shaykh. On the basis of his major works such as Sharḥ al-Ziyāra, it is obvious that he made much use of the well-known Shī'ī collections of Traditions. Uṣūl al-Kāfī of Kōlaynī (d. 329/940), al-Amālī, al-Khiṣāl, and 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā, three major works of Ṣadūq are quoted often. Shaykh Aḥmad also frequently refers to the works of Faḍl b. Ḥasan b. Faḍl Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153) such as Majma' al-Bayān and al-Wāfī. Among the exegeses on the Qur'ān, Shaykh Aḥmad is fond of those that contain the Traditions concerning qualities and attributes of the imāms. He refers to Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī by Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd b. Muḥammad b. 'Ayyāsh and the exegesis of Mīrẓā Muḥammad b. Mullā Muḥammad Riḍā Jamāl al-Dīn Qomī entitled the Kanz al-Daqā'iq wa Bahr al-Gharā'ib, which both contain the Traditions on the imāms. The Shaykh frequently quotes other works of such 'ulamā as Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, particularly his Sharḥ al-Ziyāra; Majma' al-Bahrayn of Fakhr al-Dīn b. Ṭurayḥ (d. 1085/1674); Kāmil al-Ziyāra of Ja'far b. Muḥammad Qolawayh (d. 368/978); and al-Iḥtijāj of Aḥmad b. 'Alī Ṭabrisī.
65. Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn, p. 19.
  66. By the term "madhhab" he may mean the Shī'ī doctrine.
  67. He is referring to the verse of the Qur'ān which reads, "We will show them Our signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own souls, until they clearly see that this is the truth." (41:53).
  68. Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn, p. 69.
  69. Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, Risāla-i Uṣūl, p. 135. Sayyid Kāẓim wrote a treatise on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. This treatise is combined with three other Shaykhī manuscripts in one volume under the call number 2013-F in the Bahā'ī National Archive in Iran. The 71-page treatise was written at the request of an unknown questioner.
  70. "Mutawātir is applied to a tradition with so many transmitters that there could be no collusion, all being known to be reliable and not being under any compulsion to lie." Encyclopaedia of Islam, new ed., vol. 3, p. 25.
  71. According to Hughes' Dictionary of Islam, taqīya is, "A Shī'ah doctrine. A pious fraud whereby the Shī'ah Muslim believes he is justified in either smoothing down or in denying the peculiarities of his religious

72. Risāla-i Uṣūl, p. 136.
73. Ibid., pp. 99-100.
74. Ibid., p. 132.
75. Ibid., p. 131.
76. Zayn al-‘Abidīn Shīrvānī, Bustān al-Siyāha, p. 522.
77. Risāla-i Uṣūl, p. 109.
78. Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī, Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn, p. 14.
79. Risāla-i Uṣūl, p. 152.
80. Ibid., p. 153.
81. Considering the fact that Shaykh Aḥmad usually did not make a second copy of his treatise for himself, and the fact that his works were kept in the house of Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī in Karbalā, which was robbed twice, the Shaykh could well have written more than 132 works (Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, p. 125).
82. Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, pp. 214-215.
83. Riyād Ṭāhir, Fihrist Taṣānīf al-‘Allāma al-Shaykh Ahmad al-Aḥsā’ī (Karbalā: al-Ḥā’riya, n.d.).
84. Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, p. 219.
85. Ibid., p. 242.
86. Ibid., p. 237.
87. Abī al-Ṣadūq Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābawayh al-Qomī, Man Lā Yahduruh al-Faqīh (Najaf: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīya, 1957), vol. 2, pp. 370-375.
88. Abī Ja‘far Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭosī, Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām (Najaf: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīya, 1960), vol. 6, pp. 95-101.
89. For the list of commentaries written on the Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a see Aqā Bozorg al-Ṭehrānī, al-Dharī‘a ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī‘a (Najaf: Maṭba‘at al-Qaḍā, 1959), vol. 13, pp. 305-306.
90. Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī, Dalīl al-Mutaḥayyirīn, p. 128.
91. Ibid.

92. Aqā Bozorg al-Ṭehrānī, al-Dharī‘a, vol. 4, p. 430.
93. Risāla-i Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh, p. 18.
94. Commentaries have been written on Tabṣīrat al-Muta‘allimīn by not less than 30 Shi‘a ‘ulama. (See al-Dharī‘a, vol. 3, pp. 321-323; and vol. 13, pp. 133-138.
95. Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, p. 228.
96. In al-Dharī‘a (vol. 13, p. 288), the title of the work is recorded as Sharḥ Risālat al-‘ilm and the references to the manuscripts of the work are given.
97. A collection of Shaykh Aḥmad's important treatises was published under the name of Jawāmi‘ al-Kilām in two volumes, the first in 1273/1856 and the second in 1276/1859. The first volume consists of 40 treatises and the second has 52.
98. Ibrāhīmī, Fihrist, p. 228.
99. Ibid., p. 241.
100. Riyād Ṭāhir, Fihrist Taṣānīf, p. 6.
101. Ibid., p. 12.
102. Ibid., p. 13.

## CHAPTER III

### The Basic Shaykhī Ontological Doctrines

The ontological doctrines of Shaykh Aḥmad constitute the most important link between the Shaykhī school and the mainstream of Islamic thought. In these views he relates his thought to Shī'ā and challenges Sunnī and Ṣūfī positions.

Shaykh Aḥmad's ontological doctrines do not constitute any new system of ontological thought, nor did the Shaykh himself ever claim to have produced such a system. The importance of Shaykh Aḥmad, however, lies in the emphasis he placed on certain theological doctrines and the new framework into which he put them. It lies also in the doubt that he cast upon some of the well-accepted doctrines of the Muslim philosophers and the Ṣūfīs.

