Imām and Avatāra: A Study of Divine-Human Configurations in Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274 CE) and Rāmānuja (d. 1137 CE)

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To my children:

Sebastian Karim Hann
Zara Morgana Zayn Hann
Rowena Tazim Hann

The twelfth jewel is never to afflict children with pain;
For surely God comes in their form!

Pīr Shams
The Fourteen Jewels

Résumé

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Titre de thèse: Imām et Avatāra: Une étude des configurations divins–humains chez Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (décédé en 1274) et Rāmānuja (décédé vers 1137)
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Cette thèse a pour double objectif d'analyser et de comparer deux types de configurations divins–humains, ou theándriques: la figure de *l'imām* dans l'Ismaélisme Nizārī et *l'avatāra* dans le Vaiṣṇavisme. Cette analyse, effectuée sous un angle philosophique, vise à comparer les articulations systématiques du savant et philosophe Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (décédé en 1274) et celles de Rāmānuja (décédé vers 1137), philosophe par excellence du Vaiṣṇavisme .

Les articulations divines–humaines, ordinairement reconnues sous le nom d'Incarnations, se définissent ou bien comme des figures humaines divinisées ou bien comme des divinités descendues dans le monde des mortels. Tandis que le concept Ismaélien Nizārī de *l'imām* se rapproche plutôt de la première définition, cete thèse tend à démontrer que Ṭūsī s'est efforcé au contraire de préserver l'unité de Dieu—et par conséquent de préserver sa pureté contre les qualités que lui attribuent les créatures humaines—tout en soutenant que le royaume humain constituait un milieu propre à la manifestation *(maẓhar)*du commandement *(Amr)* divin. Dans un même sens, tandis que le concept indien de *l'avatāra* se définit indubitablement comme la descente du divin dans le royaume humain, cette thèse soutient que Rāmānuja ne concevait toutefois pas *l'avatāra* comme une Incarnation du divin dans le corps humain. La forme humaine étant en effet constituée de matière, matière qui se trouve elle-même associée aux qualités qui limitent un être physique au cycle de la naissance, de la mort et de la renaissance *(saṃsāra)*—ceci à cause de l'ignorance *(avidyā)* causée par les effets d'actions antérieures et présentes—un tel état d'être n'est donc pas favorable au divin. A cet égard aussi *l'avatāra* est plutôt une manifestation du divin qu'une incarnation. A partir d'une étude détaillée de ces deux concepts, cette thèse aborde de pertinentes questions qui peuvent se poser dans le cadre d'une tentative d'établissement d'une typologie des configurations divins–humains utile aux travaux de recherche dans le domaine de l'Histoire des Religions.

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To my parents I owe a profound debt for their ongoing encouragement and their assistance. Despite the freedom they should have been granted in their later years, they courageously took on the task of raising my children over several summers to enable me to write. I have appreciated the stimulating academic conversations that I have shared with Karmen Talbot over the course of many long winters. My heartfelt thanks go to Nicholas M. Hann for single-handedly bearing the fiscal responsibilies and cheerfully managing house and three active youngsters in order to enable me to complete this work. Finally, I would like to express my boundless gratitude to Tazim R. Kassam, who has been an invaluable and consistent source of moral support, intellectual companionship, and reliable assistance. It is a rare joy to be granted such a companion in life.

All three of my children were born during the course of my doctoral studies. Too young to understand why their mother could not spend more time with them, it is to them that I dedicate this work. May God bless them.

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Section I

Introduction

I. Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this dissertation is whether it is possible to make meaningful comparisons between significant concepts in two different religious traditions. Charles J. Adams, over two decades ago, pointed out that historians of religions have in the main neglected to include Islam in their comparative studies, while drawing attention simultaneously to the fact that the categories devised by historians of religion did not necessarily fit the Islamic tradition.[1] This neglect has begun to be addressed in recent years, mostly in the form of targeted studies such as that of Toshihiko Izutsu's 1966 study titled *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism*[2] and Henry Corbin's studies comparing Ismāᶜīlī and Mazdaean notions of time and gnosis.[3] My own interest in the philosophical traditions of Islam and Hinduism led to me to wonder whether it was possible to conceive of philosophical systems, deeply grounded in their own historical, geographical, social and cultural contexts, as attempting to address universal problems. In other words, are there philosophical questions that are articulated in a specific manner and responded to in like manner but which nonetheless bear similarity to questions posed in another tradition in terms of their attempt to strive for a rational understanding of reality?

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[1] Charles J. Adams, "The History of Religion and the Study of Islam", in *History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding*, ed. by Joseph M. Kitagawa with Mircea Eliade and Charles H. Long (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 177-193.

[2] Revised as T. Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism* (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

[3] In Joseph Campbell, ed., *Man and Time: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* (Bollingen Series, XXX, v.3) (New York: Princeton University Press and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957) and reprinted in Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1983).

The perennialist approach[4] offers the view that divinity, however it may be conceived by differing traditions, is essentially one, while religious institutions, modes of worship and other expressions of religiosity, albeit inexhaustible in their diversity, are no more than symbols pointing to this unicity of divinity. What interested me was not simply the search for a perennialism underlying the study of differing religious philosophical systems, nor the desire to dismiss the specificities of each tradition, but rather to investigate simultaneously the commonality of the issues addressed by philosophical systems, as well as the diversity offered by the cultural contexts in which these systems arose. Since such a study in itself would prove to be an area too broad for study, it became necessary to isolate a focal point around which the two different philosphical systems could be organized. The notion of the divinized human being or theanthropos provided such a focal point, for such a person is a concrete (at least to appearances) expression of divinity as well as being a recognizable means through which knowledge of the divine may be communicated to other humans. In addition, such a person represents a source of authoritative knowledge concerning the various institutions, rites and ethical behaviour through which the faith community finds expression. What would we find if the notion of the divinized human being in two different religio-cultural traditions were to be examined from the philosophical point of view? Could the study of two significantly different religious traditions with respect to the concept of theanthropos contribute to the development of a general typology of divine-human configurations?

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[4] As an example, the view of F. Schuon: "There are only two relationships to take into consideration, that of transcendence and that of immanence: according to the first, the reality of Substance annihilates that of the accident; according to the second, the qualities of the accident—starting with their reality—cannot but be those of Substance." F. Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and as Way* (Bedfont, Middlesex, UK: Perennial Books, 1981), trans. by William Stoddart. This quote is cited in an essay on Schuon's philosophical perspective. See James S. Cutsinger, "A Knowledge that Wounds Our Nature: The Message of Frithjof Schuon" in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LX:3, 465–491, 467.

Islam as such does not have the concept of the divinized human being; indeed, the prophet Muḥammad is clearly identified in the *Qurʾān*, the sacred text in Islam, as a human being.[5] The notion of *ḥulūl* (connoting the sense of "infusion" in theology *(kalām)* and mysticism *(taṣawwuf))* expresses the idea of the "indwelling of God in a creature".[6] Muslims as a rule, from the viewpoint of strict monotheism, rejected the notion of God's *ḥulūl* in creatures on the grounds that it would lead to the existence of two eternals—God and the receptive object. The notion of *ḥulūl* also implied that God was divisible, a suggestion that was considered unworthy of application to God given the emphasis on his unicity, or *tawḥīd*. Indeed, the Christian doctrine of Incarnation is generally termed *ḥulūl* by Muslim authors. Furthermore, both Sunnī and Shīʿī doctors of doctrine condemned Muslim sects that they suspected of holding doctrines approaching *ḥulūl*, for example, the extreme Shīʿī sects known as the *ghulāt*, among others, who held that the *imām*—a figure in whom religious authority was vested—was veritably God Himself. However, notions of the human being whose soul is privy to divine mysteries—such that the individual self is overwhelmed by the expression of the divine within it—may be found in the Islamic mystical tradition commonly termed Ṣūfism, in the person of the *shaykh*, the *pīr*, the *quṭb*, and so forth. In addition, within the philosophical tradition, there developed a concept of prophecy in which the prophet was the communicator *par excellence* to human beings of divine truths. Thus, although the prophet was a human like others, with respect to his soul he was inspired, and thus belonged to a vastly different order of being from ordinary human beings. Furthermore, according to the renowned Muslim philosopher Ibn Sīnā (b. 980 CE), the intellect of the prophet (and, in Muslim Shīʿī circles, of the *imām)* was considered to be fully developed and able to receive—unmediated by the processes of the human intellect—the emanation of the Active Intellect.[7] Shīᶜī Ismāᶜīlī[8] philosophic writings, therefore, sought to walk a fine line between asserting God's *tawḥid*, on the one hand, and establishing the importance of the *imām* as distinguished from other humans in his proximity to God, on the other.

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[5] Qurʾān 18:111 in *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An explanatory translation by Mohammed Marmaduke Picthall* (New York and Toronto: The New American Library, n.d.), 219: "Say: I am only a mortal like you. My Lord inspireth in me that your God is only One God. And whoever hopeth for the meeting with his Lord, let him do righteous work, and make none sharer of the worship due unto his Lord."

[6] L. Massignon, "Ḥulūl" in Bernard Lewis et al, eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd Edition) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 570–571.

In Hinduism, the notion of the theanthropos is more easily to be found in the *avatāra*, as for example in the widely known work, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which details the exploits and teachings of Kṛṣṇa, the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Scholars have more readily seen in this concept material for comparison with the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation.[9] Such a dialogue is also implicit in the works of John Braisted Carman[10] and Julius Lipner,[11] both of whom draw attention to Rāmānuja as a theologian in their studies of the celebrated Hindu thinker. No studies that I know of have been conducted between Hinduism and Islam on the issue of theanthropos, with the exception of Robert C. Zaehner, who examines the correlations between Hindu and Muslim mysticism.[12] This is due, in great part, to the notion that the Hindu concept of *avatāra*, understood as an incarnation of the supreme being, was thought to come closer to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, and hence the two notions were perceived to be comparable as a category. In this regard, Geoffrey Parrinder's work may be mentioned as one such comparison.[13] In this dissertation I will be examining whether the notion of *avatāra* can, in fact, be understood as incarnation. Indeed, as will be seen later, the very term theanthropic, defined as "pertaining, relating to, or having the nature of both God and man; at once divine and human",[14] from which the term theanthropos ("God-Man") is derived and applied to Jesus the Christ causes a problem if applied without qualification to the *avatāra.*

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[7] Davidson sums up the importance of the Active *(faᶜᶜāl)* Intellect as follows: "One work of Alfarabi's, Avicenna generally, and the early works of Averröes not only recognized a transcendent cause that leads human intellects to actuality; they represented the transcendent cause of human thought, the active intellect, as the cause of the existence of part or all of the sublunar world." See Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, & Averröes, on Intellect* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 29. The Active Intellect is the tenth intellect emanating from the First Intellect, in al-Fārābi's ontological schema, based on Aristotle.

[8] The Ismāᶜīlīs are Shīᶜī Muslims whose intellectual achievements and political engagements with the larger Muslim community have drawn the attention of modern scholarship. For an introduction to the Ismāᶜīlis, see Wilferd Madelung, "Shiism" and "Ismāᶜīlīyah" in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1986), 242–247 and 247–260. For a fuller study, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāᶜīlīs: Their history and doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[9] As for example, in Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970).

[10] John Braisted Carman, *The Theology of Rāmānuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), 13 and 256.

[11] Julius Lipner, *The Face of Truth: A Study of Meaning and Metaphysics in the Vedāntic Theology of Rāmānuja* (Albany: State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 1986), 103–104.

[12] Robert C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (London: 1960).

In order to bring greater focus and depth into my study, I decided to examine the concept of *imām* and *avatāra*, respectively, in the writings of two philosophers, one from each tradition. I have chosen the Ismāᶜīlī writings of the astronomer, philosopher, theologian and mystic Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (1201–1274 CE) for my investigation into the concept of *imām.* His Ismāᶜīlī works, which belong to the Nizārī, or Alamūt phase of Ismāᶜīlism, are significant for illustrating a development in Ismāᶜīlī theories regarding the *imāmate* from the classical Fāṭimid Ismāᶜīlī[15] formulations that immediately preceded Nizārī Ismāᶜīlism. Scholars of Ismāᶜīlism will note that Ṭūsī's theory advances the *imām's* position in the hierarchy of being, or ontology, significantly over Ismāᶜīlī thinkers prior to him, although I reserve final judgement with respect to this issue until some of his lesser known Ismāᶜīlī predecessors have been studied more closely. At the same time, to avoid divinizing the *imām* to the extent that his writings could be labelled as being among those of the *ghulāt*—a position that the Ismāᶜīlīs were not sympathetic to—Ṭūsī strives to maintain a distinction between pure divinity and the *imām*, which will be explored later in this study in the appropriate section on his ontology. It is precisely because Ṭūsī's articulation of the theory of *imāmah* is closer to the notion of a divine–human configuration that I thought his work might yield some interesting observations with regard to the larger study of comparing the concept of *imām* with the notion of *avatāra*, as is found in Hinduism.

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[13] Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation.*

[14] *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1979), v. 2, 3279.

[15] Generally understood to be the period between 910 CE and 1094 CE/1110 CE.

During his lifetime, not all of which was spent in association with the Ismāᶜīlī *daᶜwah* (the institution responsible for the understanding and dissemination of the Ismāᶜīlī Shīᶜī perception of Islam), Ṭūsī wrote and worked extensively on philosophy, theology, logic, Ṣūfism, and astronomy. Ṭūsī's theological, scientific and mystic works will not be under investigation here. For a period in his life, he was a resident scholar at Alamūt, headquarters of Nizārī Ismāᶜīlism, and his articulation of Ismāᶜīlī thought is reflected in the works *Taṣawwurāt* (more accurately known as *Rawḍātal-Taslīm)* and the autobiographical *Sayr va Sulūk*. Even though he declared himself to be an Ithnā ᶜAsharī Shīᶜī after the fall of Baghdad in 1258 CE (and scholarly opinion is divided on whether he was an Ithnā ᶜAsharī Shīᶜī all along), his philosophical work prior to his declaration is considered by the later Ismāᶜīlī tradition as representative of its theoretical stance. Irrespective of the many controversies that exist regarding the true religious affiliation of this celebrated thinker, the above-mentioned works exercised a significant impact on how the concept of *imām* was understood in post-Fāṭimid Ismāᶜīlism.

Since the notion of *avatāra* pertains, by and large, to Viṣṇu, I have chosen to study the works of the pre-eminent Vaiṣṇava thinker, Rāmānuja (1017–1137 CE; traditional dates[16]), a philosopher *par excellence*, who lived in South India. His major work, the *Śrībhāṣya*, offers a rich and complex source of investigation for students of Indian philosophy. As the leading exponent of the Indian philosophical *darśana* known as *Viśiṣṭādvaita* (qualified non-dualism), his work represents a major challenge to the reigning *darśana* of the day, Śaṅkara's *Advaita* (non-dualism). Whereas for Śaṅkara the supreme being *(Brahman)* is essentially without attributes *(nirguṇa)* and whereas It is the sole reality, Rāmānuja offers a view that Brahman is replete with attributes and that the world is also real. Thus, for him, the notion of *avatāra* is not a second order of ultimately ephemeral being, but rather a full manifestation of the divine being himself. Although his discussions of the nature of the *avatāra* are scattered throughout his writings, it is clear that the notion of *avatāra* constitutes a vivid Epic and Purāṇic backdrop to his writings. That is to say, firstly, as a Vaiṣṇavite, he was keenly aware of Viṣṇu's *avatāras* as expressions of divinity, as would have been his audience. Secondly, by writing a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, he acknowledged the importance of this pivotal text that was to figure so largely in the development of the Bhakti tradition. In the introduction to his commentary on this text, purported to be the teachings of Kṛṣṇa, Rāmānuja clearly understands Kṛṣṇa to be an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. That is, he understood Kṛṣṇa to be a mode of divinity through which authoritative teaching was being communicated, teaching that was codified as a *smṛti* ("remembered") text.

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[16] Carman, *The Theology*, 27, suggests the dates 1077–1157 CE.

Thus, the primary aim of this dissertation is to examine how theanthropic figures are conceived of in a philosophical manner by the two thinkers Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja. A secondary consideration to be noted, even if not to be explored fully within the confines of this dissertation is the fact that the two concepts, *imām* and *avatāra*, have been identified in an actual historical context, namely that of the Indian subcontinental Satpanth Ismāʿīlī *ginān* literature. To briefly explore the historical identification of the two concepts, I draw the reader's attention to Azim Nanji's study of the Satpanth Ismāʿīlī tradition in Hind and Sind, in which he focuses on the development of a tradition in Northern India that represents a creative interface between Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism and, among other Indian subcontinental traditions, the Hindu Vaiṣṇava Bhakti tradition.[17]

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[17] Nanji also draws attention to the indigenous Tantric, *Sant* and Śaivite traditions, as well as the solar cult, with which the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwah* (lit. "that which calls", hence "mission") may have interacted. Azim Nanji, "The Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Tradition in Hind and Sind" (Ph.D.

The Satpanth tradition represents the fruit of the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿite attempts at establishment in the Indian subcontinent. A significant feature of its literature is the identification of the figure of the Shīʿite *imām* with the tenth awaited Hindu *avatāra* Scholars such as Ivanow, Madelung, Khakee and others[18] have noted the equation made between these two concepts in Satpanth literature, and subsequently, have built on the assumption that these two concepts have so much in common that in fact they are identical. To date, there have been no studies examining whether there was in fact any philosophical basis on which the two concepts could be identified. Although the Satpanth tradition offers an example of the possible compatibility of the two concepts, and may offer to historians of religions—once more detailed studies have been conducted—interesting clues on how two differing religious traditions creatively interface, my primary interest in this study is to analyse the philosophical structures underpinning these two respective divine–human configurations. In so doing, this dissertation will, I hope, rectify this lacunae with respect to the philosophical compatibility of two distinct notions of theanthropos that came to be historically identified in the Satpanth Ismāʿīlī tradition. However, it should be emphasized that determining the *historical* linkages upon which such an identification may have been based will have to be left to future scholarship.