Shaykh Aḥmad's primary purpose was to purify Islamic thought from the intellectual innovations of those Muslim scholars who neglect the imāms' teachings and rely upon their own understanding. Although a Shī'ā himself, his attitude toward the purification of Islam was not limited to Shī'ī innovation.

His standard for understanding the Truth was the Qur'ān and the Shī'ī Traditions, and he considered himself the interpreter of the Truth as revealed in these works. Thus he severely criticized the religious scholars who had not sought the truth from infallible sources, i.e., the imāms, whom God made the guardian for His people. Shaykh Aḥmad,

who regarded himself as a revealer of the truth, asked his audience to disregard those innovated thoughts that may divert one from the right path and urged them to heed his words, in which the truth is expressed, and to seek the truth with their own understanding and judgment instead of imitating others. The understanding and judgment to which the Shaykh refers is based on intellectual reasoning as well as intuition. A man can comprehend the truth from the sayings of the imāms if he detaches himself from innovated thoughts and refers to the genuine source of inspiration and intellectual reasoning.<sup>1</sup>

The two primary sources for the Shaykhī ontological doctrines are (1) the commentaries Shaykh Aḥmad himself wrote on certain Quranic verses and Shī'ī Traditions, and those theological and philosophical treatises he wrote at the request of individuals; and (2) the works Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī wrote to elaborate Shaykh Aḥmad's doctrines, works equally important for Shaykhī ontology.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will focus on ontological questions that have been given prominence in Shaykhī works, with attention given only to aspects of these questions which are particularly important for Shaykh Aḥmad and which differentiate his school from others.

A fundamental question that has always occupied scholars of Islamic theology is the nature of God, His attributes, and His relationship with material being. The same question is a central concern in all the Shaykh's

doctrines. According to the Qur'ān, basic Islamic doctrine holds that God is eternal, single since eternity, and incomprehensible. Among these attributes, the absolute impossibility of comprehending the essence (dhāt) of God, as the most important ontological principle, has received great emphasis in the works of the Shaykhīs. On the impossibility of knowing God's essence, Sayyid Kāẓim says that knowledge can exist only when there is a similarity between the known and the knower. Thus, the essence of God can not be known because no similarity exists between God and the knower, i.e., man: God is eternal (qadīm) and man is "accident" (hādith), and there is absolutely no similarity between eternal and accident.<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt that as long as there is no correlation (munāsabat) or similarity (mushābahat) between two things, one can not cite an example from it. Thus, one can not say that water is a thing like (mithāl) fire or heat is a thing like cold or wind is a thing like earth, and so on. If correlation were not a condition of citing an example, one could cite an example between any two things, but this obviously can not be done, as above examples show. In the case of God, there exists nothing in the material world similar to God; therefore, one can not describe Him by citing an example from the material world or know Him through likeness. Possible Being is only able to understand a subject within the realm of the Possible and is not able to understand anything beyond it, i.e., the Necessary Being.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, if Possible Being wants to cite an example from the Necessary Being, it needs two things; first, it needs to comprehend the Essence of the Necessary Being, to know whether the example is His example or not. Second, it needs to cite the example by using phenomena from Possible Being, because it was proved that the Necessary Being is one and there must exist a correlation between one object (mithl) and the object to which it is being compared (mumathal), otherwise it is not its likeness (mithāl). In order to cite an example from God, resemblance (mithl) and likeness to Him is necessary, and this is in contradiction with the belief that there is no likeness (shabḥ), comparison (naẓr), or resemblance (mithl) for God, because the Qur'ān says, "Nothing is like a likeness of Him; and He is the Hearing, the Seeing." (42:11) And also it reads, "Therefore do not give a likeness to Allah; surely Allah knows and you do not know." (16:74) Thus, such terms as "resemblance," "relatedness," "equivalent," "corresponding," "parallel," and so on, only define Possible Being and cannot refer to the Necessary Being.

Furthermore, in order to know something, the knower is required to be superior (ihāta) over the subject that is to be known. The subject, in this case God, cannot be comprehended as the Qur'ān says, "He [God] knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge." (2:255) And also, "Nay: they reject that of which they have no

comprehensive knowledge." (10:39) And, "Vision comprehends Him not, and He comprehends (all) vision; and He is the Knower of subtilities, the Aware." (6:104) These verses indicate that nothing, neither inspired knowledge (ḥuḍūrī) nor imagination (taṣawwur), is able to comprehend Him. One only comprehends those subjects within the limitations of one's comprehension, and even those are not necessarily what exists in reality. For example, if one sees the reflection of a star in the water, one is not seeing the true star, but rather the image (ṣūrat) and the example (mithāl) of the star, which is nothing but water. Therefore, whatever Possible Being comprehends is only Possible Being and nothing beyond that, i.e., Necessary Being. This attitude is based on Traditions such as the one on the authority of Imam Riḍā which reads, "One does not know God if he points out a similarity between Him and His creation; and one does not understand His oneness but puts up a companion to God if he believes that he has comprehended His very Essence; and one does not reach His recognition, who holds up a likeness (mithāl) for Him and puts up a resemblance (mithl) for Him; and one does not believe in His Deity, who maintains infinity for Him; and one does not eliminate anthropomorphism for Him who has pointed at Him . . . . Whatever one comprehends is the creation of his own comprehension (and not what exists out of him in reality)."<sup>5</sup>

Not only can man not comprehend God, but neither can

the prophets of God, who are more excellent than man. The Prophet Muḥammad, who, according to Sayyid Kāẓim was more excellent than the other prophets, says, "We did not comprehend You as You deserve to be comprehended" (mā 'arafnāka ḥaqqā ma'rifatika).<sup>6</sup>

Just as man cannot comprehend the Essence of Necessary Being, he cannot properly speak about Him, since, in order to do so, he must comprehend Him. Speech is the external expression of intellect or imagination, and, since neither intellect nor imagination is able to comprehend God, speaking about His Essence, as It is, is impossible. A Tradition on the authority of Imam Baqir states, "Speak about anything but do not speak about God. Speaking about God does nothing but increase the speaker's perplexity."<sup>7</sup>

The attributes of God are of two kinds: essential (dhātīya) attributes, which have no connection with contingencies, and actional (fi'līya or imkānī or muhdath) attributes.<sup>8</sup> Perfect belief in the oneness of God requires one to regard the essential attributes as identical with the essence of God. There is absolutely no separation between His essence and, for example, His knowledge ('ilm), which is an essential attribute. Knowledge is His essence and essence is His knowledge, without distinction. In this respect, we neither know what His knowledge is (as we do not know what His essence is), nor how He knows. Since the essential attributes such as knowledge, power (qudrat), hearing (sam') and vision (baṣar), cannot be separated from

Him, God cannot be attributed with their opposites, i.e., ignorance (jahl), weakness ('ajz), and so on.

Essential attributes are preexistent, i.e., they have existed as long as the essence of God has existed; however, this does not imply that essential attributes may be considered as separate from essence.

There exists no distinction between essential attributes: knowledge is identical with power and power is His knowledge without distinction.<sup>9</sup> Since the essence of God is unknowable, His essential attributes, which are identical with His essence, are also unknowable.

The second kind of attributes are actional attributes, which are quite different from essential attributes. Actional attributes come into being when God acts in the realm of Possible Being, or as long as His actions are regarded in Possible Being. To clarify the nature of the actional attributes, Shaykh Ahmad gives the following example: when a man writes, as a result of the action of writing we learn that he is a scribe and we can describe him as such. If the same man sews a garment, through his action of sewing we discover that he is a tailor and can describe him as such. The attributes, i.e., scribe and tailor, are not part of his essence, but rather his essence is single and not composed of the elements of being a tailor and a scribe. The man who performs these functions is perfect enough (capable) to perform them. This does not indicate that he is made up of these functions. There exists only

one single essence, i.e., the man, who acts as a tailor or as a scribe. The multiple aspects of this essence appear as soon as he acts. Before his actions took place, he was a single essence, and after he acted, his essence was still single and unchanged. Likewise the multiplicity of God's attributes is conceivable only when His actions are viewed in Possible Being.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to essential attributes, actional attributes are new (hādith) and created (makhlūq). Will (mashī'a), decree (irāda), and speech (kalām), in the Shaykh's view, are actional attributes and, therefore, are new and created.<sup>11</sup> God can be attributed with the actional attributes, or, in contrast to essential attributes, with their opposites. For example, God may will or may not will.

Since there is no similarity between the Necessary Being and Possible Being, none of the qualities and attributes applied to Possible Being are applicable to the Necessary Being, and none of the qualities and attributes of the Necessary Being are applicable to Possible Being. In other words, the attributes of Possible Being do not exist in the Necessary Being, and vice versa. Therefore, man's knowledge, power, and life is not like God's knowledge, power, and life. Man's knowledge, power, and life, or man's concept of them, are conditioned by the limitations of Possible Being and are not similar to the knowledge, power, and life that God possesses. God has knowledge, power, and life, but one whose intellect is limited by the conditions

of Possible Being is not able to comprehend them. God is powerful and all-knowing; if He were not, it would have been necessary for Him to be imperfect and this is not possible for God.

We attribute to God the qualities we think a perfect being should possess. These attributes, however, are signs of perfection only to us. This does not mean that He actually possesses them, because we know nothing about His essence. In fact, by assigning God certain attributes we imply the absence of their opposites and do not prove these attributes to Him.

God is known to Possible Being only through His actions and works, but because they are conditioned by the limitations of Possible Being, they do not define His essence. Even God's description of Himself, since it is intended to be understood by man, has been expressed within the limitation of Possible Being and is not a description of what He really is.<sup>12</sup>

The Qur'ān and Traditions tell us that the purpose of existence is to know and worship God.<sup>13</sup> But Shaykh Ahmad believes that man cannot know God. He resolves this apparent contradiction by suggesting that man is created to know God only through His actions (af'āl) and works (āthār), not to know His essence, which is beyond man's intellectual comprehension. God created all things by means of His action, not His essence. The action of God, which is identical with His will (mashī'a) and decree (irāda),

creates the creation from absolute nothingness. Shaykh Ahmad refers to a Tradition on the authority of Imām Riḍā which states that the terms mashī'a, irāda, and ibdā' are synonymous.<sup>14</sup>