The Ismāʿīlī propagandists who contributed to the formation of Satpanth in Northern India (Sind, Gujarat and Kutchch) are thought to have maintained close ties with the Persian school of Nizārī Ismāʿīlism, headquartered in the fort of Alamūt. Ṭūsī was writing his

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dissertation, McGill University, 1972), 61–64; this work formed the basis for the book published under the title *The Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1978).

[18] See V. Ivanow, "Satpanth" in *Collectanea*, v.1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1948), 1–48; Madelung, "Shiism", 13:242–70; G. Khakee, "The *Dasa Avatāra* of Satpanthi Ismailis and Imam Shahis of Indo-Pakistan" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1972); Ali S. Asani, "The Ginān Literature of the Ismailis of Indo-Pakistan: Its Origins, Characteristics and Themes" in D.L. Eck and F. Mallison, eds., *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the Regions of India* (Groningen: Egbert Forstein, 1991), 1–18, as examples.

Ismāʿīlī works during the thirteenth century, a period that coincided with a major thrust of the Ismāʿīlī conversion *machina* (the *daʿwah*) into India.[19] Thus, it is highly probable that Ṭūsī's writings exercised a significant impact on how the concept of *imām* as well as Ismāʿīlism itself was to be understood. While it is difficult precisely to pin down the geographical locations of the surviving Ismāʿīlis after the fall of Alamūt in 1256 CE, many fled to the Indian subcontinent where the *daʿwah* had already made strong connections.[20] As Ṭūsī's conceptualizations were contemporaneous, it is likely that they informed the developing Satpanth tradition.

Similarly, the spheres of Ismāʿīlī activity in North India exhibit a Vaiṣṇavite presence. The *ginānṣ*, as the hymnal literature of the Satpanth Ismāʿīlī tradition is known, make frequent references to Vaikuṇṭha, the supreme resort of Viṣṇu; the Lord of the three worlds (an indication of the three gigantic strides taken by Viṣṇu in his fifth incarnation as Vāmana, the dwarf); Hari, an epithet of Viṣṇu–Kṛṣṇa; among others.[21] Although the question of historical connections between the emerging Satpanth communities and Vaiṣṇava communities cannot be fully studied here, it should be noted that Rāmānuja, who himself lived in the South, travelled to the Northwest and visited places which were already established centres of Vaiṣṇavism. The Āḻvārs (Tamil poet–saints) mention places in the North where Vaiṣṇava communities had developed. The travels of the South Indians Nāthamuni, Yāmuna and Rāmānuja through the Northwest may have established a connection between the southern and northern Vaiṣṇava traditions.[22] Hardy has shown the influence of the South Indian Āḻvār tradition (to which Rāmānuja subscribed) upon the formulation of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, a sacred text noted for its tenth book, which deals with the highly popular exploits of Kṛṣṇa.[23]

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[19] See in this connection Tazim R. Kassam, "Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance: An Anthology of Hymns by the Satpanth Ismāʿīlī Saint, Pīr Shams" (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1992). This study investigates the historical origins of Satpanth Ismāʿīlism, as the Indian phase of Ismāʿīlism came to be known.

[20] Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 444–445: "Many of the Quhistānī Nizārīs who survived the Mongol massacres migrated to Afghanistan, Sind, Panjāb and other parts of the Indian subcontinent."

[21] For examples, see the *gināns* translated by Kassam, "Songs of Wisdom".

[22] I thank Katherine K. Young for drawing my attention to these points.

The comparison undertaken in this dissertation will contribute toward a more sophisticated philosophic understanding of the theoretical basis upon which Satpanth *pīrs* (or *dāʿīs)* sought to develop an Ismāʿīlī identity within the largely Vaiṣṇavite milieu in which the *daʿwah* seems to have been active. The comparison proposed in this study will help future researchers to understand whether the identification proposed by the Ismāʿīlī *pīrs* in the Indian subcontinent was based on substantive grounds or if it was simply an expedient measure to facilitate conversion, or in between the two. Recent studies such as those of Kassam point to the fact that Satpanth was a development in India arising out of social, cultural, political as well as religious factors.[24] If so, then the development of Satpanth cannot be viewed only as the imposition of Indian religious symbols upon the Ismāʿīlī belief system, or vice-versa, but must be examined more seriously as a creative interaction between the deeper social and religious constructs of each tradition. Such an investigation would require a development of the scholarship on the *ginān* literature, which scholarship is still in its nascent stages, as well as more information about the Indian communities of the time.[25]

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[23] Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti: The early history of Kṛṣṇa devotion in South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). See Part 5.

[24] See Kassam, "Songs of Wisdom", 203–204. Kassam notes: "The period between the Sūmrah recapture of Lower Sind in 1051 C.E. and the Ghūrid attack of the Ismāʿīlīs in Multān in 1165 CE is most likely the crucible in which the social basis of an indigenous Ismāʿīlī community was forged through intermarriages, political alliances and a common cause requiring mutual trust and support .. [which] would have ... created a fertile ground for the exploration and exchange of religious and cultural ideas." Ibid., 201.

[25] Asani notes, in the absence of any historical verification, that the community itself asserts its period of activity in India to be "as early as the thirteenth century". See Ali S. Asani, "The Ismaili *gināns* as devotional literature" in R.S. McGregor, ed., *Devotional Literature in South Asia: Current Research 1985–1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 101.

To summarize, the aims of this dissertation are firstly to examine, from a philosophical point of view, divine-human configurations in two different religious traditions. Specifically, this study will investigate the concept of the theanthropos in the Ismāᶜīlī thought of the philosopher-*dāᶜī* Naṣīr al-Dīn Tūṣī (1201–1274 CE) and the Vaiṣṇava philosopher Rāmānuja ((1017–1137 CE).

Secondly, in analysing and comparing the philosophical structures underpinning the concepts of *imām* and *avatāra* in the writings of the abovementioned philosophers, this study will examine the compatability of these two concepts and whether their identification in the literature of the Satpanth Ismāᶜīlīs might have had any philosophical basis.

Thirdly, on the basis of this study, I will offer some pertinent questions that may be asked when developing a typology of divine-human configurations. It is hoped that in this manner this dissertation will advance the discussion of meaningful comparative analysis between key concepts in different religious traditions.

II. Methodological Considerations

There is some debate as to whether or not the undertaking of a comparative analysis such as is proposed here is possible or meaningful. For instance, an eminent Ṣūfism scholar once mentioned that such an endeavour was like comparing apples and oranges. Yet, within the context of the historical development of religious traditions, parallel or analogous concepts do get identified, as in the example of Satpanth Ismāᶜīlism, where an equation is made between *imām* and *avatāra*, respectively. Moreover, there is the larger framework of the questions pertaining to broader religious concepts such as divinity and the development of typologies to help organize deeper reflections on and responses to the sacred by human societies through the ages. That there is possibility of and value to comparative work was sharply brought into focus by Marilyn R. Waldman in her self-described "best bad pun": "You can make fruitful comparisons between apples and oranges, especially if you are interested in small round objects."[26]

Waldman's thesis is that such a comparative study of categories outlined by the discipline commonly known as the history of religions is possible, provided that there has been careful reflection on certain key issues pertaining to the categories, and proceeding from that, the procedure of comparision is clearly and explicitly outlined. For example, she asks:

a. Do we begin by assuming similarity or difference or some mixture of the two?

b. Do we believe that comparative strategies are discovered, uncovered, found, constructed, stipulated, or imagined?

Following upon questions such as these, Waldman goes on to discuss how her own comparative research proceeds along the lines of "stipulating or constructing patterns of similarity explicitly, according to a stated rationale." I have kept Waldman's observations to the fore—if perhaps not quite in the manner intended by her—when constructing a methodology for the purposes of my investigation, especially with regard to stipulating my comparative strategy. This I have done by isolating four categories within the systematic articulations of each thinker through which I will be examining the concept of the divine–human configuration, that is, *imām* and *avatāra*, respectively. These four categories are: ontology, psychology, epistemology and salvation. They will enable me to determine whether there are similar philosophical concerns and issues that pertain to the concepts of

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[26] Marilyn R. Waldman, "Islam and the Comparative Study of Religion." Draft paper presented to the American Academy of Religion, Anaheim, California, November 1989.

imām and *avatāra*, respectively. With respect to Waldman's first question, whether we begin by assuming similarity or difference, or some mixture of the two, I would like to note only that the Satpanth tradition considered them identical; that is, that someone, at some time, at some place, thought the two were identifiable as identical. Whether in fact, speaking from a philosophical point of view, there is any basis for them to be identical, or similar or different or a mixture, is something I will depend on my sources to tell me. Thus, in my conclusion, I will draw a comparison based on my investigation of each thinker's reflections on the nature of the *imām* and *avatāra*, respectively, with regard to the larger categories outlined above. Following this, I will briefly examine, as a secondary but critical issue, whether the Indian Ismāᶜīlī *daᶜwah* had any substantial basis for declaring the *imām* as the tenth *avatāra* in its hymnal literature. Finally, I will raise the questions that need to be asked were a typology of divine–human configurations to be developed within the discipline of History of Religions.

Problems of Scope

Considering that this study undertakes an examination of two key thinkers, one from each tradition, it is important to clarify in what respect will it be of value to Islamicists and to Indologists. With respect to the growing field of Ismāᶜīlī studies, it must be noted that a full study of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī has not, to date, been undertaken precisely because of the various fields to which he made a contribution.[27] The Ismāᶜīlī writings of Ṭūsī represent only one aspect of his thought. Studies of his Ismāᶜīlī writings have so far been conducted by Ivanow, Badakhchani, Madelung and Dabashi. Hodgson and Daftary refer to his thought in the context of larger studies.[28] Ivanow's research constitutes a paraphrase of Ṭūsī's *Taṣawwurāt*, as well as the preparation of an edition of the text and its translation, which is accompanied by an annotated glossary of terms. As such, important though Ivanow's scholarship was for drawing attention to and making accessible Ṭūsī's Ismāᶜīlī writings, it does not constitute a full analysis. Badakhchani, as part of his doctoral dissertation in which he presented a new edition of the *Taṣawwurāt*, as well as a partial translation of the same, examined the doctrines of *bāṭin* (lit. the 'inner", hence, esoteric), *taʾwīl* (symbolic interpretation), *taᶜlīm* (instruction) and *qiyāmat* (the Resurrection). Although his efforts are laudable and useful for further scholarship, there is no systematic analysis of the notion of *imām* as is proposed to be undertaken here. Madelung's work on the Ismāᶜīlī aspect of Ṭūsī has hitherto been recorded in his paper on Ṭūsī ethics; as a noted scholar on Shīᶜism, further works from him would be welcome. His landmark study on the historical development of the institution of *imāmate* and its relation to the doctrine of *imāmah* has cleared the field for more detailed studies of the concept of *imām* with respect to individual thinkers. I am, as are other scholars of Ismāᶜīlism, awaiting with interest Hamid Dabashi's paper on Ṭūsī that is shortly to be published in a collected edition by Farhad Daftary. In addition, there is still much research to be undertaken with respect to the intellectual history and development of ideas from one Ismāᶜīlī thinker to another, and from one Ismāᶜīlī phase to another. The connections between the Ismāᶜīlī works of Ṭūsī and prior Ismāᶜīlī as well as Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sīna still have to be researched and for these the scholarly world awaits the writings of James W. Morris and Hamid Dabashi, both of whom are purported to be working on these issues. Scholars such as Madelung, Halm, Corbin and Daftary[29] have attempted to begin to place the history and thought of Ismāᶜīlī ideas in a continuum. Current scholarly research as evinced in the writings of Walker, Alibhai, Hunzai, Kassam, and Hunsberger,[30] to name but a few, is of necessity still centred on examining the contributions made by individual Ismāᶜīlī thinkers (none of which writings are on Ṭūsī).

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[27] Noted by James W. Morris, "The Philosopher–Prophet in Avicenna's Political Philosophy", in Charles E. Butterworth, ed., *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 157. He observes: "Unfortunately, the many extant studies of al-Ṭūsī (whether in Western languages or in Persian and Arabic) tend to focus on narrower subjects—e.g., his astronomical endeavors, Ismaili Shiite writings, role in Imami Shiite *kalam*, political functions (under the Mongols and earlier), and relations with al-Qūnawī (and other disciples) [of Ibn al-ᶜArabī]—without indicating the way these writings and activities are tied to his lifelong devotion to the study and teaching of Avicenna's philosophy and its political applications." Whether or not one agrees with his view of the underlying unity in Ṭūsī's diverse spheres of intellectual activity, the charge levelled against the scholarship on Ṭūsī holds. However, such a complete work on all of Ṭūsī's writings must necessarily be preceded by detailed study on the each of these areas.

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[28] For example, see W. Ivanow, "An Ismailitic Work by Nasiru'd-din Tusi" in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1931), 3:527–564; W. Ivanow, ed. and trans., *The Rawdatu't-Taslim commonly called Tasawwurat by Nasiru'd-din Tusi* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1950); Sayyed Jalal Hosseini Badakhchani, "The Paradise of Submission: A Critical Edition and Study of Rawẓeh-i Taslīm commonly known as Taṣawwurāt by Khwājeh Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, 1201–1275" (Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1989); Wilferd Madelung, "Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī's Ethics Between Philosophy, Shiᶜism and Sufism" in Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *Ethics in Islam* (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1985), 85–101; and Hamid Dabashi, whose paper on Ṭūsī is about to appear in a series of articles on Ismāᶜīlism to be edited by Farhad Daftary and is not yet available. Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismāᶜīlīs Against the Islamic World* ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1955), esp. 231ff, and Daftary, *The Ismāᶜīlīs*, 408ff include Ṭūsī in their larger purview.

The efforts of Ṭūsī's Ismāᶜīlī works evidence a close familiarity with previous works in that tradition as well as engagement with philosophical issues in the larger context of Muslim philosophy that occupied Ismāᶜīlī thinkers of the Fāṭimid period. Given the focus and scope of this work, it will not be possible (nor relevant) to examine Ṭūsī's Ismāᶜīlī works in the full context of Ismāᶜīlī thought as well as Muslim philosophical thought. However, this study should advance studies undertaken in that regard. Similary, his work as a Twelver-Shīᶜite theologian, as a commentator on the esteemed philosopher Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), as a Ṣūfī and as a scientist are completely outside the purview of this dissertation. However, it is my hope that this study of Ṭūsī's thought as found in his major Ismāᶜīlī work, the *Taṣawwurāt*, will further the research on Ismāᶜīlī philosophy, and thereby contribute both to the study of Islamic philosophy and more integrated Ismāᶜīlī studies. In addition, this study on the concept of *imām* should advance scholarship on the historical development of ideas concerning *imāmah* with respect to Ismāᶜīlī studies as a whole and Nizārī Ismāᶜīlism in particular.

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[29] Wilferd Madelung, "Das Imamat in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre" in *Der Islam* (1961), 43–135; Heinz Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen ismāᶜīlīya: eine Studie über islamischen Gnosis* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1978); Henry Corbin, *Trilogie Ismaèlienne* (Tehran and Paris, Institute Franco-iranien, 1961); Henri Corbin, *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964); Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāᶜīlīs, op. cit.* Although this list is by no means exhaustive, it must be mentioned that after Ivanow's landmark 1952 monograph in which a comprehensive look at Ismāᶜīlism was offered, Daftary's was the first attempt to survey the development of Ismāᶜīlism within a historical, political and intellectual context. See W. Ivanow, *Brief Survey of the Evolution of Ismailism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1952), and Daftary, cited above.

[30] Paul E. Walker, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom: A Study of Abū Yaᶜqūb al-Sijistānī's Kitāb al-yanābīᶜ* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994); Paul E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Yaᶜqūb al-Sijistānī* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Paul E. Walker, "Abū Yaᶜqūb al-Sijistānī and the Development of Ismaili Neoplatonism" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1974); Mohamad Abualy Alibhai, "Abū Yaᶜqūb al-Sijistānī and Kitāb Sullam al-Najāt: A Study in Islamic Neoplatonism" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1983); Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, "The Concept of Tawḥīd in the Thought of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1986); Sayyed Jalal Hosseini Badakhchani, "The Paradise of Submission"; Tazim Rahim Kassam, "Songs of Wisdom"; Alice Chandler Hunsberger, "Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Doctrine of the Soul: From the Universal Intellect to the Physical World in Ismāᶜīlī Philosophy" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1992), as examples. Also my own short study: Zainool Rahim Kassam, "The Problem of Knowledge in Nāṣir-i Khusraw: An Ismāᶜīlī Thinker of 5th/11th century" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1984).

For Rāmānuja, the situation is somewhat different. As a key Indian philosopher, Rāmānuja has commanded greater scholarly attention, both indigenous and western, than has Ṭūsī. References to some of the key works on Rāmānuja can be found in the bibliographies of both Carman and Lipner. However, there are still infinite possibilities for research both with respect to specific issues in his thought, and with respect to his engagement with other *darśanas* or Indian philosophical schools. For instance, in examining the secondary literature on Rāmānuja, I was unable to find any systematic analysis of his position on *avatāra*. This is perhaps due to the fact, mentioned earlier, that this concept is not of central concern to him even though it forms an underlying backdrop against which many of his ideas are articulated. Carman examines the notion of *avatāra* briefly in the context of wider discussions of God's relationship to man's moral and religious action in the form of divine grace, and in the divine's role as merciful protector and savior. Although he does not undertake a full investigation of the *avatāra*, his work on the theology of Rāmānuja has thrown some light on the importance of the *avatāra* in a devotional context. I hope that my study will augment Carman's treatment of the issues from a philosophical perspective. Lipner's discussion is all too brief, comprising no more than five pages in total, but his comments provide very helpful clues. Although Lipner considers Rāmānuja to be a theologian in his overall concerns, he has examined the philosophical subtleties in

Rāmānuja's works that have added to my understanding of this complex and intriguing philosopher. My studies on *avatāra* from the point of view of philosophy will, I hope, add to Lipner's work. In order to conduct an inquiry on the concept of *avatāra* in Rāmānuja's writings, I have consulted three primary sources, namely, *Śrībhāṣya, Vedārthasaṃgraha* and *Gītābhāṣya* . In this regard, my study offers the first full investigation of this concept in Rāmānuja's writings and my contribution lies in specifically examining the concept of *avatāra* with respect to four categories of philosophical investigation, namely, ontology, psychology, epistemology and teleology in the sense of salvation/liberation. It is my hope that this study of Rāmānuja's abovementioned writings with respect to the notion of *avatāra* will contribute to the field of Indian philosophy in general, and Vaiṣṇava studies in particular.