Since Shaykh Ahmad denies any relationship between the Necessary Being and Possible Being, he must explain how Possible Being came into existence, and the nature of the relationship between the eternal (qadīm) and the new (hādith). Shaykh Ahmad accepts the view that only a single being can issue from the essence of God, which is single. Consequently, the Single Being (God) issues forth His single will by itself, as an act and not as a part of His essence. The will, which is the first creation of God, is called God's possible will (al-mashī'at al-imbkāniya). From it, Possible Being comes into existence. This view is found in a Tradition on the authority of Imām Ṣādiq, which reads, "God created the will by itself, and then the will created things" (khalāqa Allāhu al-mashī'ata bi nafsihā thumma khalāqa al-ashyā'a bi al-mashī'a).<sup>15</sup> On the basis of this Tradition, Shaykh Ahmad explains that the will is a "creative movement" (al-ḥarakat al-ijādīya)<sup>16</sup> which, although created (muḥdath), depends upon nothing except itself. Thus, when we say that God created the will by itself, we mean that the will is a single thing by itself and in its essence, i.e., the will is not "a" thing and its "self" something else; rather, the will is the simplest thing in the realm of Possible Being. Shaykh Ahmad has

called the simplicity of the will the "possible simplicity" (al-bisātat al-imkāniyya) to differentiate it from the simplicity of God.<sup>17</sup>

The will is at the highest level of the hierarchy of Possible Being and has produced everything below it; the will was the first being, preceding all else in the realm of Possible Being. The will is eternal (sarmad) and God has created (aḥdatha) the possibilities (imkānāt) of things from it in a general, infinitive sense ('alā wajhin kullin lā yatanāhī) in the Possible Being.<sup>18</sup>

Shaykh Aḥmad states that the possible (imkān) is the source (mansha' or aḡl) of the existent (wujūd or akwān).<sup>19</sup> As an adjective depends upon the noun it qualifies, existence depends upon the possible. The relationship between the possible and the existent, in a more tangible example, is like the relationship between sperm and a man.<sup>20</sup>

When we say that things exist in the possible realm we mean that they exist collectively, and not individually, in the will. It is the will which produces the individuality of things and issues them into Possible Being one after another. We need to think in this way because God is not affected by time; therefore past, present, and future are identical to Him, even though from the Possible Being point of view, the action is past or is yet to occur. If this were not so, God would be in the position of "waiting" (muntazira),<sup>21</sup> which, as a deficiency, would be inconsistent with His perfection.

From the fact that to God, every thing is in the present we do not mean that things are eternal, for only the essence of God is eternal. We mean, rather, that things receive their existence as soon as they are created. For example, Adam was created at one time and Zayd at another. Both times are in the present to God, each one in its own turn. We exist here and now; before this moment we had no existence. Likewise, Adam existed at his time and Zayd at his time, but, to God all of these times and places are in the present.

Shaykh Aḥmad's doctrines on God and His attributes, particularly God's knowledge, put him in serious disagreement with the Ṣūfīs, such as Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240); theologians, such as Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680); and philosophers, such as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640). While a detailed study of the points of disagreement between Shaykh Aḥmad and these three eminent figures of Islamic thought would be beyond the scope of this work, a discussion of the major points as they are revealed in the Shaykh's better known works, should suffice to illustrate the dispute.

Among the Ṣūfīs, Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī has been severely criticized in the works of Shaykh Aḥmad. Shaykh Aḥmad sarcastically calls Muḥy al-Dīn (Reviver of religion), "Mumīt al-Dīn," (slayer of religion)<sup>22</sup> and regards him as an infidel.

Among Ṣūfī thinkers, Ibn al-'Arabī is a classical example and the best known representative of Islamic



pantheism. His pantheism is clear in his theory of Love. To him, "The ultimate goal of love is to know the reality of love and that the reality of love is identical with God's Essence."<sup>23</sup>

He praises me and I praise Him,  
And He worships me and I worship Him.  
In one state I acknowledge Him  
And in the a'yān I deny Him.  
He knows me and I know Him not,  
And I know Him and behold Him.  
How can He be independent,  
When I help Him and assist Him?<sup>24</sup>  
In my knowing Him, I create Him.

A basic belief of the ṣūfīs, including Ibn al-'Arabī, concerns the love of God and the idea that, in the last stage of the journey to God, the lover may become unified with Him. According to Ibn al-'Arabī,

Man makes various progresses [sic], which are thought of as a series of journeys (asfar), in particular three: (1) from God, al-safar 'an Allāh, by which a man having traversed the various worlds ('awālim) is born into this world, and is then thus furthest removed from God; (2) to God, al-safar ila'llāh, by which, with the help of a guide, he makes the spiritual journey with the goal of reaching the "station of junction [with Universal Intelligence] after separation" (makām al-djam'ba'd al-tafrika); (3) in God, al-safar fi'llāh. The first two journeys have an end, the third has no end: it is bakā'bi'llāh. The traveller (sālik) who is making the third journey performs those precepts of the shari'a which are farq; externally, he is living with his fellows; but internally he is dwelling with God. Not every man is capable of more than the first journey; only those specially endowed (khawāṣṣ) may win to the vision of God, but even for them this depends on certain conditions (shurūṭ), some fulfilled by the traveller (sālik, murīd) himself, some provided by the shaykh. Even the Prophet had a shaykh--Gabriel . . . There will be awakened in his heart a love (maḥabba), which grows to be a passion ('ishk) quite distinct from selfish desires (shahwa). It is this passion which

particularly brings men to God. On the journey the sālik experiences a series of "states" (ahwāl), some continuing and hence called "resting-places" (makām, manzil), at each of which he learns various ma'ārif. When the heart is thoroughly purified, the veil (ḥidjāb) of those "other" things which hide God (mā siwā'Allāh) is drawn aside; all things, past, present and future, are known; God grants the manifestation (taḥjallī) of Himself; and finally union with Him (waṣl) is achieved.<sup>25</sup>

Shaykh Aḥmad maintains there exists connection in creation, but the connection does not physically reach God. No created being can attain to what is not created, i.e., the Necessary Being. To be able to do so it would have to be the Necessary Being itself.<sup>26</sup> The Necessary Being is limitless, eternal, immortal, and invisible. The world of creation, on the contrary, is bound by natural law, finite, mortal, and visible. To him the Necessary Being does not ascend or descend and is never an object for any kind of unification with His creation.