Regarding Translations

The works utilized in this dissertation have all, by and large, been translated by earlier scholars in the field. Ṭūsī's *Taṣawwurāt* was first translated in 1950 by W. Ivanow,[31] whose indefatigible efforts in the field went far in establishing Ismāᶜīlī studies on the scholarly map. As noted by Daftary,[32] Ivanow's original field of study was Iranian languages, and he worked under the directorship of the eminent philologist, C. Salemann at the former Asiatic Museum (renamed the Institute of Oriental Studies) in St. Petersburg. In his many translations of Ismāᶜīlī works, Ivanow took great pains to point out peculiarities within the language of the text, problems encountered in translation, authorship, dating, and notes on the technical terms and doctrines presented in the text. While the translations are not always literal, they communicate the concepts intended, provided one has recourse to the original text.

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[31] *The Rawdatu't-Taslim commonly called Tasawwurat by Nasiru'd-din Tusi,* Persian Text, edited and Translated into English by W. Ivanow (Leiden: E.J.Brill for the Ismaili Society, 1950).

[32] Farhad Daftry, "Bibliography of the Publications of the Late W. Ivanow" in *Islamic Culture*, Jan. 1971, 55.

The *Taṣawwurāt* was re-edited and portions of it retranslated by Jalal Badakhchani[33] in 1989 on the basis of new manuscripts that had come to light subsequent to the manuscripts utilized by Ivanow. Badakhchani reports several misreadings by Ivanow, stating that they are too numerous to point out, and claims that the latter also deleted a great number of the Arabic quotations from the body of the text.[34] However, he does not himself provide a complete translation of the text, choosing to paraphrase at certain sections. Accordingly, in the section on Ṭūsī, the translations provided by Badakhchani will be utilized when available, and recourse made to Ivanow's translations in other instances. Despite his greater fidelity to the text, Badakhchani's translations are less readable compared with Ivanov's. There is still room for improvement in this area of translation and this is perhaps a task that can be taken up at a later date. In all cases, I have checked against the Persian original to ensure that the translation offered, whether Badakhchani's or Ivanow's, does not depart from the meaning of the text. In many instances, to improve the accuracy of the translation, I have offered my own. The *Sayr va Sulūk* has been translated by Badakhchani in an unpublished work titled *Contemplation and Action* in 1987.[35] This work has not been utilized to any great extent in the dissertation; however, Badakhchani's translation is offered in the one or two instances in which it has been cited.

For the section on Rāmānuja, the chief works that have been utilized are his magnum opus, the *Śrībhāṣya*; the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, which van Buitenen refers to as Rāmānuja's "philosophical début"; and the *Gītābhāṣya*, a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which van

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[33] Badakhchani, "The Paradise of Submission", op.cit.

[34] Ibid., 3, n. 2.

[35] J. Badakhchani, "Contemplation and Action: English translation, notes and introduction" (author's typescript, London, 1987; first translated 1983). It is accompanied by the Persian text of *Sayr va Sulūk*.

Buitenen places as having been composed after the *Śrībhāṣya*. For the *Śrībhāṣya,* I have utilized the edition of the text offered in the The University of Poona Sanskrit and Prakrit Series, which aimed at providing a critical edition of this key text, along with "an English translation, Introduction, Notes and Appendices" by Raghunath Damodar Karmarkar, a respected senior Poona Sanskritist.[36] The *Vedārthasaṃgraha* has been similarly edited and translated by J.A.B. van Buitenen, a noted Indologist and eminent Sanskritist.[37] For the *Gītābhāṣya,* I have taken recourse to the translation of A. Govindāchārya published in 1898.[38] Although this is a much older translation, given the more recent (1985) translation available of M.R. Sampatkumaran,[39] I have preferred it owing to its more literal translation of the text, despite its archaisms. The Sanskrit text itself is found in the *Granthamāla.*[40] The translations of Carman and Lipner have been utilized in the contexts in which they occur. In all cases, all the translations utilized are those of authorities well-established in the field. I did not think it necessary to reproduce their worthy efforts in this area, except to check the Sanskrit originals for my own clarification.

III. A Brief Historical Overview of the Concept of *Imām*

The term *imām* (literally, "one who precedes", "one who leads the prayer") is understood by Shīᶜah Muslims to connote the true successors of Muḥammad with respect to the spiritual, and at times, the temporal, leadership of the community. One of the sources for this claim is the account, found in both Sunnī and Shīᶜī collections of *ḥadīth* (traditions recounting the sayings and actions of the Prophet and his companions), concerning the details of what has come to be termed the Farewell Pilgrimage of the Prophet. According to an account given by Ibn Ḥanbal in his *Musnad*, the Prophet declared his cousin and son-in-law ᶜAlī to be in a position of authority similar to his own:

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[36] *Śribhāṣya of Rāmānuja,* edited with a complete English Translation, Introduction, Notes and Appendices by Raghunath Damodar Karmarkar (Poona: University of Poona Sanskrit and Prakrit Series, Part I: 1959; Part II: 1962; Part III: 1964).

[37] *Rāmānuja's Vedārthasaṃgraha: Introduction, Critical Edition and Annotated Translation* by J.A.B. van Buitenen (Poona: Deccan College Monograph Series, 1956).

[38] *Śrī Bhagavad-Gītā with Śrī Rāmānujāchārya's Viśiṣṭādvaita-Commentary,* translated into English by A. Govindāchārya, the disciple of Śrīmān (sic) Yogī S. Pārthasārathi Aiyangār (Madras: At the Vaijayanti Press, 1898).

[39] *The Gītābhāṣya of Rāmānuja,* trans. M.R. Sampatkumaran (Bombay: Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, 1985 [reprint]).

[40] *Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja Granthamala,* ed. Sri Kanchi P.B. Annangaracharya Swami (Kancheepuram: Granthamala Office, 1956).

> We were with the Apostle of God in his journey and we stopped at Ghadīr Khumm. We performed the obligatory prayer together and a place was swept for the Apostle under two trees and he performed the mid-day prayer. And then he took ᶜAlī by the hand and said to the people: 'Do you not acknowledge that I have a greater claim on each of the believers than they have on themselves?' And they replied: 'Yes!' And he took ᶜAlī's hand and said: 'Of whomsoever I am Lord *[Mawla]*, then ᶜAlī is also his Lord. O God! Be Thou the supporter of whoever supports ᶜAlī and the enemy of whoever opposes him.' And ᶜUmar met him [ᶜAlī] after this and said to him: 'Congratulations, O son of Abū Ṭālib! Now morning and evening [i.e. forever] you are the master of every believing man and woman.'[41]

In subsequent events, ᶜAlī did become the fourth caliph, but his caliphate was contested by Muᶜawiyah, the Umayyad governor of Syria, who claimed that the issue of the third Caliph ᶜUthmān's murder had never been fully resolved, accusing ᶜAlī of complicity in the affair. ᶜAlī's supporters rallied around him and came to be known as the party *(shīᶜah)* of ᶜAlī.

The next event of significance in the development of Shiᶜism is the death of Ḥusayn, the son of ᶜAlī, at Karbala (in Iraq) in 680 CE. This led to the formation of a radical Shiᶜite sect called the Kaysānīyah, whose doctrines need not concern us here except in so far as they considered ᶜAlī and his three sons as "successive, divinely appointed *imāms* with supernatural qualities."[42] The doctrines of the Kaysānīyah were not accepted by the more conservative Shīᶜah in Kufah. Accepting successively the *imāmate* of Ḥusayn's descendants, the Kufan Shīᶜah "sought the guidance of the *imam* as an authoritative, divinely inspired teacher rather than as a charismatic leader."[43]

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[41] Reproduced from Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shiᶜi Islam* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 15. In his notes, Momen draws attention to other similar traditions *(ḥadīth)* found in Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad*, as well as to the *Sunan* of Ibn Māja. This specific tradition is found in Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad*, 4:281. The Arabic text is: *man kuntu mawlāhu fa-ᶜAlī mawlāhu, Allāhumma wāli min wālāhi wa-ᶜādi min ᶜādāhi, wa ānṣar min naṣrihi wa-ākhdhal min khadhilihi.*

[42] Wilferd Madelung, "Shiism", 13: 242.

By the time of Ḥusayn's great-grandson Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq's death in 765 CE, the Shīᶜah had developed into a "significant religious community with a distinctive law, ritual, and religious doctrine."[44] The doctrine of the *imām*, as it had appeared by this point in time, differed from the Sunnī doctrine regarding the leader of the community in one significant aspect. While the Sunnī theologians had identified Muḥammad, the bearer of the revelation, as merely a human being like themselves, the Shīᶜīs considered Muḥammad not only to be human, like themselves, but also as someone who in his heart was able to receive the divine revelation *(waḥy)*. Thus, the Prophet was considered a link *(waṣīlah)* between humanity and divinity. Then, while the Sunnīs held that revelation came to an end with the demise of Prophet Muḥammad (the seal of the prophets), the Shīᶜah held that, on the contrary, it was not revelation that had come to an end, only the bringing down of a divinely-sanctioned lawbook *(risālah)*. That is, Muḥammad was both a *nabī* and a *rasūl*, both a "warner" and a "messenger" with an authoritative lawbook, the Qurᵓān. It was the prophetic function embodied in the revelation of a book of laws, as it were, that had come to an end, not the inspirational function. The latter belied a closeness to or link with the divine. This inspirational function of the prophet set him apart from other mortals, and, in his capacity to receive inspiration or *waḥy*, the prophet was considered a *walī* (lit. friend, helper, guardian, patron) as exemplified in the Qurᵓānic vs. 5:55: "Your *walī* is only God, his Messenger, and those who [truly] believe". To clarify the distinction between Muḥammad and ᶜAlī, the Shīᶜah maintained that prophethood as represented by Muḥammad as the conveyor of God's message *(risālah)* had come to an end, that is, Muḥammad's death signified the end of

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[43] Ibid., 243.
[44] Ibid.

nubūwwah (prophecy), but that revelation in the form of divine inspiration *(waḥy)* continued, in the *wilāyah* (spiritual authority)[45] of ᶜAlī.

The importance of sustaining divine inspiration after the death of Muḥammad was articulated as a difference between the exoteric and the esoteric aspects of the revealed scripture. The Qurᵓān constituted what has been termed the *tanzīl*, "that which has been brought down," the exoteric revelation. However, due to the many difficult, abstract, and metaphorical passages within it, the Qurᵓān's message was seen to have contained much within it that could not possibly have been explained by the Prophet during the short span of his lifetime. It was thus necessary for divine providence to have allowed for the ongoing interpretation of the revealed scripture, so that its esoteric meaning could be revealed to human minds at the appropriate time. This interpretation of the esoteric passages, termed the *taᵓwīl*, became the preserve of the *imām*, who continued in his person the function of *wilāyah*, or divine inspiration. Thus, concomitant with the *tanzīl/taᵓwīl* aspects of prophecy were the *ẓāhir/bāṭin* aspects of the revealed scripture. The *tanzīl* was that which was revealed to Muḥammad and the *taᵓwīl* represented the ongoing interpretation of the *tanzīl* for succeeding generations, thus rendering the *tanzīl* relevant for all future eras. Accordingly, the *ẓāhir* was that which was the apparent meaning of the text, while the *bāṭin* signified its inner, or esoteric, meaning. The Shīᶜah maintained that this function of *wilāyah* was bequeathed by Muḥammad to ᶜAlī and his heirs through Fāṭimah, the daughter of Muḥammad. This *wilāyah* was to continue to the end of time, since, after the Qurᵓān, no more legislative scriptures were to be revealed.

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[45] For a fuller discussion of *wilāyah*, see Hermann Landolt, "Walāyah" in Mircea Eliade, Editior in Chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (henceforth *ER)*, 316–323. With respect to the Ismāᶜīlī view of *wilāyah* as articulated by the famed Fāṭimid jurist Qāḍī al-Nuᶜmān, Landolt notes that *wilāyah* stood "esoterically *(bāṭin)* for the true knowledge *(ḥaqīqat al-ᶜilm)* bestowed primordially on Adam and inherited by prophets and imams, [and] is the very foundation of the sacred history of prophecy itself and its necessary fulfillment in the imamate." (320)

Within this general framework concerning the articulation of the Shīᶜah concept of *imām* developed the specifically Ismāᶜīlī concept, which continued to be reformulated according to different historical circumstances.[46] Our specific concern here is the nature of the *imām*. General Shīᶜah formulations had already set the *imām* apart from other human beings in that the *imām* in his nature was human but, in addition, was spiritually elevated, and thus linked to the divine in his capacity to receive divine inspiration. The Ismāᶜīlīs derive their nomenclature from another dispute over succession, this time, over Ismāᶜīl, the elder son of Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765 CE). Ismāᶜīl, although designated successor by Jaᶜfar, predeceased him, and Jaᶜfar's followers separated into different factions. Some followers transferred their allegiance to another son, ᶜAbd Allāh al-Afṭaḥ, while some others, upon the latter's death a few years later, recognized another yet son, Mūsā al-Kāzim, giving rise to the branch that today is recognized as the Ithnā ᶜAsharīya, or Twelver Shīᶜah. Yet other followers "either denied Ismāᶜīl's death, or recognized Ismāᶜīl's son Muḥammad"[47] as the *imām* and came to be known as the Ismāᶜīliyah, and is the stream that concerns us here.

Jaᶜfar's doctrine was based on the premise that the world cannot exist without the leadership of the *imām*, who is divinely appointed and guided, and who is a requisite authoritative teacher in all religious matters. Due to his divine mission, the *imām* is conceived of as being infallible or sinless *(maᶜṣūm)* and occupies the prophet's rank in every way except in the revealing of a new scripture. Those Muslims who in any way rejected, disbelieved or disobeyed the divinely appointed *imām* were, in fact, rejecting the Prophet, and this constituted an act of apostacy. The succession of divinely appointed *imāms* passed from father to son by designation *(naṣṣ)*, and would continue to the end of time. While temporal rule was possible for the *imām*, it was not deemed necessary to his office. In fact, Jaᶜfar forbade his followers to engage in political or revolutionary activity, declaring instead that the rightful position of the *imāms* as rulers of the world would be restored at the advent of the *Qāʾim* ("riser") at the end of time.[48]

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[46] For an examination of this in some detail, see Wilferd Madelung, "Das Imamat", 43–135. An exhaustive overview of the Ismāᶜīlīs and their doctrines, with the exception of the Satpanth period, the scholarship on which is still in the early stages, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāᶜīlīs.*

[47] Madelung, "Shiism", 244.

Within Twelver Shīᶜism, the events that led to a further development in the theory of *imāmah* surrounded the death of the eleventh *imām*, Ḥasan al-ᶜAskarī, in 874 CE. Disputes over whether or not he left an heir led to further schisms, but the main body of his followers declared that a son was born to him but had been hidden, and was declared to be the twelfth *imām*. He was declared to remain in hiding *(ghayba)* until his return at the end of time as the *Mahdī* and the *Qāʾim*, at which time he would re-establish the righteousness of the Shīᶜah cause.[49] In the first phase of his concealment, he was declared to be in contact with a series of stewards *(wakīl, safīr)*. The fourth of these died in 941 CE without appointing a successor, and this initiated the second phase, or the greater *ghayba*. The *imām* is henceforth thought to live on the earth, *incognito*, and not in regular contact with any one person, although he may communicate to one or another of his followers and intervene in the affairs of the community.[50]

Within Ismāᶜīlī Shīᶜism, the attempt to establish the Fāṭimid caliphate led to the identification of the successor of Ismāᶜīl, Muḥammad b. Ismāᶜīl, with the awaited *Mahdī* or *Qāʾim*. The significance of this identification lay in the development of a cyclical view of history, according to which each *nāṭiq*, or speaker-prophet,[51] was accompanied by a *waṣī* (executor) or *asās* ([one who would lay the] foundation), and followed by seven *imāms*, the seventh of whom would rise to occupy the rank of the speaker–prophet of the next cycle.

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[48] Ibid., 243-244.

[49] For more details on the return of the *Imām* as the *Mahdī*, see Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shiᶜism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), especially Chapter 5.

[50] Ibid., 244.

[51] The first six speaker-prophets are identified as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. See W. Madelung, "Shiism: Ismāᶜīlīyah", in *ER*, 248-9.