Because there can be no connection between Possible Being and the Necessary Being, Shaykh Aḥmad believes that it is absolutely impossible for a man, no matter how exalted in rank, to love God and to achieve union with Him. Loving someone, in the views of Shaykh Aḥmad, is a function of soul (nafs) and intellect ('aql). This function is not possible without the continuous remembrance of the beloved and concentration on the ways of loving and joining him, which requires picturing him. Without imagination, one cannot achieve His remembrance or think about the ways of joining Him, and this is not possible in the case of God.<sup>27</sup> Shaykh

Aḥmad's second major point of disagreement with the Ṣūfīs, particularly Muḥy al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī, concerns the Ṣūfī theory of "unity of being" (wahdat al-wujūd). According to this theory, existence (wujūd) is described as one plain (basīt), continuous thing (shay' wāḥid), which is nothing but God, and God is nothing but that existence. Shaykh Aḥmad denounced this pantheistic doctrine and therefore designated its upholder, Ibn al-ʿArabī, as an infidel.<sup>28</sup> Such a doctrine necessitates that God be, on the one hand, a creator, and, on the other, a creature--which is patently against the basic principle of the Qur'ān and the Islamic Traditions.<sup>29</sup> Schimmel writes,

The concept of wahdat al-wujūd does not involve a substantial continuity between God and creation. In Ibn ʿArabī's thought, a transcendence across categories, including substance, is maintained. God is above all qualities--they are neither He nor other than He--and He manifests Himself only by means of the names, not by His essence. On the plane of essence, He is inconceivable (transcending concepts) and nonexperiential (transcending even nonrational cognition). That means that in their actual existence the creatures are not identified with God, but only reflections of His attributes.<sup>30</sup>

Although Schimmel's description of an aspect of wahdat al-wujūd denies that the creatures are identical with God, it still maintains that they are the reflections of His attributes. Even if by "attributes" the actional attributes are meant, Shaykh Aḥmad would still not agree with the concept of wahdat al-wujūd as long as God stands at one end of it. It does not seem that even the nonpantheistic interpretations of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought advanced by Henry

Corbin and Seyyed H. Nasr would be acceptable to Shaykh Aḥmad, because in these interpretations, too, God is assumed to have produced creation as a mirror for His tajalliyāt, His manifestations,<sup>31</sup> whereas Shaykh Aḥmad maintains that the mirror for His tajalliyāt is His will, from which the creation came into being.

A basic point of disagreement between Shaykh Aḥmad and Shīʿī theologians is the question of God's knowledge. Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī was one of the leading Shīʿī theologians whose views on God's knowledge the Shaykh criticized. Mullā Muḥsin believed that God knew about His creation "before" He actually created it. He maintained this because he believed that God, who is the knower (ʿālim), could never have been without knowledge and that this knowledge must always have had an object.<sup>32</sup> This "object" is a created thing about which God knew since He existed, i.e., since eternity.

Shaykh Aḥmad holds that God's knowledge is an essential attribute and is identical with His essence, i.e., that there is no separation between His essence and His knowledge, and there exists no object for His knowledge because knowledge and the essence are identical, i.e., the knower and the known are the same. God's knowledge about what His essence does is not to be confused with His knowledge of His essence itself, because His knowledge of His essence has no object except His essence. This means that there was nothing to be known (although He knew His essence, and that knowledge was identical with His essence), until He created

things and knew about them "after" their creation.<sup>33</sup>

The Shaykh quotes a Tradition on the authority of Imām Ṣādiq which reads, "There was God, our respected and exalted God, and knowledge was His essence and there was nothing known [ma'lūm] to Him . . . . When He created [aḥdatha] things and the known came into being, His knowledge came to rest [waqa'ā] upon the known".<sup>34</sup> The Shaykh explains this Tradition by saying that God certainly is all-knowing, but at first His knowledge comprehends only His essence, and after He creates things His knowledge knows them.<sup>35</sup>

Mullā Muḥsin says that God's knowledge about Himself and His knowledge about His creation are one. Shaykh Aḥmad believes that Mullā Muḥsin is wrong in regarding these two kinds of knowledge as one and as identical with His essence. Shaykh Aḥmad, in opposition to Mullā Muḥsin, maintains that God's knowledge about Himself and God's knowledge about His creation are different; the first is a condition of the second.<sup>36</sup>

Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ believes that everything in the material world has two aspects: first, the uncreated aspect which existed in the mind of God before it came into being, an aspect which is eternal and identical with God; second, the definite form it assumed as a material object in the universe.

Shaykh Aḥmad asserts that Mullā Muḥsin's view is contrary to that of the imāms, and points out that created things (ḥādith) are not under any circumstances eternal

(azalī), and that God does not contain both eternal and new.<sup>37</sup>

Among the philosophers, Mullā Ṣadrā's views have been extensively discussed in the works of Shaykh Aḥmad, who rejects his theory that "the elementary reality is all things" (basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa Kull al-ashyā), which holds that being, although single in its reality, manifests itself with varying degrees of intensity in different grades of existence. The concept of basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa maintains that the being of God and the being of possible being are all one being, although they differ from each other in degree of intensity.