His function would be to abrogate the previous religious law *(sharīᶜah)* and bring a new scripture and law. In the case of Muḥammad b. Ismāᶜīl, however, while he would abrogate the law of Islām, he would not bring a new scripture (since his ancestor, the prophet Muḥammad had been the seal of prophecy in this regard), but would instead reveal in full the hitherto hidden esoteric import of the Qurᵓān. As the *Qāᵓim* and *Mahdī*, he would rule the world and restore righteousness. During his absence, the teaching was to be handed down through twelve *ḥujjahs* (literally, "proofs", that is, "verifiers"), each responsible for a province or *jazīrah*. Below them were several ranks of *dāᶜīs*. The development of this theory of *imāmate* and its attendant organizational structure cannot be dated with any certainty. The successors of Muḥammad b. Ismāᶜīl are also shrouded in mystery, and very little is known about the development of Ismāᶜīlism until the middle of the ninth century, when the Ismāᶜīlīs reappeared on the historical scene in an organized effort to establish what later became the Fāṭimid caliphate in North Africa. However, as Madelung points out, "the ancestors of the Fāṭimids, claimed neither descent from Muḥammad ibn Ismāᶜīl nor the status of *imams*, even among their closest *dāᶜīs*, but described themselves as *ḥujjahs* (lit. "proofs"; here meaning deputies) of the absent *imam* Muḥammad ibn Ismāᶜīl."[52]

Subsequently, however, ᶜAbd Allāh, later to become the first Fāṭimid caliph, declared that his predecessors had been, in fact, legitimate *imāms*, but had concealed this truth out of concerns for political safety. He also declared that the names of Ismāᶜīl and Muḥammad b. Ismāᶜīl had been used along with other names as cover names to conceal the true identity of the *imāms* after Jaᶜfar, whose son ᶜAbd Allāh was reckoned to be the legitimate heir. These declarations led to further schisms, but in any case ᶜAbd Allāh was declared caliph and al-Mahdī by his *dāᶜī*, Abū ᶜAbd Allāh al-Shīᶜī, in 910 CE.[53] This led to a separation in the understanding of the two terms, *mahdī* and *qāᵓim*, which had previously been understood to connote the same eschatological figure. Thus, some of the functions of the awaited *mahdī* were thought to have been taken over by the Fāṭimid *imām* al-Mahdī, with the expectation that his successors would fulfill whatever he was unable to carry out in his lifetime. Henceforth, the title *al-Qāʾim* was reserved for the awaited seventh speaker-prophet *(nāṭiq)*, and *imām* of the end of time.[54] The development of subsequent Fāṭimid theories of the *imāmate*, which were not without many intricate dimensions, placed the Fāṭimid caliphs as *imāms* of the sixth cycle (that is, the cycle of Muḥammad), and projected the appearance of the *Qāʾim* even further into the future. Essentially, the *imām* was understood to occupy a rank below that of the *nāṭiq* and the *asās*; however, in the absence of both, the *imām* functioned as the primary guardian and interpreter of the revealed scripture, transmitting his knowledge in turn to the ranks of initiates below him. Details on the ontological and cosmological hierarchies employed to explain the rank of the *imām* differ from one Fāṭimid thinker to the other, although agreement was reached on the *imām's* spiritual authority and his function as interpreter.[55]

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[52] Ibid., 249.
[53] Ibid., 249-250.

Within the Ismāᶜīlī Shīᶜah, another split occurred after the death of the Ismāᶜīlī Fāṭimid caliph, al-Mustanṣir (d. 1094 CE). His eldest son, Nizār, was imprisoned by al-Mustanṣir's vizier, al-Afḍal, who placed Nizār's younger brother, Aḥmad, on the Fāṭimid seat of caliphate. Nizār's claims, however, were championed by Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, an Ismāᶜīlī *dāᶜī* who had gained control of the fort of Alamūt just south of the Caspian Sea, and thenceforth, his followers came to be known as the Nizārīyah or Nizārī Ismāᶜīlīs. Ḥasan-i Ṣabbah's ideological contribution lay in his development of the theory of *taᶜlīm* (lit.,

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[54] Madelung, "Al-Mahdī", in H.A.R. Gibb et al, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition) (henceforth *EI*^{2}) (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1960–), 1237.

[55] For differing Ismāᶜīlī articulations of the rank of the *imām*, see as an introduction Sami N. Makarem, "The Philosophical Significance of the Imām in Ismāᶜīlism" in *Stvdia Islamica* XXVII (1967), 41–53. Mention of this article is made by way of introduction, in light of the more detailed studies such as those of Walker, Hunzai, and others, on different Ismāᶜīlī thinkers.

"teaching").[56] According to this theory, the divinely sanctioned and authoritative teaching *(taᶜlīm)* of the *imām* with respect to knowledge of God was necessary for all human beings, whose intellect alone could not possibly span the range of such requisite knowledge. Ḥasan-i Ṣabbah died in 1124 CE and was succeeded by his deputy Buzurgummīd.

The next point of significance for the development of the theory of *imāmah* occurred in 559 AH/1164 CE, when Buzurgummīd's grandson, Ḥasan ᶜalā dhikrihi al-salām, proclaimed the resurrection *(qiyāmah)*. Ḥasan seems to have maintained that as *ḥujjah* of the absent *imām*, he was spiritually identical with him. His son Muḥammad, however, declared that his father had really been the *imām*, and thus that he was both physically and spiritually the *imām*, and he developed the doctrine of *qiyāmah* further.[57]

According to this doctrine, the *imām* was conceived of as being the manifestation of the divine word *(kalimah)*, which was the command *(amr)* and which put the cycle of creation into motion. As the lord of the age of *qiyāmah* (resurrection), he was the *Qāʾim*. Henceforth, the spiritual truths attendant upon the revelation (the *tanzīl)*, which had hitherto remained hidden *(bāṭin)*, could be openly declared by the *imām–qāʾim* to his followers, the true believers. The *imām–qāʾim*, as the manifestation of the divine word, was, so to speak, the manifestation of the divine in so far as this was possible within the realm of creation. As Marshall G.S. Hodgson points out, the development of the doctrine at this time, with its emphasis on attaining spiritual perfection under the guidance of the *imām–qāʾim*, moved the Ismāᶜīlis "closer to the practices of a Ṣūfī *ṭarīqa*," an option they were forced to utilize after the disintegration of the Ismāᶜīlī state at Alamūt.[58]

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[56] For an exposition of the doctrine of *taᶜlīm*, see Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins*, especially chapters II and VI.

[57] Ibid., chapters VII and VIII; also Daftary, *The Ismāᶜīlīs*, chapter 6.

[58] M.G.S. Hodgson, "The Ismāᶜīlī State", in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, v. 5, ed. by J.A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 475, 482.

Muḥammad's son Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan (d. 1221 CE) rescinded the *qiyāmah* doctrine and commanded his followers to observe the *sharīᶜah* in its Sunnī form, a command that was relaxed to some degree by his son, ᶜAlāᵓ al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 1255 CE). It was during his reign that Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūṣī (d. 1274), whose Ismāᶜīlī works will be the focus of our attention in this dissertation, came to Alamūt. He wrote several works which stand testimony to the Ismāᶜīlī doctrines of this period, and as noted by Hodgson, reflect the contemporaneous teachings concerning the doctrine of *qiyāmah*.[59]

The fort of Alamūt was surrendered to the Mongols in 1256 CE and the subsequent persecution of the Ismāᶜīlis led to the concealment of the *imāms*. We do know that another split occurred between the followers of Qāsim Shāh and Muḥammad Shāh, the grandsons of the last *imām* of Alamut. The descendants of Qāsim Shāh seem to have operated from Anjudān.[60] They also seem to have been associated with the Niᶜmatullāhī Ṣūfī order up until the nineteenth century.[61] In the mid-eighteenth century, the *imām* of the Qāsim Shāhī line, Abū al-Ḥasan Shāh, was appointed governor of the province of Kirmān until his death in 1206 AH/1791–2 CE. His grandson, Ḥasan ᶜAlī Shāh received the title of Āghā Khān, a hereditary title, from the Persian ruler, Fatḥ ᶜAlī Shāh, and after an unsuccessful attempt to regain control of Kirmān, he moved to India in 1259 AH/1843 CE.[62] The fourth Āghā

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[59] Ibid. Opinion is divided on Ṭūsī's religious affiliation before, during and after his stay at Alamūt. The consensus, across the board, however, is that his writings from the Alamūt period reflect Ismāᶜīlī teachings. See Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins*, 239–243; Daftary, *The Ismāᶜīlīs*, 408–410; G.M. Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964), introduction, esp. n.i, 21. Abdulhadi Hairi's "Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī: His Supposed Political Role in the Mongol Invasion of Baghdad" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1968) is an example of kinds of arguments advanced to explain Ṭūsī's engagement with the Ismāᶜīlīs from the point of view that Ṭūsī was a Twelver Shīᶜite, whereas Badakhchani's treatment of the issue is to defend Ṭūsī's actions from the perspective that he was a sincere Ismāᶜīlī during the time he wrote the Ismāᶜīlī works.

[60] W. Ivanow, "Tombs of some Persian Ismaᶜili Imams," in *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JBBRAS)*, xiv (1938), 49-62

[61] Madelung, "Ismāᶜīliyya," in *EI*^{2}, 201.

[62] Ibid. Also see Daftary, *The Ismāᶜīlīs*, 507, 511ff.

Khān, Karīm al-Ḥusaynī, presently resides in Aiglemont, France, and is considered by the heirs of the Nizārī Ismāᶜīlīs to be the forty-ninth *imām*.

As Madelung notes, after the fall of Alamūt, the "Nizārī communities ... developed largely independently of each other."[63] He identifies four major communities: the Syrian, Persian, the Upper Oxus region, and the Indian. His observation holds true to a certain extent, especially since after the fall of Alamūt there was no clear locus of leadership. The Syrian community had, under the leadership of Rashīd al-Dīn Sinān (1140–1192 CE)—titled "The Old Man of the Mountain" by the Crusaders—already begun to develop independently in the Alamūt period, even while maintaining its allegiance to the leaders at Alamūt. The literature of the Syrian *daᶜwah* comprised largely of Fāṭimid and Qarmatī works that were composed in Arabic.[64] No Persian works seem to have been translated, and the *qiyāmah* doctrine as introduced via Rashīd al-Dīn Sinān does not seem to have taken the precise formulation it did in Alamūt. According to Hodgson, the Syrian tradition contains popular Shīᶜah ideas that are not mirrored in the Alamūt tradition, such as the prominence of the figures of Khiḍr, Abū Ḍharr, and the concept of transmigration.[65] The Syrian community did, however, retain a degree of independence after the fall of Alamūt, largely through the payment of tribute first to the Christians, by whom they were almost completely surrounded, also to the Hospitallers and Templars, and then to Salaḥ al-Dīn and his successors. Under the Ottomans they were granted *millet* status.[66] The literature of the Syrian Ismāᶜīlīs is still in the process of emerging and has yet largely to be studied.[67]

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[63] Ibid., 202.

[64] Madelung, "Shiism: Ismāᶜīlīyah", 257.

[65] Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins*, 205-206.

[66] Ibid., 207-209; that is, protection "as a backward and dependent religio-social group, autonomously enclaved within the dominant community."

[67] Daftary, *The Ismāᶜīlīs*, 444. Some Syrian Ismāᶜīlī texts have been brought to light by the efforts of ᶜĀrif Tāmir. See S.M. Stern, review of A. Tāmir (ed.), *Arbaᶜ Rasāᵓil Ismāᶜīliyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kashshāf, 1953) in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* II (1954), 169–171.

The community of the Upper Oxus region has retained the works ascribed to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, a late Fāṭimid *dāʿī* (d. circa 1074 CE), as well as several Alamūt and post-Alamūt works, notably those of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūṣī. It has also preserved a work attributed to the Kufan Shīʿī *ghulāt* of the eighth century, the *Umm al-Kitāb*, whose final redaction may date as late as the twelfth century.[68]

IV. A Brief Overview of the Concept of *Avatāra*

The term *avatāra* comes from the prefix *ava*, meaning to go down, plus *tāra* from the verbal root *tṛī*, to cross over, attain, and has been understood to mean the descent of the divine to earth.[69] In popular usage, the term may also be used to denote the reincarnation or rebirth of an earlier figure. Thus, the demons killed in battle will take rebirth on earth to torment human beings.[70] Also, in modern times, it has been said Idi Amin is the *avatāra* of Hitler.[71] Nor are all *avatāras* benevolent in their intent, as seen by the idea of Buddha, the false *avatāra* of Viṣṇu portrayed in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (circa 400–500 CE), whose purpose was to mislead the demons by converting them to Buddhism.[72] Chiefly the notion of *avatāra* is applied to the incarnations of Viṣṇu, and although the number varies with different scriptures, tradition commonly refers to ten such "descents," with the tenth yet to appear. The notion of *avatāra* is also associated with the *ācāryas* and *sants* of Śrīvaiṣṇavism.[73] With the development of Kṛṣṇaism, Kṛṣṇa too supported *avatāras*, such as Cadradhar, the founder of the Mānhāv movement in Maharashtra, circa 13th century CE,[74] and Caitanya (16th century CE) in Bengal.

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[68] Madelung, "Shiism: Ismāʿīlīyah", 257.

[69] Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit–English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarssidass, 1970 (1899)), 99.

[70] *Matsya Purāṇa* 47:26-27, cited by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), Preface, v.

[71] Usage among the South Asians expelled by Idi Amin from Uganda in 1970.

[72] For a discussion on the moral ambiguity of this *avatāra*, see O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil*, 188; 204ff.

[73] See John Carman and Vasudha Narayanan, *The Tamil Veda: Piḷḷān's Interpretation of the Tiruvāyamoḻi* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 146, and also 91–92. For the role of the *ācārya* as mediator, see Patricia Y. Mumme, *The Śrīvaiṣṇava*

The work of Madeleine Biardeau[75] bears testimony to the complexities attached to the figure of the *avatāra*, and of necessity we can only offer a few remarks as background to the detailed examination of Rāmānuja's writings, for whom the idea of *avatāra* is associated with Viṣṇu–Nārāyaṇa. One of the earliest references to the notion is found in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which forms chapters twenty-three to forty of Book VI (also known as the *Bhiṣma-parvan)* of the eighteen-volume epic poem *Mahābhāratā.*[76] However, scholarly opinion is divided on whether Kṛṣṇa is here clearly identified as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu or not.[77] This is

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Theological Dispute: Maṇavāḷamāmuni and Vedānta Deśika (Madras: New Era Publication, 1988), 239 ff. For the *sant* tradition, see Daniel Gold, *The Lord as Guru: Hindi* Sants *in the Northern Indian Tradition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). See also Raymond B. Williams, "The Holy Man as the Abode of God in the Swaminarayanan Religion" in Joanne Punzo Waghorne and Norman Cutler, in association with Vasudha Narayanan, eds., *Gods of Flesh, Gods of Stone: The Embodiment of Divinity in India* (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: Anima Publications, 1985), 143–157.

[74] Friedhelm E. Hardy, "Kṛṣṇaism" in *ER*, 7:390.

[75] For an essay on, and titles of Biardeau's work, see Julian F. Woods, "Hinduism and the Structural Approach of Madeleine Biardeau" in Katherine K. Young, ed., *Hermeneutical Paths to the Sacred Worlds of India* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994), 160–185.

[76] See Robert N. Minor, *Bhagavad-Gītā: An Exegetical Commentary* (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1982) for a discussion on the origins and authorship of the *Bhagavad Gītā.* The main points of discussion are whether the *Bhagavad Gītā* was an independent text, perhaps from the Bhāgavata cult, which worshipped the deities Vāsudeva and Kṛṣṇa, or whether it forms an integral part of the *Mahābhārata.* If the former, then the text may have been incorporated by the largely Vaiṣṇavite compilers of the *Mahābhārata* in an attempt to revitalize vedic orthodoxy, especially after the major challenge posed to the latter by the advent of Buddhism and Jainism. For this, see also G.P. Upadhyay, *The Brāhmaṇas in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1979), Chapter 2: The Challenge of New Socio-Religious Communities. The *Bhagavad Gītā* is thought to date anywhere between the 5th century BCE and the 2nd century CE, depending on whether it is a composite work or not, and Minor dates it at around 150 BCE.

[77] For example, David R. Kinsley tacitly assumes that Kṛṣṇa reveals himself in the *Bhagavad Gītā* "as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, an incarnation (or "descent") of the supreme god, whose divine purpose is to ensure victory for the just Pāṇḍavas" in *The Sword and the Flute* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1975), 9. J. Gonda, on the other hand, argues with F. Edgerton, who also holds the view that Kṛṣṇa is an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, that the text does not clearly support such a view, and that although Arjuna considers Kṛṣṇa to be a manifestation of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa is himself silent on the issue. See 151, n. 70 in *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism: A Comparison* (London: The Athlone Press, 1970). Similarly, Friedhelm E. Hardy makes the case that when the *Bhagavad Gītā* is read as an independent work and not in the light of the Vaiṣṇavism that permeates the remainder of the *Mahābhārata* (see note 5 above), "There is no suggestion here that in the person of the physical Kṛṣṇa a different being, that is, an eternal, unmanifest Viṣṇu, is contained." See "Kṛṣṇaism", 7:388.

due to the fact that the term *sambhava* is used in the key text that commentators such as Rāmānuja have understood as being a reference to the notion of *avatāra*, viz. 4:6. Upadhyay suggests that the myths found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, a text that predates the *Bhagavad Gītā*, were evolved around Viṣṇu to show him participating in the realm of creation in times of distress, and were utilized by the later Brāhmaṇic theologians to harness the currents of devotional theism with the earlier Vedic ritual-based religion.[78] Various manifestations of Viṣṇu as well as manifestations of other gods are mentioned in the great epic, the *Mahābhārata*, whose compilation evolved over several centuries, although it seems that the list of the ten *avatāras* commonly associated with Viṣṇu may have been a later insertion.[79] Sheridan notes that the "word *avatāra* introduces a note of systematization into the Purāṇas. ... The number of ten manifestations was fixed soon after the *Mahābhārata*, but the names vary with the particular text, not achieving standardization before the eighth century A.D."[80]

Gonda points to the lack of textual evidence in determining exactly how it was that the Vedic Viṣṇu came to be connected and fused with the cults of Nārāyaṇa and Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva.[81] Thus, although Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa are widely held by scholars to be two independent deities, the development of the process of their fusion is not well understood. However, the association of the two deities is found in texts such as the *Mahābhārata*, that is, in all sections except the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, which Hawley considers to date from about the fifth century CE, although he suggests that the merging of the two deities may have taken place as early as the first century BCE from archeological evidence.[82] In both these works, Kṛṣṇa is considered a manifestation of Viṣṇu. However, in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, by far the most important text for development of Kṛṣṇaism, and thought to be compiled in South India at about the ninth or tenth centuries, twenty-two *avatāras* of Bhagavat, understood to mean Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, are mentioned. It is significant to note that in this *Purāṇa*, Kṛṣṇa is no longer considered simply an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, but rather is identified fully with the latter.

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[78] See Upadhyay, *The Brāhmaṇas in Ancient India*, Ch. 3: Brāmaṇas as Theologians.
[79] See Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation*, 21–22.
[80] Daniel Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 60.
[81] J. Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism: A Comparison*, 24.
[82] John Stratton Hawley, "Kṛṣṇa" in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *ER*, 8:385.

The fusion of Kṛṣṇa, among the most popular of the various deities of devotional theism, with Viṣṇu, a Vedic god, has led to the inclusion, by the Vaiṣṇava tradition, of all the various religious sects and movements that combine Kṛṣṇa worship with the formulation of their systematic philosophies. As such, then, although other important deities such as Śiva and Durgā are said to have *avatāras*, the *avatāra* phenomenon is associated largely with Viṣṇu.

Some salient features identified by Gonda[83] that may be mentioned in connection with the rise of Viṣṇu to pre-eminence and the fusion of Viṣṇu with Kṛṣṇa are as follows. First is the notion of Viṣṇu's all-pervasiveness, hinted at by the story of his three strides (Ṛg Veda 1, 155, 6), in the span of which all created beings reside, while he himself resorts to the bright realm of heaven, above the reach of mortal knowledge. Then is his association with the *axis mundi*, argued for by Gonda on the basis that Viṣṇu is said to "sustain the upper component of the universe" (*Ṛg Veda* 7, 99, 2); that the *yūpa*, the sacrificial post mounted by the ritual sacrificer in order to reach heaven, belongs to Viṣṇu (this accounts for the lower end of the axis); and that he lives in the mountains (RV 1, 155, 1; 8, 31, 10), interpreted by Eliade as a meeting point of heaven and earth. Moreover, Viṣṇu protects the womb of Aditi (interpreted by Gonda to be the "place of universal creation"), which is identified as the navel of the earth (the middle of the axis). Thirdly, there is the notion of Viṣṇu as promoting the welfare of gods and humans exhibited in his strides that create a place of safety. In imitating the three strides of Viṣṇu, the sacrificer is enabled to reach the highest goal (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* I.9.3. 9f; 15). This notion is also revealed in his connection with the sacrificial pillar that enables the two-way traffic of sacrifice and boons and the idea that Viṣṇu is allied with the *soma*, the power of life.

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[83] See J. Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism*, Chapter 1, for a fuller discussion of these.

Another feature highlighted by Gonda is the identification of Viṣṇu with the supreme person of the *Ṛg Vedic* hymn 10. 90, the *Puruṣa Sūkta*. In the hymn, the primeval person, whose origin is unknown and from whom *Virāj* (a term that connotes the idea of "extending far and wide") was born, gives rise to an evolved *Puruṣa* (lit. 'Person') who is sacrificed and thereby gives rise to phenomenal creation. This action forms the paradigm for a sacrificial rite that enables the sacrificer to realize his identity with the totality of existence *(idaṃ sarvam).* In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, this totality, or *Puruṣa*, is identified with Nārāyaṇa, considered to be the author of the *Ṛg Vedic* hymn. Later, in the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*,[84] Nārāyaṇa is praised variously as the Absolute, the Supreme Lord of the Universe, Brahman, Prajāpati, the Highest Light, Viṣṇu, and the *Puruṣa* who fills the whole universe. He is identical with cosmic order *(ṛtam)*, truth *(satyam)*, and is the One who may assume every form. Moreover, the *Puruṣa* is not different from the *Ātman*, and is compared, in a manner indicating the *axis mundi*, to a tree fixed in heaven. In other words, here we have a fusion of the idea of the supreme person—*Puruṣa*—with Prajāpati and Nārāyaṇa; this person is also called Hari and Viṣṇu, and he is pervasive, having entered light, animals, and humans; he is the navel of the universe he supports; moreover, he is all-seeing and omniscient.

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[84] This long Upaniṣad forms the conclusion of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, which itself is a continuation of the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, which is a continuation of the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* in the Black *Yajurveda*. See Maurice Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, v. 1, translated by V. Srinivasa Sarma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1907] 1981), 217, 178. Winternitz suggests that the entire Vedic literature was composed by 500 B.C.E.; he also suggests that the Upaniṣad is of a fairly late date but does not offer one. See 218.

Then, in the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa is considered to be the eternal *Puruṣa*, the ungenerated one *(svayaṃbhū)* (*Mahābhārata* 3.13.49; 186, 13; etc.); and the same identification is made in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (10:12; 11:18, etc.). Kṛṣṇa is identified with "that Person, by which the All is pervaded and supported and in which all beings abide" *(Bhagavad Gītā* 8:8, 10, 22, etc.). He is declared to be "the Highest Brahman, the supreme manifestation of divine essence, the purifying power *par excellence*, the eternal celestial *Puruṣa*, the unborn universal ruler . . . " *(Bhagavad Gītā* 10:12f; 11:38). Finally, in the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa is identified with the "unborn primal god Viṣṇu *Puruṣa*" *(Mahābhārata* 3. 187. 45).

Gonda points out that the *Mahābhārata* does not represent the last stage in the development of the merging of Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu, but that the process continues. So, for example, in a text dating perhaps from the fourth century CE, the re-enactment of the *puruṣamedha* (sacrifice) is to be accompanied by the recital of two texts, the *Ṛg Vedic* 10:90 hymn of the *Puruṣa sūkta*, and the *Ṛg Vedic* 1, 154, 1, the *Viṣṇu sūkta*: "I shall proclaim the mighty deeds of Viṣṇu", thus pointing to the complete merging of the identity of the primeval *Puruṣa* with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa.[85]

However, the identification of Viṣṇu with Kṛṣṇa brings to the fore the tension within their relationship, noted by both Hawley and Hardy. Hardy points out that the *avatāra* concept was introduced to "clarify the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu", and that this "had very far-reaching consequences for the interpretation of Kṛṣṇaite material, including the *Gītā* itself."[86] This tension regarding the supremacy and original autonomy of Kṛṣṇa as an independent deity is revealed best perhaps in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, in which Kṛṣṇa occupies a central position, identified with Brahman, the supreme being, in an Advaitin framework.[87] Similarly, in the earlier *Bhagavad Gītā*, all *avatāras* are said to have issued forth from Kṛṣṇa, and not, as would have been expected, from Viṣṇu.[88]

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[85] For the above discussion on *puruṣa*, see ibid., Chapter II.

[86] See Hardy, "Kṛṣṇaism", 388.

Thus, it appears that the development of the *avatāra* theory had occurred by the compilation of the *Mahābhārata*, and appears to have drawn from mythic events recorded in the earlier scriptures to develop a Vaiṣṇavite religion. This development was not without internal tension as evinced in the debates surrounding the origin and authorship of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which is often cited as the key text for viewing Kṛṣṇa as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. By the time of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (circa fifth century CE), the *avatāra* theory was well developed, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (circa ninth century CE) brings once again to the fore the issue of Kṛṣṇa's supremacy and independence from Viṣṇu, declaring, in fact, that it is Viṣṇu who is an *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa.[89] Nimbārka (circa fifteenth/sixteenth centuries) identifies Kṛṣṇa with Brahman for the first time in the *vedānta* tradition, once again pointing to the tension.[90] Notwithstanding this tension, however, Vaiṣṇava theology has struggled to incorporate Kṛṣṇa worship into its fold.

The term *avatāra*, according to Parrinder,[91] is a relatively late term, not occurring until the late Upaniṣads. It is most often used in the great epic, the *Mahābhārata*. Sheridan points out that the term does not occur in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Nārāyaṇiya* of the *Mahābhārata*, nor the *Harivaṃsa*, "where such words as *janman*, *sambhava*, *sṛjana*, and *pradurbhāva* are employed."[92] Hardy draws attention to terms such as *rūpam*, *vapus*, *tanum* + *kṛ*, *āsthā*, "all denoting 'taking on a body' ...".[93] On the basis of Hacker, Hardy states: "*Avatāra* as denoting the person 'descending' (and not the action itself) seems to have evolved only towards the middle of the first millenium A.D."[94] The first book of the *Mahābhārata* is called a "partial *avatāra*" *(aṃśāvatarana)*, and gives the first exposition of the nature and purpose of the *avatāras.* In speaking of Kṛṣṇa, the first book mentions that Viṣṇu appeared *(prādurbhūta)* in the family of Kṛṣṇa *(Mahābhārata* 1, 58, 51, etc.).

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[87] Ibid., 389.
[88] Hawley, "Kṛṣṇa", 385.
[89] See Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 63. This is as a cosmic manifestation (*guṇāvatāra)*; that is, "Viṣṇu is the pure being *(sattva)*, Brahmā is action *(rajas)*, and Śiva is inertia *(tamas)*." However, those *avatāras* that descended "to relieve the burden of earth" associated with Viṣṇu are, in this Purāṇa, attributed to Kṛṣṇa as the one who manifests himself in these forms. See 67.
[90] Hardy, "Kṛṣṇaism", 390.
[91] Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation*, 19–20.
[92] Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 60, citing Suvira Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967), 120.

The standard list of the ten *avatāras* associated with Viṣṇu appears to be a later insertion into the appendix, the *Harivaṃśa*, of the text. The *avatāras* are not listed together in the standard critical edition of the epic, indicating that the *avatāra* theory was still in the process of development. The first book speaks simply of two manifestations *(prādhurbhāvā)* of Viṣṇu, as horse-head *(hayaśira)* and swan *(haṃsa)*; the horse-head (or horse-necked, *hayagrīva)* disappears from later lists to reappear in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* as the horse *avatāra (aśvatāra)* instead of the dwarf *avatāra.* The swan, too, does not reappear in later lists. Their place is instead taken by the fish *(matsya)* avatāra, which is first mentioned in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* I.8.1, and the story is elaborated upon in the epic, wherein the fish declares itself to be Brahmā, lord of the creatures (Prajāpati), and is later identified with Viṣṇu *(Mahābhārata* 3.186). The tortoise *(kūrma) (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 7.5.1), boar *(varāha) (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.1.2) and dwarf *(vāmana) avatāras* likewise have their origins in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa,* and the stories of the boar and the dwarf are also found in a kernel form in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 7.1.5 and 2.1.3, respectively. The dwarf *avatāra* reproduces the essence of the story of the three strides of immense proportion taken by Viṣṇu at Indra's request found in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā.*

Other *avatāras* mentioned in the epic are the man-lion *(nara-siṃha) (Mahābhārata* 3.270), Paraśu-Rāma *(Mahābhārata* 3.115; 5.96), Rāma-candra, who is mentioned in the

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[93] Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, 23.
[94] Ibid., 24. See also P. Hacker, "Zur Entwicklung der Avatārlehre", in *WZKSA*, v.4, 47–70.

Mahābhārata (but whose story is told more fully in the epic poem devoted to him, the *Rāmayāṇa)*, Kṛṣṇa *(Mahābhārata* 2.188 & 270) and Kalkin, the *avatāra* yet to come *(Mahābhārata* 3.139). A fuller description of Kalkin is found in the *Kalkin Purāṇa*, which is not counted among the eighteen great Purāṇas.[95]

An *avatāra* not mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*[96] but which appears in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is the Buddha *avatāra*, thought to have come into general acceptance after the writing of the great epic. It is considered a means to counter the influence of the Buddhists and the Jains. It is also mentioned several times in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (e.g., *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.3.24; 2.7.37, etc.).

The purpose of the *avatāras* is worthy of some brief exploration,[97] a fuller description not being warranted as it is so readily available elsewhere. The horse-head and swan both are associated with recovering the Vedas from two demons who had stolen them during Brahmā's sleep at the dissolution of the universe. Matsya, the first *avatāra*, became a fish to save the seventh Manu, the progenitor of the human race, along with seven sages from the deluge, the account of which is found in the *Matsya Purāṇa.* The tortoise served as the foundation upon which the gods and demons set the churning stick in order to churn the ocean for the nectar of immortality. The boar rescued the goddess earth (Pṛthivī) from the demon Hiraṇyākṣa who had captured and imprisoned her under the cosmic waters. The man-lion upheld the righteousness of Prahlāda, a devotee of Viṣṇu, who was persecuted by his father the demon-king Hiraṇyakaśipu. The king had won a boon from Indra, according to which he could not be killed by either human or animal, neither during the day nor the night. In the dwarf *avatāra*, Viṣṇu as Āditya restored the cosmos to the gods, who had lost it to Bali, ruler of the *asuras* (demons), by asking for the territory he could cover in three strides. Paraśu Rāma humbled the Kṣatriyas, or warrior class, several times for the injustices they had heaped on the Brāhmaṇas, or priestly class, thus restoring social and religious order. As Rāma-candra, Viṣṇu defeated the demon Rāvaṇa and set up a rule of virtuous kingship. Kṛṣṇa's purpose was to destroy the oppressor of the world, the demon Kaṃsa, and to aid the Pāṇḍava brothers in their battle against their cousins, the Kauravas. And finally, Kalkin would come to glorify Viṣṇu, bring this cycle to an end, and commence a new age. In the latter, he would exterminate foreigners, restore order and peace to the world, and in the end, after giving the earth to the Brāhmaṇas, retire to the forest. The *avatāra* not mentioned in the epic, the Buddha *avatāra*, was sent to delude those deserving of punishment into forsaking the Vedas and Hinduism by offering them the false hope of Buddhism, thus earning them punishment in hell or inferior births. As pointed out by Kinsley, this *avatāra* is interpreted more positively in later texts, in which he is said to have come to the world to teach nonviolence and gentleness.[98]

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[95] For the above, see Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation*, 22–27.

[96] Except, as pointed out by O'Flaherty, in the Kumbhakona edition, 12, 348, 2; 12, app. 1, no. 32, lines 1–17. See O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil*, 188, and n. 59.

[88] For this paragraph, see David Kinsley, "Avatāra" in *ER*, 2:14–15, and also Parrinder, cited above.

In all of these, some of the characteristics identified by Gonda stand out. The idea that Viṣṇu acts for the good of the universe and for restoring cosmic order is revealed in the actions of the horse-head, swan, fish, and boar *avatāras*. The controversy surrounding the moral ambiguity of the Buddha *avatāra* has already been mentioned above. The salvation of the righteous creatures within the world is demonstrated by his various engagements—as much through wit as by form—with demonic forces, as shown by the man-lion, Paraśu-Rāma, Rāma-candra, Kṛṣṇa, and will be shown by the awaited Kalkin *avatāra*. Then, the connection of Viṣṇu with the *axis mundi* is borne out through the tortoise *avatāra*. Finally, the notion of his all-pervasiveness is expressed through the three strides taken by the dwarf *avatāra*.

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[98] Kinsley, "Avatāra", 15.

Gonda's theory is that the continuation of Viṣṇu's characteristics into the various *avatāra* forms indicates an awareness on the part of the writers of the epic literature of the need to absorb the various streams of theistic devotion into the fold of emerging Hinduism. However, the question remains as to how the notion of the supreme being was reinterpreted in order to explain the philosophical relationship between the supreme being and the forms of the *avatāra*, and this will be one of our central questions as we study Rāmānuja's work in the following.

V. The Identification of *Imām* with *Avatāra* in the Satpanth Tradition

Whether or not the concepts of *imām* and *avatāra* bear any similarity or can be considered to be identical, the fact remains that an identification of the two concepts did take place in a historical context, namely, within the Satpanth Ismāᶜīlī tradition of the Indian subcontinent. In his investigation of the Hājī Bībī case in 1908 in India, Justice Arnould noted the following about the lengthy *ginān Das Avatār*, part of the then liturgical tradition of the Satpanth Ismāᶜīlīs:

> What is *Dasavatar?* It is a treatise in 10 chapters containing (as, indeed, its name imports) the account of ten *avatars* or incarnations of the Hindu God Vishnu; the tenth chapter treats of the incarnation of the Most Holy Ali ... it is precisely such a book as a *Dai* or missionary of the Ismailis would compose or adapt if he wished to convert a body of not very learned Hindus to the Ismaili faith. It precisely carries out ... the standing instructions to the *Dai* ... viz, to procure conversion by assuming, as in great part true, the religious standpoint of the intended convert. This is exactly what the book does: It assumes the nine incarnations of Vishnu to be true as far as they go, but not the whole truth, and then supplements the imperfect Vishnuvite system by superadding the cardinal doctrine of the Ismailis, the incarnation and coming manifestation (or *Avatar)* of the 'Most Holy' Ali.[99]

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[99] Asaf ᶜAlī Asghar Fyzee, *Cases in the Muhammadan Law of India and Pakistan* (London: Clarendon Press, 1965), 545.

Perhaps taking his cue from Justice Arnould, Ivanow further develops the conversion theory of why this identification was made. According to his 1948 study of Satpanth, Nizārī Ismāᶜīlī missionaries *(dāᶜīs)* devised the "bold [tactic of] separating the meaning and spirit of Islam from its hard Arabic shell ... [and] explained the high ideals of Islam in the familiar terms of the ancestral religion and culture of the new converts".[100] Identifying messianic expectations as the "'bridge' between Ismailism and Hinduism", Ivanow explained Satpanth doctrine as an effort "to make Islam recognized as the religion of the final period, *Kalijug*, according to Hindu terminology ... [hence] ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the first Imam, was introduced as the expected Tenth *Avatar* of the Deity."[101]

In her study of the *Dasa Avatāra* texts, presented in 1972, Gushan Khakhee observed that "the basic theme of the 'Dasa Avatāra' is the theme of god's coming to man in an incarnation for the 'liberation' of man and the destruction of the demon (evil)."[102] She noted that the text specifies that Hari (an appelation of Viṣṇu) is the tenth Nakalanki incarnation, and "that he is sitting in an Arabian country".[103]

Nanji published his work on the Satpanth tradition in 1978, a work that represents a significant step forward in the scholarship on that tradition. In it he notes how in a *ginān* titled *BuddhaAvatāra:*

> the ninth incarnation is already made to foretell the coming of this tenth *avatāra.* The eschatological fulfillment of the Hindu doctrine would, however, find its culmination, not in the standard figure of Kalki, but as the form of ᶜAlī. He was to be the Mahdī who would kill Kaliṅga, the embodiment of evil .... Furthermore, it was stated that this manifestation of ᶜAlī would be located in Dalamdesh (i.e. Daylamān), and he would be manifested through the teaching of Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn who would come to Jambūdvipa (i.e. India).[104]

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[100] W. Ivanow, "Satpanth" in *Collectanea,* v.1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1948), 21.
[101] Ibid., 22.
[102] Khakhee, "The Dasa Avatāra", 42.
[103] Ibid., 44.
[104] Nanji, *The Nizārī Ismāᶜīlī Tradition in Hind and Sind,* 113.