The Essence of God, which is simple (basīṭ), manifests itself in various degrees and different stages in all things. Cause and effect, according to the concept of basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa, are fundamentally the same. What differentiates things from God is their deficiencies and limitations. If one disregards these limitations and deficiencies, only perfection remains, which is identical with the essence of God, Who is perfect.<sup>38</sup>

The concept of basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa holds that the Being, which is absolutely simple and free from any kind of limitation or composition, contains within it all the attributes of all beings. Thus, the concept refers to a hierarchy, each stage of which includes all those things that are in the stages below it. For example, the first intellect, which is the first manifestation of God, occupies

the second stage in the hierarchy and contains all the attributes of any other being inferior to it. This, however, does not mean that the first intellect contains the quantities of all material bodies, but that all the attributes of all creation are found in the first intellect. God, Who is beyond the first intellect and is the most simple Being, possesses all the attributes of the whole of existence. If God did not possess the attributes of the whole creation, He could not have given them to it.<sup>39</sup>

Shaykh Aḥmad rejects the concept of the baṣīṭ al-ḥaqīqa by maintaining that, first, there is only one Simple Being; all else is complex, i.e., composed of matter and form. Composed beings differ from one another only in concentration. For example, intellect and stone differ only in the matter of intellect, which is made of the liquid light (al-nūr al-dhā'ib), i.e., intellectual matter (al-mādda al-'unṣurīya). Intellect and stone, like other created things, are created by the action of God and not from His Essence. They also receive their quiddity--their form--from Him, because nothing can exist without both existence (wujūd) and quiddity (māhīya). Second, Shaykh Aḥmad argues that the concept of baṣīṭ al-ḥaqīqa implies that things exist with God in His Essence. This is not acceptable because it, in turn, implies that things are co-eternal with His Essence, and, in addition, that the Essence of God is complex, which are both false, according to Shaykh Aḥmad.<sup>40</sup>

Shaykh Aḥmad believes that even the simplicity of

existence is not conceivable in the Possible Being: things that exist in the realm of the Possible Being occupy a different level in the hierarchy, and there is a substantial difference between things on different levels. For example, there exists no point of comparison between the first intellect and those things situated below it, although the first intellect is the cause of their being.<sup>41</sup> To elaborate the point, Shaykh Aḥmad says that the light of Muḥammad was the first creation. From this light, the light of the imāms came to being, and from the light of the imāms the light of the believers came into being, all the way down to the lowest level of the hierarchy. It is true that in all these levels we are talking about one substance--the light-- but the degree of its manifestation is so different that we cannot say that abstract intellects, divine spirits, and dense mineral bodies are alike.<sup>42</sup>

Shaykh Aḥmad emphasizes that God's Essence is single, that there is nothing with it or in it. Things came into being as a result of His action in the Possible Being, which is not in any way comparable with His Essence. If we assume that things are identical with His Essence or that they are in His knowledge, then His Essence and His creation would be identical. This assumption is not correct because the creation is within the realm of Possible Being, and Possible Being cannot achieve union with the Necessary Being. Shaykh Aḥmad insists that God is absolutely incomprehensible to and unreachable by man. That which man imagines about Him is

not the Reality of God; He, the unknowable, the unthinkable, the inconceivable, is far beyond the highest conception of man.

In summary, the basic ontological doctrines Shaykh Aḥmad sets forth are: (1) God's Essence, which is simple, is, and has ever been, incomprehensible to and unreachable by man; (2) existence is the creation of God's action and not a part of His Essence; (3) His will is an actional attribute, separated from His Essence, and the cause of creation; (4) man is substantially unable to comprehend any being which is beyond his possible-conditioned intellect.

Such doctrines led the Shaykh to the belief that between God and man there are intermediaries who bear His names and embody His attributes. They are the manifestations or representatives of God's power, knowledge, and other attributes in the realm of Possible Being. Therefore, the highest point of comprehension and the ultimate level of unification for man is comprehension and unification with the intermediaries, as man has no access to any other being beyond them, i.e., God.

The intermediaries are the prophets and the imāms, who are in reality the hypostasis of the Necessary Being. Although they share certain functions, responsibilities, and qualifications, a prophet occupies a higher rank than an imām. The function of prophethood (nubuwwat) is to convey the will of God to people without a human intermediary. It also means to inform people of God's Essence, attributes,

actions, and teachings. There are two types of prophethood: prophethood of definition (nubuwwat ta'rif) and prophethood of legislation (nubuwwat tashrī'). Prophethood of definition has to do with informing people about God, His attributes, names, and actions, whereas the prophethood of legislation, which is identical with messengership (risālat), means establishing moral, social, and political institutions--sharī'a.<sup>43</sup>

Prophethood is described as the receiving of knowledge by a purified soul (al-nafs al-qudsīya) from the essence of the first intellect (al-'aql al-awwal), and messengership is described as proclaiming that knowledge to the prepared (musta'idd) people.<sup>44</sup>

Regarding the relationship between God and a prophet, Shaykh Aḥmad denies that any point of comparison (nisbat) exist between God and the prophet. If, hypothetically, there were such a relation, the eternal (qadīm), i.e., God, would have to be in relationship with the new (ḥādith), the prophet. To hold such an idea is infidelity (kufr) and blasphemy (zandaqa).<sup>45</sup> Just as there can be no point of comparison between God and His prophet, there can be none between a prophet and an ordinary man. A prophet is the man who is essentially qualified (qābil) to be a prophet because of a particular capability that an ordinary man does not possess. Thus, God does not choose just any man as His prophet, but only the one capable and worthy of proclaiming God's message to His people. The essential capability of

the prophet is unique among mankind, and no one else is capable nor worthy of receiving God's revelation.