In two cosmogonic *ginās*, the *Gāyatri* and the *Mōman Chetvarṇi*, the divine being, described as formless *(nirākār)* takes a form, that of ᶜAlī, who after a long period of inactivity, takes the form of Viṣṇu.[105] Nanji goes on to note:

> It is only the ten *avatāras* of Vishṇu, the representation of the pre-eternal ᶜAlī, who are considered the most significant epiphanic earthly representations during the period of the Four Yugas. As the tenth *avatāra*, the historical ᶜAlī and after him the Imāms become the earthly epiphanies of the pre-eternal ᶜAlī.[106]

Hasina M. Jamani, in her 1985 study of a *ginān* titled *Brahm Prakash*, noted that "[the] *ginān* says that the Lord *(sāheb)* whose Name is the object of quest has manifested himself for the sake of his creatures through several *yugas*. ... The *Brahm Prakāsh* maintains that the tenth *Avatāra* has manifested himself into Islam".[107] In this *ginān* the Named *(śabda)* is identified as *Imām Mahdī*, the expected messiah through whom liberation is to be attained.[108]

Ali S. Asani has noted the identification of the *imām* with *avatāra* in many of his recent articles on the *ginās*, and points out that the *ginās* continue to play an important role in the devotional life of the community. He observes that "today, several centuries later, the *ginās* dominate the community's religious life not only in the subcontinent but also in other parts of the world to which Ismailis of Indo-Pakistani origin have immigrated, such as East Africa, Europe, North America, and Australia."[109]

In their 1992 study of the *ginās*, Christopher Shackle and Zawahir Moir draw attention to the many honorific epithets of the *imām* mentioned in the *ginās*, such as 'Lord of the Three

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[105] Ibid., 114, 118.
[106] Ibid., 118.
[107] Hasina M. Jamani, "Brahm Prakāsh: A Translation and Analysis" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1985), 92–93.
[108] "In the Kali-yuga he has taken the form of Naklanki/ ... / When Imām Mahdī extends his protection, twelve crores and innumerable souls will then attain liberation." (BP 137, 139) Cited in Jamani, "Brahm Prakāsh", 93.
[109] Ali S. Asani, "The Ismaili *ginās* as devotional literature", 103.

Worlds' *(tribhovar)*, which, they note, are closely associated with their Vaiṣṇava origins. They remark in the context of the cyclical nature of salvation:

> There is an obvious similarity between this cyclical scheme, so uniquely characteristic of Ismailism within Islam, and the Vaishnava doctrine of the ten manifestations (Sk *avatār*) of Vishnu through the four ages (Sk *jug*) which constitute a cycle of Hindu cosmic time. This striking resemblance is repeatedly dwelt upon in the *ginans*, in accordance with the limited reinterpretation of indigenous beliefs typical of the Ismaili Mission. The mysterious figure of Kalki, whose appearance is promised in the Vaishnava scheme at the end of the present Kaliyuga (*kalajug*) as the saviour from its evils, is recast and given greater significance as the 'Stainless One' (Sk *nakalaṅki)*, i.e. none other than the Immaculate Mahdi who as the ultimate manifestation of Ali the Imam is called the tenth manifestation (Sk *dasam avatār).*[110]

In her paper on syncretism, Kassam examines how the the different elements in the *ginān Brahma Prakāśa* "retain their potential to communicate meanings specific to different religious communities ... while retaining the central meaning for each."[111] For example, in drawing attention to the role of the formless creator as the Divine Player, identified as ᶜAlī, the text of the *Brahma Prakāśa* is able to evoke "the figure of Viṣṇu, both in his transcendent aspect and in his immanent aspect as the incarnation Kṛṣṇa."[112] At the same time, "[the] vagueness of the idea that the Formless takes form to save humanity permits the meanings associated with the names Imām Mahdī and ᶜAlī in their original context to continue to exist."[113] The multiplicity of meanings associated with Viṣṇu in his various aspects and the *imām/mahdī* are unified in the Divine Player himself, the path to whom is specified as being through the *satguru* (true guide).[114]

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[110] Christopher Shackle and Zawahir Moir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans* (London: University of London, 1992), 23.

[111] Tazim R. Kassam, "Syncretism on the Model of the Figure-ground", in Katherine K. Young, ed., *Hermeneutical Paths to the Sacred Worlds of India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 241.

[112] Ibid., 238.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid., 240.

The above scholars have drawn attention to differing aspects of the *imām–avatāra* figure that have been highlighted in the *ginān*s. For instance, Ivanow draws attention to the messianic expectations that were to be fulfilled by this figure. Khakhee mentions that the figure has the double mission of both liberation of devotees and destruction of evil, manifested as a demon. Nanji shows that the *ginān* literature contains an account in which the ninth *avatāra* foretells the advent of the tenth *avatāra*, killer of the demon Kaliṅga, and specifies that he will be from Daylamān (where Alamut, the seat of the Nizārī *imāmate* was situated). Further, he draws attention to the notion found in the *ginān*s that the creator, who is formless, takes the form of ᶜAlī, who then takes the form of Viṣṇu and his *avatāras*. Jamani's study points to a *ginān* in which the theme of the formless taking form is developed further, where the soul attains fulfilment through devotion to the Named. Shackle and Moir draw attention to the tenth *avatāra* who is the stainless one *(nakalanki* or *niṣkalaṅka)*, identified as the messianic figure of the Mahdī.

By and large, the scholarship on the *ginān* literature has revealed the fact that the identification between the *imām* and the *avatāra* was made by the authors of the literature—who themselves are shrouded in myth and legend, and for whom there is a lack of clear historical data. Attention has also been drawn to the common elements highlighted in this identification, for example, messianic expectations, salvific role, destruction of evil, providing accessibility to the formless through form, and the stainless/immaculate nature of both. However, the question that has not been asked to date in any overt manner is whether there was, in fact, any substantive philosophical basis upon which this identification could have been made. Kassam is the first scholar who has implicitly drawn attention to this problem in her paper on syncretism, where she argues that the differing meanings associated with each of the concepts were artfully maintained by the author of the text under study, who also sought, however, to attain a resolution by creating a text that was analogous to a figure-ground illustration (the simultaneous appearance in the illustration of both the chalice and the two human profiles, each coming into view depending upon the viewer's point of focus).

Clearly, in order to appreciate more fully the merging and synthesis of Hindu–Muslim ideas in the *ginān* literature, a significant question is whether or not the notions of *imām* and *avatāra*, respectively, are substantively the same, analogous or related. Such a philosophical analysis would help scholars to examine the Satpanth *ginān* literature with a much greater level of sophistication than has hitherto been possible. Although it is not within the scope of this dissertation to examine this literature here, a philosophical investigation of the concepts of *imām* and *avatāra* will enable scholars of the literature to understand how the authors of the *ginān*s sought to evoke the deeper structures of meaning associated with each divine–human configuration.

Further, it will help to advance discussions on the interpretations that have been cast on the Satpanth literature itself, for instance, whether this literature was, as Ivanow and others have claimed, simply a Hindu veneer on Ismāᶜīlī ideas for the purpose of conversion. Most of the scholars mentioned above have utilized other frameworks to explain the Satpanth tradition and some have dismissed its intellectual value by viewing it as merely folkloric in nature. Ivanow makes the assumption that the identification of the *imām* figure, ᶜAlī, with the tenth *avatāra*, is undertaken purely for the purposes of conversion. He attributes the success of the Ismāᶜīlī venture in the Indian sub-continent to the Ismāᶜīlī *pīrs'* ability to appeal to familiar Hindu ideas to convince local, ordinary Hindus in Sind and other parts of the Indian subcontinent that Satpanth Ismāᶜīlism was "the crowning phase of the whole development of Hinduism."[115]

Gulshan Khakhee in her attempt to explain the Satpanth literature draws attention to Bernard Lewis' suggestion that the ten *avatāras* are homologues of the ten Intelligences of earlier Fāṭimid Ismāᶜīlī cosmogonic speculations. While this schema was derived in principle from Aristotle and not Plotinus, as she suggests, it was outlined chiefly by the Fāṭimid *dāᶜī* Hamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī and reappears again in the ontological and cosmological scheme proposed by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūṣī, who worked during the post-Fāṭimid, Alāmūt phase. Khakhee dismisses Lewis's suggestion, however, because in her view the *Das Avatāra* texts of the Satpanth Ismāᶜīlīs contained little by way of philosophical language, and in addition, the description of the first eight *avatāras* was drawn largely from prevailing Hindu myths, albeit in an "unrecognizably altered form."[116]

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[115] Ivanow, "Satpanth", I:24.

Nanji, unlike Khakhee, does not discount the intellectual formulations of the preceding Ismāᶜīlī tradition in his attempt to explain the development of Satpanth. In developing Corbin's interpretation of the development of the theory of *imāmate*, he focuses on the notion of *taʾwīl*, which was declared by one of the *imāms* of Alāmut, Ḥasan ᶜalā dhikrihi al-salām, as the key to the reformulated doctrine of the *qiyāmah* (resurrection). Further, in Nizārī Ismāᶜīlism, the conception of the *imām* as the prime practitioner of *taʾwīl* changes from being the manifestation of the second intelligence, as in the Fāṭimid philosopher-*dāᶜī* al-Kirmānī's system, to "the Epiphany of the existentiating word *(kalima)*, the creative fiat *(kun)*, of eternal existentiation *(ibdāᶜ)*."[117] (The exposition of such a view is found in Ṭūsī.)

In Nanji's view, the *ginān* literature is further evidence of the

> ability of Ismāᶜīlī writers to integrate into their systems a variety of strands ... [just] as we find in the Fāṭimid schemes the use of a Neoplatonic emanationist outlook to propound the doctrine ... All of thus brings us back to the point made earlier ... about the method by which concepts are continually restructured in Ismāᶜīlī thought to provide a new formulation of the doctrine.[118]

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[116] Khakee, "The Dasa Avatāra", 41-42.

[117] Henry Corbin, "Divine Ephiphany and Spiritual Birth in Ismailian Gnosis", as quoted in Nanji, op.cit., 119, n. 78.

[118] Nanji, *The Nizārī Ismāᶜīlī Tradition*, 110.

By and large, approaches to Satpanth Ismāʿīlism have laid emphasis on the transmission of Nizārī Ismāʿīlī ideas through Hindu myths and symbols. Few have examined the possibility of Satpanth as expressive of a unique synergy of Indian and Ismāʿīlī concepts, or of the impact of the notion of *avatāra* on the development of the notion of *imām*. The fact is that the theory of *imām* has never been a static concept, but rather, has developed as a dynamic concept, and been expressed in various ways through the course of Ismāʿīlī intellectual history. While this has been tacitly acknowledged by all the abovementiond scholars, none have seriously examined the notion of *avatāra* to assess whether this did, in fact, play any role in the Satpanth conceptualization of the *imām*, and if it did, in what substantive manner. Nor have any, with the exception of Kassam, pointed to the possibility that the multivalency of meanings associated with the figures of *imām* and *avatāra* might have been retained by the author of such a *ginān* as *Brahma Prakāśa*, thus giving weight to the notion that despite all its folkloric appearances, the literature was carefully constructed.

Thus, the value of asking our question lies in contributing an overlooked but nonetheless important intermediary step with respect to the discussion of whether Satpanth was merely a tool for conversion or whether it was a remarkably creative and intellectually sound engagement between two religious traditions, or something in between. Outside the pale of specific Satpanth studies, an examination of this question will enable historians of religions to discuss and develop further studies on divine–human configurations in different traditions, as outlined in the Introduction above.

Section II

CHAPTER 1

Avoiding *Tashbīh* and *Taᶜṭīl:*

Ṭūsī's Conception of God, the Most High

In this chapter, which begins the investigation of the question outlined in the Introduction, we will examine Ṭūsī's ontological framework. Ṭūsī's primary objective in presenting his view of God is to show that God, the Most High, is independent *(munazzah)* of any relation with the created world. Ṭūsī is impelled to do this out of consideration for the Qurᵓānic verse, "Say: He, Allāh, is One *(aḥad)*."[1] Safeguarding God's oneness, or *tawḥīd*, which can also be understood as an attempt to maintain God's transcendence, was one of the major preoccupations of Muslim discourse. This concern found expression in the attention focussed on the divine attributes,[2] and the various proponents of the Ismāᶜīlī position shared this concern over *tawḥīd*.[3]

God's Attributes

The question of God's oneness required an articulation of the notion of God that would avoid falling into the pitfalls of both *tashbīh*, outright anthropomorphism (also *tajsīm*, corporealism) that occurs when emphasis is placed on God's attributes, and *taᶜṭīl*, the negation of all ascription to God, such that it results in a concept that is devoid of any relevance, thereby leading to atheism.

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[1] Qurᵓān, *Sūra al- Ikhlāṣ*, 112:1: *Qul huwa allāhu ahadun.*

[2] For the discussion of knowledge as one of the essential divine attributes, see Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 109ff.

[3] See for example, Paul E. Walker, "Abū Yaᶜqūb al-Sijistānī and the Development of Ismaili Neoplatonism" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1974); Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, "The Concept of *Tawḥīd* in the thought of Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī" (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1986); both of which examine the approach taken by two different Ismāᶜīlī thinkers concerning *tawḥīd.*

Ṭūsī's arguments with respect to the oneness—or uniqueness—of God may be seen as part of a dialogue with Muslim philosophers and theologians and reveals his familiarity with the ideas of other religious traditions such as Zoroastrianism. The Qurʾānic references to God's hands and feet or his sitting on a throne, and having sight, hearing, wisdom and knowledge, to mention only a few, were interpreted by the early theologians such as the Ḥanbalites as attributes to be taken literally, *bilā kayfa*, "without [asking] how".[4] Following the dictates of the Qurʾānic verse, "Nothing is like Him; He is the One who knows and sees" (Qurʾān, 42:11), early Qurʾānic exegetes held that God had attributes that were unlike those of human beings. The Muʿtazilite school of theologians, known as the rationalists, asserted that belief in God's *tawḥīd* necessitates that ascribing attributes to God implies multiplicity in His being. Even if God's qualities were inherently part of His essence, and inseparably joined to it, it would still mean positing other elements besides God. Therefore, they employed *taʾwīl*, or figurative interpretation, to elucidate a metaphorical meaning for all anthropomorphic statements in the Qurʾān.

However, such a rationalist interpretation did not augur well with the traditional exegetes, to whom such a treatment of God's attributes amounted to *taʿṭil*, "stripping the concept of God of its contents".[5] The schools of al-Ashʿarī (d. 935 CE) and al-Māturīdī (d. 944 CE) contended that since attributes were mentioned in the Qurʾān, they must be predicated of Him. The former held that "God knows by a knowledge that is not distinct from His essence",[6] and furthermore, that not all of God's attributes are eternal, such as His creating or providing, which come into play when creatures are brought into being.[7] The Māturīdīs criticized this position as being tantamount to stripping the concept of God of any meaningful content, countering that all of God's attributes are eternal, but it is inadmissible to say that God's attributes are identical with Him or that they are distinct from His essence.[8]

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[4] Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. from the German by Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 92.
[5] Ibid., 96.
[6] Ibid.

With respect to avoiding *tashbīh*, the ascription of attributes to God, Ṭūsī argues somewhat in the manner of the Mu^{c}tazilah who, as we have seen, held that God was totally transcendent. They attempted to safeguard God's unity by not allowing any possible comparison between God and His creatures. Ṭūsī addresses the question of God's attributes in the following manner:

> For example, we say that our Creator is Wise *(ḥakīm);* we call Him—the All-High—Wise *(ḥakīm)* for the reason that we who are his creatures and devotees recognize *(mīshināsīm)* and know *(mīdānīm)* the signs of [His] Wisdom. And if we, who are His creatures and devotees, are endowed with (lit. characterized by) wisdom *(ḥikmat)*, it necessarily follows for us to say that all wisdom is from Him. Similarly, in our own being *(wujūd)* we find that in this world no action proceeds from us without being preceded by a thought *(taṣawwūr)* concerning that [action]. Thus, when we see that our thought is necessary for our action, accordingly, when we say something about the work of Him—the Most High—we cannot transcend *(bar natawānīm guẓasht)* the limits of our analogy, that is, [we speak] from the level of our own knowledge and perception ... .[9]

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[7] W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 316.

[8] Ibid.

[9] T 7–8, P 9; BP 9. Translation mine (KH). All references to the *Rawḍat ul-Taslīm*, more commonly known as the *Taṣawwurāt*, are to: (i) the edition and translation prepared by W. Ivanow, *Tasawwurat (Rawdatu't-Taslim)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1950). This edition contains an extensive introduction, with notes. The text of Ivanow's translation is found on the page numbers indicated prefaced by T, while P indicates the pagination of the manuscript, not the Persian page on which the edited manuscript occurs. The Persian text itself may be found on the page numbers indicated prefaced by P. (ii) Also included are references to the more recent, though unpublished, edition that has been prepared by Sayyed Jalal Hosseini Badakhchani as part of his doctoral dissertation. See his "The Paradise of Submission: A Critical Edition and Study of *Rawẓeh-i Taslīm* commonly known as *Taṣawwurāt* by Khwājeh Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī" (Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1989). This new edition supercedes Ivanow's edition and translation both in accuracy of translation—in the case of misreadings and omissions—and increased clarity of text based on the older manuscript. In addition, it offers, as mentioned in the Abstract, I, "a comparison of the oldest known manuscript of the text with three other manuscripts and the version of the text

In other words, for Ṭūsī, any attributes ascribed to God stem from the human point of view. To say that a proof for God may be established would be tantamount to claiming that one has encompassed the reality of His ipseity, which is not possible for creatures to do. Thus, any proof that may be furnished regarding God's ipseity is absurd.[10]

There were other ways of conceiving the notion of God that were brought to the forefront by Muslim philosophers. For example, the view that God is the First Cause was held by the Aristotelian philosophers in Islam, such as al-Fārābī (d. 950 CE), considered the 'Second Master' after Aristotle, who was considered the 'First Master.' This view, that the world had emanated out of the superabundant goodness of God, who could thus be considered the First Cause, was later criticized by the philosopher–theologian al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111 CE) on the grounds that such a mechanical outpouring of the universe from the primal cause omitted to attribute to God any exercise of His Will. That is, God had no choice but to produce the universe, which was not fitting in a conception of God as Creator.[11] Similarly, to hold that the world was eternal, as did many of the philosophers, was to admit that God had a partner, since both He and the world were eternal. For the philosophers, the eternality of the world was a natural corollary of the view that God, as perfect, could not change, and if there was a time when the world did not exist, and then

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edited by W. Ivanow ... [and] includes the variants of all manuscripts and a twenty-eighth representation (taṣawwur) [reconstructed from fragments] which is missing from Ivanow's edition." The manuscript utilized by Badakhchani is the oldest known manuscript, having been copied in 1560 CE, and appears to be a closer copy of the autograph manuscript than any other available. The two manuscripts accessible to Ivanow date from 1764 CE and 1924 CE, respectively. References to Badakhchani's edition and translation will be indicated by page numbers prefaced with B for the translation and BP for the Persian manuscript text (not the Persian page on which the edited text appears). If Badakhchani offers a synopsis rather than a translation, then only the appropriate references from Ivanow will be given. All translations from the *Taṣawwurāt* are indicated in parentheses following the citation; hence Ivanow is indicated (I); Badakhchani (B), and myself (KH). I have utilized Ivanow where Badakhchani provides only a synopsis of the text and provided my own translations in cases where the accuracy of the text might be served better.

[10] T 6, P 7; B 157, BP 7.

[11] See the discussion on Ghazzālī's attack on philosophy in Oliver Leaman, *An introduction to medieval Islamic philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Part I, Ch. 1: How did God create the world?

another time when the world came into existence, then this would imply a change in the essence of God, which would then denote His imperfection. For Ghazzālī, however, the issue of the eternality of the world was yet another proof that the philosophers were ungodly, for to him the view that the world was eternal denied the active Will of God and the conception of God as the creator.

With respect to God as cause, Ṭūsī argues that where there is a cause, there has to be an effect. This leads to the problem both of relationality, as well as of plurality, both of which are not permissible in our concept of God. That is to say, since a cause exists for the sake of an effect, and an effect cannot exist without a cause, it places both cause and effect in the realm of relationality *(iḍāfī)*, and God is above relationality. Moreover, relationality belongs to the category of oppositions, such as existence/non-existence; being/non-being; cause/effect; truth/relativity, etc., and since oppositions can only exist between two things, and two things can only belong to the realm of plurality, they cannot be applied to God, for God is above oppositions.[12] Thus, he argues, "it is an error to speak of a 'first cause', following the philosophers, in relation to God, but ... it is correct in relation to the Command of God ... which is the source of all existents."[13]

Ṭūsī also examines the notion of God as creator. The issues regarding the creatorship of God are that, for the philosophers, God was always the creator (or more accurately, the First Cause), for to say that there was a time when he was not the creator would imply that something changed in His essence in order for Him to make the decision to create—and change indicates imperfection in the deity. For if God is perfect, then He need not change, and if He changed, then did He change in order to increase His perfection? If so, then He was not perfect before the change took place. The implications of God always having being a creator are, correspondingly, that the world is eternal and co-existent with God. But such a view, as Ghazzālī was quick to point out, implies *shirk*, for to posit the eternality of the world implies that God had a partner. Moreover, it made the Qur᾿ānic assertion that God is a creator meaningless if one were to hold that the world had always been in existence.

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[12] Sayyid Jalāl Hosseīnī Badakhshānī, trans., notes and introduction, "Contemplation and Action" (author's typescript, 1987), 51–52, #27. This work is a translation and text with notes and an introduction of an untitled work of Ṭūsī's that was given the title *Sayr wa Sulūk* "by whoever first published the text." The text is found in a collection of Ṭūsī's works edited by Mudarris-i Rizvī , titled *Majmū'ah-i Rasā'il*, and it is in the introduction (h) that Rizvī mentions the name.
[13] Ibid, 52, #28.

Ṭūsī argues along the lines of the philosophers when he states that to say that there was a time when the world was not in existence is to imply that there was a time when the Creator was still not a creator, or that His creative power was *in potentia* and not *in actu.*[14] Such an implication, he says, is indicative of disbelief, *kufr*, for it is necessary to maintain that God was always a creator, and hence that there never was a time at which the world did not exist.

His hypothetical questioner, however, then raises the issue of *shirk*, co-partnership, if both God and the world are co-eternal. Ṭūsī replies to this objection by stating that he does not deny either that the world was eternal nor that the world is transient *(muḥdith).* Its eternality is constituted "by its coming from the state of potentiality to that of necessary existence *(wujūb)*, and from imperfection to perfection", while its transience is constituted "by the fact of its potential existence *(imkān)* and its imperfection *(nuqṣān)*".[15] Thus, Ṭūsī once again takes recourse to the idea that to deny the eternality of the world would deny the creatorship of God, and since God has always been a creator, the world must always have existed, even if in the form of potential existence and in a state that requires it to be brought to perfection. At the same time, he is careful to point out that the transience of the world and all the imperfections attached to it should not be reflected back towards God. Moreover, he points out, it is an imaginary human idea to say that there was a time when the world was not, and another time when the world was, for no creature can ascertain the truth of the matter *(ḥaqiqat-i ḥāl)*: in other words, the question of the existence of the world is a divine matter to which human conception cannot reach.

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[14] T65, P 47–48; BP 47–48.
[15] T 65, P 48; BP 48. (I)

It is salient to mention that unlike the philosophers, Ṭūsī holds the view that God willed to create, but that like the philosophers, he understands the mechanics of creation to have occurred through emanation, and also, along with the philosophers, he finds it necessary to maintain the eternality of the world. In other words, had the philosophers been able to maintain both the theological position of God's willed creatorship and the philosophical understanding of the necessity of emanation as the mode of creation and the eternality of the world to safeguard the potency of God's Will, then he would not have had cause to find fault with the philosphers with respect to their understanding of God as the First Cause. This needs be noted because Ṭūsī, at this stage in his life, which is at the time of the writing of the *Taṣawwurāt*, is much closer to the position of the philosophers than he is to that of the theologians. It should also be mentioned that Ismāᶜīlī philosophers prior to him also found it important to maintain both the willed creation of God as well as the emanative mode of creation. In other words, as Muslims, they felt they had to uphold the creatorship of God; as philosophers, their cosmological schemes depended upon emanation and as a corollary of this, upon the eternality of the world.

To turn to the discussion on the nature of God found in the *Taṣawwurāt*, Ṭūsī sets out, first of all, to establish that there is only one God. He examines the notion of duality both from the standpoint of asking whether there are two eternals and from that of whether duality is expressed through attributes. He dispenses with the first question by asserting that such a stance would imply that there are two gods, one good and the other better, which is absurd. Regarding the second, Ṭūsī asks whether such an attribute is created or divine: if created, then it is not worthy of being an attribute of God's, and if divine, then such an attribute could apply to one god only as the other god would require a different attribute in order to be distinguished from the first.[16] However, although the existence of objects in this world depends on someone different from them rather than upon themselves, that is to say, a *wājib al-wujūd*, viz. something existing by virtue of its own necessity,[17] the existence of God cannot be proven. This is so because in reality God is the establisher of all proofs *(thābitāt)*.[18] To say that the existence of God can be proved is to imply that the ipseity of God can be comprehended *(muḥit ast)* in its reality, which is impossible, for the nature of God cannot be comprehended. We understand Ṭūsī to mean that the nature of God cannot be comprehended in its reality by anything that falls within the realm of created being, for, in Ṭūsī's view, God is far above the ability of created beings to comprehend Him in reality. He extrapolates further that neither can God be comprehended by non-created being, for to posit the existence of such a being would imply that there was a being equal in power to God, which would indicate duality, and indeed Ṭūsī asserts, evidently in response to Zoroastrian notions, that there cannot be two equal powers both claiming to be divine.

Ṭūsī makes the statement that just as we cannot comprehend the notion of God, so, too, we cannot understand his role as creator. Ṭūsī does not elaborate upon this point. He simply asserts that the source of all existence is the volition *(Amr)* of God, called the Word *(Kalima)*.[19] The first creation *(mawjūd)* that comes into existence from this command of God, directly, without any intermediary, is the first intellect *(ᶜAql-i awwal)*, and all subsequent existents come into being through different intermediaries. Thus, the soul *(Nafs)* comes into being through the mediation of the *ᶜAql*, and so on.

The text now switches into a question-and-answer format. Some one points out that this creative act—termed *ibdāᶜ*, may be understood as creation *ex nihilo*, but not in the sense that it is creation out of nothing, but out of something to which existence or any other creaturely attribute cannot be predicated.[20] The creative act emanates *(fāʾiḍ)* from the volition *(Amr)* of the Creator[21] without any intermediary *(tawassuṭ)*, and not in time. This process is likened to the image of a light spreading from a lamp, such that this light is thought to spead without volition *(bī ikhtiyār)*. The implication of this, suggests the questioner, is that neither can the creatorship of the creator be proved, for, if we were to expand on the questioner's argument for a moment, there is nothing willed about it. As mentioned above, one of the problems relating to the process of emanation from the source of all existents is that if emanation is viewed as an outpouring that takes place by virtue of the very nature of the source of all being, then the idea of a God who makes the active decision to create disappears from view. Such appears to be the case here. To return to the questioner then, not only does it become difficult to prove the existence of the creator, but also of the creative act, that is, of the act as being a creative act rather than an automatic act *(bīikhtiyār)*.

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[16] T 5, P 7; B 157, BP 7.
[17] T 2, P 5; B 155, BP 5.
[18] T 5, P 7; B 157, BP 7.
[19] T 6, P 8; BP 8.

In his answer, Ṭūsī points out that the simile of the light of the lamp applied to the creative act is only a metaphor to make accessible to human understanding how divine volition works.[22] It should not be taken to correspond exactly in reality to that which it refers. Attributes given to God such as absolute existence *(wujūd)*, oneness, simplicity of substance *(bisāṭat)*, spontaneity *(ikhtiyār)*, knowledge, might, etc. are, according to Ṭūsī, like saying that God is pure light or an absolute bounty *(fayḍ)*; and that although these qualities are given to Him separately, it does not imply that all of these qualities are not one with Him. His main argument, however, is that these are creaturely properties, referring to creatures, and not to God, suggesting that we utilize them as aids to our understanding of a concept that is really beyond our reach. Therefore, he asks, in what way can the properties volition *(ikhtiyār)* or non-volition *(bī ikhtiyārī)* be applied to God and how can these be binding?[23] Ṭūsī appears to be saying that willing to create or creating through emanation, that is, spontaneously, may be ways in which we can approximate how the world comes into being. However, the manner in which this happens at the divine level is something we cannot have any knowledge of. All we can safely say is that creation comes into being through divine volition *(Amr)* by a creative act *(ibdāᶜ)*. Divine volition may be understood metaphorically as the Word of God *(Kalima)* and, similarly, the divine creative act may be understood metaphorically as light spreading from a lamp.

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[20] This is Nāṣir-i Khusraw's view. see W. Ivanow, ed. and trans., *Six Chapters of Shish Fasl also called Rawshana'i-nama by Nasir-i Khusraw* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1949), 30, P 6.

[21] Termed the *mubdiᶜ*—one who creates through *ibdāᶜ*, from the Ar. root *b-d-ᶜ*, to innovate, to make something new.

[22] T 6-7, P 8; BP 8.

Ṭūsī has introduced a fine line of distinction between God—whom he wants to protect from being attributed with any description arising out of human conception—and God's Will or volition or command, *Amr*, which in his view is the source of all existents. Since the nature of God is not accessible to human understanding, the exact relation between God and His Word is not detailed in the *Taṣawwurāt.* However, in the *Sayr va Sulūk*, Ṭūsī mentions that the Word *(Kalima*, i.e., *Amr)* is not something additional to God's essence when viewed from the point of view of His exaltedness. Had it been so, another mediator would have been needed. By this, Ṭūsī means that had the Amr been additional to God's essence, it would have been co-eternal with God. Since such a notion is inadmissible in order to keep God's monotheism intact, another attribute would have had to be devised that was internal to God's essence in order to keep God's omnipotence intact. However, from the point of view that the command is the cause for that which is caused, it is something additional to His essence. What is additional is the mode of the divine Word in which it is cause for the effect, because since the dyad of cause/effect belong together, this introduces a relation between them, and relationality belongs to the category of oppositions, which, as has been mentioned before, belongs in the realm of plurality[24] and hence in the realm of created beings.

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[23] T 6-7, P 8; BP 8.
[24] SS 51, #27, SSP 82–83.

God, His command, and the act of creation *(ibdāᶜ)* are, therefore, a divine mystery, although Ṭūsī does not explicitly say so but indicates through the arguments outlined above. He gives good reason as to why they should be a divine mystery. If they were amenable to human understanding, then this would be tantamount to claiming for humans the ability to comprehend the divine, thereby denying to God any real lordship over the realm of created entitites. Similarly, the relationship between God's Word or command and the first *ᶜAql,* which is the first existent to issue from the Command of God through the act of *ibdāᶜ*, is understood by the metaphor of the light of the lamp, in which the light denotes the *ᶜAql,* while the lamp stands for divine volition *(Amr).* In declaring that the Creator aspect of divinity remains essentially a divine mystery, Ṭūsī incorporates the philosophical view of existence as having issued forth from the First Cause—divinity—through a process of emanation. He identifies the Will of God, the *Amr,* as the cause of all inanimate and animate creations *(mawjūdāt wa kāʾināt)* and adds:

> Although the Command of God, the Most High, who is the cause of the existents *(mawjūdāt)* and the universe *(kāʾināt,* lit. creatures), is an absolute emanation (also bounty) *(yik fayḍ muṭlaq)* that emanates (lit. shines) equally upon all 18,000 worlds without illumination *(tajallī)* or bounty *(ᶜināyatī)* to some over others, each existent speaks of His creation *(kār,* lit. work) according to the existential rank it has received from the Command of God, the Most High, and in proportion to the effects *(āthār)* [of the Command] that it has witnessed in its own essence *(dhāt).*[25]

Ṭūsī tries to strike a balance between the strict monotheism dictated by the Qurʾān and the references found in the same to God as a being by utilizing the hermeneutical strategy of alternating points of view. Thus, from the point of view of the divine essence, God is above any creaturely attribution, and unrelated in any way to the realm of creation. However, from the point of view of the creatures, He is all and more that we can attribute to Him—He is creator, lord, one, simple in substance, wise, mighty, has will, etc. Logically speaking, however, all these attributes are aimed at the Will or Command of God, and not

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[25] T 17, P 16-17; B 160, BP 16–17. (KH)

God per se, although we must bear in mind that God's Will is not to be differentiated from him from the point of view of God himself. Moreover, each creature speaks of God from the position it occupies, so the *ᶜAql*, which "received its existence from the Command without any mediation and was one *(wāḥid)* in its oneness *(waḥdat)*, did not see or know anything but one *(wāḥid)* and oneness *(waḥdat)*; and in relation to its own knowledge and vision it said: Nothing can proceed from one *(wāḥid)* except one *(waḥdat)*."[26] Similarly, the *Nafs*, from its point of view, while looking in the direction of the *ᶜAql* sees oneness, and looking in the direction of matter *(jism)*, which it came into possession of and began to control through the aid *(taʾyīd)* of the *ᶜAql*, sees plurality, would say: nothing can result from one except plurality.[27]

Thus, if Ṭūsī has succeeded in de-anthropomorphizing God by holding Him to be far above any attributes humans can impute to Him, thereby avoiding the pitfall of *tashbīh*, he does so because from the point of view of God, no attribute can fully comprehend his nature, nor be, in any real sense, be applied to him as it stems from the creaturely point of view. However, to then avoid falling into the pitfall of *taᶜṭīl*, Ṭūsī changes the lens to say that from the creature's point of view, depending upon the status occupied by the creature, certain positive attributes can be applied to God, and these are to be understood always within the context of the relation of the existent to that which is ontologically prior to it, and from the point of view of the existent's origin. For example, following the logic of avoiding *tashbīh*, to say that something issues from God is untrue, for God has no connection with anything material. Were we to admit a connection between an existent and God, then we would be denying God's oneness *(waḥdāniyyat)*. If we deny that things come from God, we would be denying the existence of creation, which is also clearly untrue. But to admit that things come from God would produce a relation that in turn would result in the denial of truth itself. And to say that the issue of something from God is in a way possible and in a way impossible would be to imply plurality, which again is not befitting of God.

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[26] T 17-18, P 17; B 160, BP 17. (KH)
[27] T 18, P 17; B 160, BP 17.

So, in a tacit acceptance of the difficulty of maintaining a balance between *tashbīh* and *ta^cṭīl*, Ṭūsī has to introduce the point of view of the creature. As iterated above, from the point of the view of the *^cAql*, from one only one can issue forth. Ṭūsī offers very little detailed explanation of why this is so, and to a certain extent we have to reconstruct his argument.