This view of the relationship between God and His prophet, on the one hand, and between the prophet and the people, on the other hand, is one of the major points of dispute between the Shaykhīs and the Ṣūfīs. The Ṣūfīs traditionally maintain that prophets reach the position of prophethood through their personal spiritual endeavor. Ascetic practices, including purifying the heart from temptations, abandoning all the natural inclinations, subduing human desires, and adhering to meditation and spiritual qualities increase the divine nature in man. The ultimate result of this process is that the individual loses his personal identity and receives God's divine identity. According to the Ṣūfīs, such a journey culminates with the ability to be a prophet. Although the Shaykhīs do not deny that a man makes spiritual progress through ascetic practices, they insist that an ordinary man cannot become a prophet no matter how highly he has developed his spiritual qualities on the journey. A prophet has a unique capability not granted to any other man. Through the spiritual journey this unique capability develops and reaches its highest level. While the journey, by itself does not create the capability, it enhances it. This unique capability differentiates a prophet from an ordinary man and gives him a substantial superiority above mankind.

The relationship between a prophet and a man is like

that of the sun and its radiance. The radiance cannot achieve the station of the sun, yet its own existence depends upon it. In the same way, a man cannot achieve the station of a prophet, yet his life is dependent upon the prophet's life.<sup>46</sup>

Regarding the relationship between a prophet and an angel, the Shaykhīs assert that an angel is not made of matter and, therefore, has no relationship to the material world.<sup>47</sup> The station of the prophet, however, is higher than that of an angel.<sup>48</sup> Sayyid Kāẓim relates a Tradition on the authority of the Prophet, who told 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, "God has not created any one more exalted and more loved than me (the Prophet)." When 'Alī asked the Prophet if he was more exalted than an angel, the Prophet replied, "O 'Alī, God has given His "Sent Prophets" [mursalīn] a higher station than His "Close Angels" [muqarrabīn] and He has given me a station higher than that of the other prophets and apostles. After me the highest station is yours and after you it belongs to the imāms. Verily, the angels are our servants and the servants of our lovers."<sup>49</sup>

Shaykh Ahmad maintains that a prophet, as a receiver of God's revelation, is infallible and free from all sin.<sup>50</sup> He occupies the highest position in regard to moral standards, and his infallibility is thought to begin even before his declaration of prophethood.

The Prophet Muḥammad was sent to all creatures with proofs of his right to prophethood, the most important of

which is the Qur'ān. He is the final Prophet until the Day of Judgment, and the last one in the chain of five prophets who preceded him, i.e., Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.<sup>51</sup> The religion of the prophet, Islam, which is situated at the highest level of the religious hierarchy, is the most comprehensive religion, and the earlier religions were only introductions to it.<sup>52</sup> Islam abrogates all the previous religions.

Regarding the relationship between the Prophet Muḥammad and the imāms, Shaykh Aḥmad writes that the Prophet is like a house and that the imāms are the people of this house ('itrat ahl bayt). Here, "house" stands for kinship, referring to the fact that the imāms are the descendents of the Prophet. The house also stands for knowledge (bayt al-'ilm), to which the imāms are like the doors. This indication is based on many Traditions such as the one on the authority of Abū Ja'far al-Bāqir which reads, "The children of Muḥammad [ā'l Muḥammad] are the doors to God and the ways to God."<sup>53</sup>

People are created from the radiance of the light of the imāms, and, therefore, the imāms are the actional cause (al-'illat al-fā'iliyya), as well as the material cause (al-'illat al-māddiyya). The imāms are also the formal cause (al-'illat al-ṣūriyya) because the form of every single item of creation is their form; the imāms are the manifestation of the grace of God, and each creature has its form as a result of God's grace. They are also the ultimate cause

(al-'illat al-ghā'ī) because God has created things for their sake.<sup>54</sup>

The imāms are the a'rāf (the area between Paradise and Hell), intermediaries through whom God can be understood, i.e., the understanding of God is only possible through the guidance of (ahl al-ḥaqq), the people of truth, i.e., the imāms.<sup>58</sup>

The imāms are like the gates between God and creation, or as the keys to His treasure. They are the scene (maḥāll) of the manifestation of His divine will and power, and the embodiment of His attributes among mankind.<sup>56</sup> The imāms, who are the trustees (umanā) of God among the people, are installed in their position by the will of God, and the Prophet only announces the installation. They are free from all sin, forgetfulness, and ignorance before and after they take office.<sup>57</sup> As the representative of God on earth, they are the most learned people and the world cannot function without them.<sup>58</sup>

The imāms are the refuge (malja'), protection (malādh), and authority (marji') for every thing that has issued from His will, namely, substance ('ain) or notion (ma'nā), matter (jawhar) or accident ('arad), essence (dhāt) or attribute (ṣifat), ecstasy (ḥāl) or condition (ḥarf), and even material (bu'd jismī), place (bu'd makānī), and time dimension (bu'd zamānī). In sum, everything takes refuge in them because of its poverty and needs.<sup>59</sup>

The Shaykhīs believe that certain verses in the Qur'ān

and the Traditions refer to the imāms, and they interpret these verses in a way unacceptable to other Muslims. For example, one verse of the Qur'ān reads, "And He it is Who has created man from the water, then He had made for him blood-relationship and marriage-relationship and your Lord is powerful." (25:54) The Shaykhīs insist that in this verse 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is the man referred to because he had a blood-relationship and marriage-relationship with the Prophet<sup>60</sup>: 'Alī was the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law. Another verse in the Qur'ān reads, "Thus have we made you a central [intermediate] people, that ye may be witnesses in regard to mankind." (2:143) The Shaykhīs believe that the terms "ummatan wasaṭan" (intermediate people) in this verse refers to the imāms. This interpretation is based on a Tradition on the authority of Abū 'Abd Allāh who, when asked about the meaning of these terms, replied, "We [the imāms] are the intermediate people and we are God's witnesses among His people."<sup>61</sup> Another verse in the Qur'ān which the Shaykhīs believe is a reference to the imāms reads, "Certainly We created man in the best make [aḥsani taqwīmin]." (95:4) Shaykh Aḥmad interprets the "best make" as the perfect men, i.e., Muḥammad, his twelve sons and his daughter Fāṭima.<sup>62</sup> A Quranic verse reads, ". . . A good tree, whose root is firm and whose branches are high." (14:24) Shaykh Aḥmad says that when Imām Bāqir was asked about the meaning of the above verse, he replied on the authority of the Prophet, "I [the Prophet] am its root

[aṣluḥā] and 'Alī is its branch [far'uhā]; and the imāms are its twigs [aghṣānuḥā], our knowledge is its fruit, and our people [shī'atunā] are its leaves."<sup>63</sup> In addition to these verses, some Quranic terms such as "The Farthest Lote-Tree" (sidrat al-muntahā) (53:14); "The Garden, The Place to be Resorted to" (jannat al-ma'wā) (53:15) are also considered as references to the imāms.<sup>64</sup>

The attitude of Shaykh Aḥmad towards the imāms and his free interpretation of certain verses of the Qur'ān to signify their station, significance, and holiness, made him the target of accusations that he was an Extremist, Ghālī.<sup>65</sup>



NOTES

1. Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī, Jawāmi' al-Kilam, 2 vols. (Tabrīz: lithography, 1273-76/1856-59), vol. 1, part 2, p. 167.
2. Shaykh Ahmad's works on ontology are too numerous to list in full. The main ones are as follows:  
 (1) Jawāmi' al-Kilam, (Among the treatises compiled in this collection we have relied heavily on "Sharḥ'ala al-Risāla al-'ilmīya," part 2, pp. 166-200); (2) Sharḥ al-Ziyārat al-Jāmi'a (Tabrīz: lithography, 1276/1859); (3) Sharḥ al-Mashā'ir (Tabrīz?: lithography, 1255/1839); (4) Sharḥ al-Fawā'id (Tabrīz?: lithography, 1254/1838).  
 Sayyid Kāẓim's major works and those referred to here most frequently are: contained in the Uṣūl-i 'Aqā'id, a collection of manuscripts with the call number 2016-F in the National Bahā'ī Archive of Iran, consisting of three works: (1) Uṣūl-i 'Aqā'id (pp. 1-215); (2) Risāla-i Radd-i Shubḥa-i Akil va Ma'kūl, written at the request of Prince Muḥammad Riḍā Mīrzā (pp. 216-263); (3) an untitled treatise written for Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥasan (pp. 263-281) to answer his questions on: (a) the meaning of the Qāba Qawsayn, (b) 'Illiyat-i Wājib or 'Illiyat-i Mashī'at, and (c) Khalq-i Mashī'at bi Nafsihā.
3. Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, Uṣūl-i 'Aqā'id, pp. 12-13.
4. Necessary Being (al-Wājib al-Wujūd), is the Being which exists by itself in contrast to the Possible Being (al-Mumkin al-Wujūd), which receives its Being from another, i.e., from the Necessary Being. While the nonexistence of Necessary Being is unthinkable, the nonexistence of the Possible Being is thinkable. Philosophers use the term Necessary Being for God and Possible Being for the world.
5. Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, Uṣūl-i 'Aqā'id, p. 9.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 11.
8. Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī, Sharḥ al-Ziyārat al-Jāmi'a, p. 124.
9. Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, Uṣūl-i 'Aqā'id, p. 36.
10. Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī, Sharḥ al-Ziyārat al-Jāmi'a, p. 134.
11. Sayyid Kāẓim quotes a Tradition on the authority of Imām Riḍā which reads, "Will and decree are from among

- the actional attributes. One who claims that God has possessed will and decree from eternity (i.e., preexistence with God) does not believe in the oneness of God." (Uṣūl-i 'Aqā'id, p. 36).
12. Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, Uṣūl-i 'Aqā'id, p. 31.
13. The verse of the Qur'ān reads, "I have not created Djinn and man, but that they should worship me." (51:56); and a Tradition reads, "I was a hidden treasure, I wished to be known, therefore, I created all creation in order to be known."
14. Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī, Sharḥ al-Mashā'ir, p. 3.
15. Ibid., p. 308.
16. Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī, Sharḥ al-Fawā'id, p. 457.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 458.
20. Ibid., p. 459.
21. Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, The Treatise for Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥasan, p. 279.
22. Reference to this term is frequently made throughout the works of Shaykh Ahmad. For example see Jawāmi' al-Kilam, vol. 1, part 2., p. 183.
23. A. E. Affifi, The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Dīn-Ibnul 'Arabī (Cambridge: University Press, 1939), pp. 171-172.
24. Ibid., p. 13.
25. The Encyclopaedia of Islam, new ed., s.v. "Ibn al-'Arabī," by A. Ateş.
26. Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī, Sharḥ al-Ziyārat al-Jāmi'a, p. 40.
27. Ibid., p. 123.
28. Ibid., p. 125.
29. Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī, Jawāmi' al-Kilam, vol. 1, part 2, p. 175.
30. Annemarie Schimmel, Mystical Dimension of Islam (Chapel