He says of the *^cAql* that it is the First, because it is the first to have come into existence (the first to have become *mawjūd).* It is called the Active *(fa^{cc}āl)* Intellect, because through its aid *(ta^ɔyīd)* the things of this world come from the state of potential existence into actuality. It is called the Universal Intellect *(^cAql-i Kull),* because all the individual intellects connected to beings are its traces (or effects—*āthār).* It always remains quiescent with respect to the creative force it receives from the *Kalima* or divine Word, while it is in a state of movement with relation to the *Nafs*, or the second existent.[28]

The question is: does the *^cAql* look toward the *Kalima* or *Amr* when it declares that from one can come only one, or does it look toward the *Nafs*, which has come into being through it, when it makes its declaration? In searching the text for possible clues, it appears that for Ṭūsī this is a statement made by the *^cAql* in acknowledgement of God's unity, or *tawḥīd.* Furthermore, when the *^cAql* begins its process of contemplation, which ultimately results in the remainder of creation coming into existence, this is a unified conception *(taṣawwūr),* since for the *^cAql*, one thought encompasses all thoughts, and all thoughts become one thought.[29] This is based on the notion that the *^cAql's* unity is due to the fact that for it all relative aspects become one since it is turned toward Him.[30]

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[28] T 19; P 17; B 161, BP 17.
[29] T 10, P 11, BP 11.
[30] Ibid.

To return, then, to the issue of *taᶜṭīl,* from the point of the view of the *ᶜAql,* God is One. It may be argued that if Ṭūsī says that the *ᶜAql* does not know anything outside itself, which is what we may extrapolate when Ṭūsī says that the *ᶜAql* contains the idea of all existents within itself, then how could it assert that God is one when it says that from one only one issues forth ? The objection holds until we turn to Ṭūsī's statement that although God is not an existent, and hence cannot be known and acknowledged as such by the *ᶜAql,* nonetheless the *ᶜAql* must be conscious of deriving *fayḍ* (bounty) from the Command, because it is to the *Amr* that the *ᶜAql* submits *(taslīm)* itself. Based on this it would appear that the *ᶜAql's* assertion that from one issues forth only one means that from the *Kalima* or *Amr,* which is the source of all creation, only one has issued forth, viz. the First Intellect. It is not meant in the sense that from one existent, another existent has come forth, because the *Kalima* or *Amr* is not understood by Ṭūsī to be an existent. The emphasis here is on the *Amr* as simple cause, not on *Amr* as existent. Moreover, the *ᶜAql's* assertion is based upon its own knowledge: it is one in its oneness *(wāḥid ba-waḥdat)* and knows only oneness. Therefore, it is logical for it to assert that from one only one ensues, that is, from a simple *(basīt)* cause, only one effect comes into being. The Soul, however, has come into existence indirectly, through the mediation of the Intellect, and with its help *(taʾyīd),* it comes into possession and control of matter *(jism).* When it looks toward the Intellect, it sees one and oneness. However, when it looks in another direction, it sees many and plurality. Therefore, the Soul asserts that from one plurality has issued forth.[31]

Accordingly, everything that is existent formulates a theory regarding its origin *(iṣdār)* from God consistent with its knowledge and ability to perceive. When people assert that God is cause of all existence, they do so in conformity with their place in the order of things and their origin—although they run the risk of attributing plurality to His essence, and this is clearly contrary to the notion of *tawḥīd.* To deny the possibility of something coming from

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[31] T 18, P 17; B 160, BP 17.

God, says Ṭūsī, "I would be denying the figurative and the relation *(majāzī wa iḍāfah)*",[32] the figurative being that God is said to be the creator, and the relation being that we, as existents, must have a connection with Him in order to exist. However, this would deny His unity. Accordingly, Ṭūsī asserts, if he were to say that things do issue forth from Him, then "I would be denying the reality itself."[33]

Ṭūsī's point is simply this: all our articulated notions concerning God's creation are constructed arguments. Each view has merit in that it seeks to avoid one pitfall or the other. At the same time, each view raises further logical problems. Therefore, although one must avoid being negligent by refusing to comment on these questions, at the same time one must remain aware that any articulation is limited by one's knowledge, ability to perceive the true nature of things, and one's status in the order of created beings. In the end, each creature speaks of God in accordance with its position in the existential hierarchy, and in proportion to the divine traces *(āthār)* manifested in its substance *(dhāt)*.[34] Thus, it can be surmised that although Ṭūsī calls upon the "point of view" argument to avoid the pitfall of *taᶜṭīl*, he nonetheless cannot accept the point of view of the unthinking believer who attributes God with being the source of all existents or of those who try to qualify their beliefs by distinguishing between a unique, substantial existent and the plurality of accidental existents. That is simply not going far enough in his view.

What, then, would comprise correct belief? If we look at his interpretation of the Qurᵓānic dictum, *"Allāhu Akbar"* (God is Great), we see another illustration of his understanding of divine nature. This statement, according to him, means that God is greater than being liable to description. Further, it means that He is greater than being above description, and that He never diminishes or becomes deficient. He explains that the word *akbar*, if taken alone, means that there may be great ones in that class *(jins)* but to understand this of God would amount to unbelief *(kufr)* and polytheism *(shirk)*. Hence it is not allowable.

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[32] T 16, P 16; B 159, BP 16. (B)
[33] Ibid.
[34] T 17, P 16-17; B 160, BP 16–17.

Rather, he suggests, one has to recognize that there is a double purpose contained within this statement, because humanity cannot be exempt, that is, must consider things from the point of view of the starting point *(mabdaᶜ)* and the destination point *(maᶜād)*. Initially, the statement appears as a belief that has a certain form *(ṣūrat)* and description *(ṣifat)*, and it is necessary for the believer to testify to this as otherwise the person would give up the idea of, we assume, the belief in God altogether. The second consideration is to recognize that the point of the first consideration— accepting the form and description of the statement—is that it is something that belongs to the realm of humanity and not to God. This is because the truth of His substance cannot be known to anyone except God Himself. Thus, the secondary consideration consists of the denial and abolition of His attributes. This forms the point at which the believer begins the journey of returning to the realm of perfection, and hence Ṭūsī sees the second consideration as relating to the return *(maᶜād)*.

Yet, as Ṭūsī is careful to point out, God Himself is above both these considerations, that is, He is far above attribution (which is something humans do in order to acknowledge their point of origin, *mabdaᶜ*) and also above not having attributes (which humans acknowledge in order to acknowledge the point of their return, *maᶜād*). If this were not sufficient to establish the greatness of God that is above both the assertion and denial of attributes, Ṭūsī goes on to declare that He is also above being free from both these. In other words, the very idea of the freedom of God from every creaturely conception of Him is an idea rooted in human conception, and He is also beyond that. Now this, according to Ṭūsī, is what constitutes praise *(waṣf)* in the realm of creation, while in the realm of the divine Will

(Amr) the mystery of the paradox contained within the formula is alluded to by the Qurʾānic vs.: "Is not His the creation and the command?"[35]

We may argue, however, that thus far Ṭūsī has succeeded perhaps in rendering God above any creaturely description and, further, even freed Him from the conception that He is above creaturely description. In so doing, he has fulfilled his purpose to avoid falling into the pitfall of *tashbīh.* He has also pointed out that statements that appear to anthropomorphize our conception of God do so in order that the believer may acknowledge his point of origin. But has he not gone too far the other way and fallen into the pitfall of *taʿṭīl?* For is not his conception of God such that *Deus* is rendered completely *absconditus,* completely hidden from view, such that it would be very difficult for the believer to have a notion that would fulfil the need for a personal deity? In other words, is there an immanency to God at all in Ṭūsī's view, or is God compelety transcendent?

The Divine Will (Amr)

We have seen that Ṭūsī has sought to establish that God *qua* God is beyond description, even the description of being beyond description, and that the mysterious connection between God and his Will is essentially a matter that only he understands. Having explained that we must always bear in mind that God *qua* God is beyond and free from any connection with the created world, he then proceeds to use the terms God and his divine Will *(Amr)* almost interchangeably.

Let us turn to those statements made in the text that refer directly to the volition or Will of God, that is, that aspect—if we may call it that—of God that "faces" creation. The *Amr* or Will of God is variously described as being the cause of all inanimate and animate existents *(mawjūdāt va kāʾināt)*; it may be described as an absolute emanation *(fayḍ-i muṭlaq).*[36] The first destiny *(taqdīr-i awwal)* proceeds from the Command to the Intellect, and *qaḍa*, predestination, by which is meant the first imposition of duties *(taklīf)* is established in the first Tablet *(lawḥ-i awwal)* by the Command.[37] The *Amr* also determines the existential rank *(martaba)* which every existent occupies, which in turn determines that existent's origin *(mabdaᵓ)* and return *(maᶜād)*.[38] So, for instance, human beings are said to have come from the world of the divine Will *(Amr-i ilāhī)* into the being of symbolic and illusory existence of ordinary creatures, and to the place where everything created is proof of the existence of God.[39] The purpose of the emanation *(ifāḍat)* of the Word *(Kalima=Amr)* was to facilitate the progress *(taraqqī)* of the *ᶜAql*, that is, to grant it eternal peace, absolute perfection and knowledge of reality.[40] The perfection attained by each existent is proved by its surrender *(taslīm)* to its superior, and by its placing itself at its superior's disposal *(taṣarruf)*.[41] Similarly, the *ᶜAql* "is superior to all other creatures [because] its submission to the Exalted word is purer and more sincere, and it avoids partnership with the Exalted Word in will, knowledge and power better than any other creature."[42]

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[35] Qurʾān 7:54; cited on T 158, P 107; B 220, BP 107.
[36] T 17, P 16; B 160, BP 16.

How does Ṭūsī view the relationship between God the creator and the created world? One of the cardinal presuppositions in Islamic philosophy that was inherited from the Greeks was the notion that the effect must bear some traces of the cause. As we have seen above, Ṭūsī cannot conceive of God as cause, for to do so would compromise God's *tawḥīd* or uniqueness since the notion of cause implies the notion of effect and the two together form a dyad. God is above dyads or oppositions. Rather, Ṭūsī names the Will *(Amr)* of God as that which humans may consider divine cause. Although in absolute terms God's Will is internal to his essence and non-distinct from him, from the point of view of human understanding we may separate out this Will from the notion of God *qua* God so as to keep our conception of God intact with respect to his uniqueness. Can we, then, detect in Ṭūsī's articulation of the divine Will any elements that connect the cause to the effect?

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[37] T 48, P 36; BP 36. If the *lawḥ-i awwal* is the same as the *lawḥ-i maḥfūẓ*—and there is no reason why it should not be—then we may note that Ṭūsī identifies this as the Universal Soul. See T 120, P 82; B 197, BP 82.
[38] T 85, P 59; B 173, BP 59.
[39] T 92, P 64; B 178, BP 64.
[40] T 111, P 77; B 191, BP 77.
[41] T 109, P 76; B 190, BP 76.
[42] T 110–111, P 77; B 191, BP 76–77. (B)

In order to determine this we must examine Ṭūsī's view of how the created world comes into being. In response to a question regarding the source of existence *(mubdiᶜ-i mawjūdāt),* he says:

> My conception is that the instaurator *(mubdiᶜ)* of existents *(mawjudāt)* is one, namely the Command *(Amr)* of God the All-High and Sacrosanct, which is called "the Word" *(Kalima).* The first existent *(mawjūd),* which came into existence through divine (lit. pure; *maḥḍ)* instauration *(ibdāᶜ)* without any intermediary *(bī tawassuṭ)* from the Command was the First *ᶜAql* [Intellect]. [All] other existents came into existence from the Command through the mediation of [other] intermediaries; for example, the [Universal] Soul *(Nafs)* through the mediation of the Intellect *(ᶜAql),* and the *Hayūla,* [Universal] Nature *(ṭabīᶜat)* and [Universal] Body *(Jism)* through the mediation of the Soul.[43]

There are two points that may be made here. First, there is a descending hierarchy of creation or, more precisely, created existents, depending upon the number of intermediaries that separate that existent from the Will *(Amr).* Accordingly, the Universal or First Intellect, the *ᶜAql,* which comes into existence directly from the divine Will without any intermediary, "by its substance *(jawhar)* is superior to all existents *(mawjūdāt),* by its existence the most perfect, and by its position the highest; it possesses absolute perfection *(kamāl-i muṭlaq).* Therefore, where it is, there is pure good *(khayr-i maḥḍ).*"[44] Second, every existent that speaks of God's work, that is, creation *(kār)* can be classified, according to Ṭūsī, by its rank in the order of creation, and "extent of benefaction" (lit. trace of emanation, *athar-i fayḍ)* that it receives from the Will *(Amr)* of God.[45] This emanation, also understood as bounty or abundance *(fayḍ)*,[46] is manifested in each existent in the traces *(āthār)* on the soul or the actions *(aᶜmāl)* of the body.[47] Ṭūsī's intent here is to show that existents cannot transcend the limits of their knowledge and vision when they speak of the doings of God. However, the statements he makes are instructive for us in revealing that the emanation, abundance or bounty *(fayḍ)* of the divine Will, which Ṭūsī has already likened to light spreading from a lamp, are a key point of connection between the divine Will and its effect, viz., creation. A chief characteristic of the cause that is contained in the effect—that is to say, existents—is the manifestation of the abundance *(fayḍ)* of the cause in the existent in the form of traces in the soul and the actions of the body.

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[43] T 6, P 8; BP 8. (KH)
[44] T 46, P 35; BP 35. (I)
[45] T 7, P 9; BP 9. (I)

Another characteristic connecting the cause to the effect is articulated by Ṭūsī in the following:

> ... the First *ᶜAql* by the power of divine assistance *(taʾyīd)* of the Highest Word (i.e. Divine volition, *Kalimaʾi aᶜlā)*, conceived the idea *(taṣawwur)* of all things *(ashyāʾ)*, both spiritual and material, to the utmost limits. ... Such an idea *(taṣawwur)* of the ᶜAql became the existentiating *(ījād)* cause *(sabab)* of the commencement *(badāyat)* of all things *(ashyāʾ)*, with all that every creation *(mawjūd)* required *(mā yaḥtaj)*.[48]

Here we have the second characteristic that links the effect to the cause: the notion that the *ᶜAql* conceived the idea of all things in creation "by the power of divine assistance" or *taʾyīd*. Ṭūsī views the Intellect as possessing absolute perfection. Why, then, does the *ᶜAql* need the power of divine assistance or *taʾyīd* ? Since ordinarily the notion of absolute perfection would imply independence of anything external to itself, it is clear that for Ṭūsī the notion of perfection is understood somewhat differently. The *ᶜAql's* perfection lies in (i) that it came into existence without an intermediary, and (ii) that it submitted to the divine

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[46] The term *fayḍ* (from the Ar. root *f-y-ḍ*) has been used as a technical term in classical Islamic philosophy to depict emanation. Its range of meanings include the notions of flowing over, superabundance, bounty, pouring forth, issuing and so forth.

[47] T 7, P 9; BP 9.

[48] T 8, P 9; BP 9. (I & KH)

Word or Command. In the first aspect, the *ᶜAql* is the recipient of the emanation *(fayḍ)* of the Command, and in the second, it is the recipient of the assistance or guidance *(taʾyīd)* of the Command. In both cases, it receives these in very act of *ibdāᶜ* or (primordial) instauration. Is this *taʾyīd* the same as *fayḍ* ? From the context, it appears that *taʾyīd*, lit. "assistance, support" is connected to the notion of forming an idea *(taṣawwur).* In other contexts, the notion of *taʾyīd* is mentioned in connection with understanding things directly.[49] *Fayḍ*, on the other hand, appears in its manifestation to be a kind of potency, a "power" that is latent in every existent, such as the instinctual drive to move or the capacity to reason. That is, although it is a form of divine bounty, or abundance or emanation from the point of view of the source, from the point of view of the existent, it is a power contained in the soul or an ability possessed by the body. The two notions appear to be closelyinterconnected:

> A person who knows everything without learning from anyone, i.e., who does not need any physical instruction *(taᶜlīm-i jismānī)* or acquisition and convincing *(iktisāb wa talqīn)*, and does not have to be taught by anyone, i.e., that knowledge unites with his mind from the emanations of the lights *(az fayḍ-i anwār)* of [divine] assistance *(taʾyīd)*, and should teach others, is a *ḥujjat.*[50]

The *ḥujjat* is the manifestation of the Universal Intellect *(ᶜAql)* on the human plane. Drawing upon the notion that "every substance (lit. quiddity, *māhiyyat)* that has its origin in the higher world has a manifestation *(maẓhar)* in this world,"[51] Ṭūsī identifies the *ḥujjat* as someone who:

> would know everything without instruction *(taᶜlīm)* and extracts *(istinbāṭ)* the verities *(ḥaqāʾiq)* of all things from his own soul. He is not in need of anyone or anything save the assistance (or guidance, *taʾyīd)* of the manifestation *(maẓhar)* of the Highest Word *(Kalima)* that [alone] is above him. All is perfect in his own essence *(dhāt)* and he brings to perfection all that is other than himself.[52]

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[49] T 45, P 35; BP 35.
[50] T 143, P 97; B 211, BP 97. (B and KH)
[51] T 186, P 129; BP 129. (KH)
[52] T 186, P 129; BP 129. (KH)

This passage is intended to elucidate an understanding of the status of the *ḥujjat*, a figure in the Ismāᶜīlī hierarchy, which we will be discussing shortly. However, for our purposes here, it is clear that *taʾyīd* is conceptualized as a knowledge of the divine that is flashed directly upon the soul, while *fayḍ*, as shown in the lines preceding this passage, is the bountiful emanation received by each existent in the very process of creation. The granting of *taʾyīd* by the divine Will presupposes the existence of *fayḍ*. Perhaps what Ṭūsī is trying to articulate is the notion that if *fayḍ* is the potency contained in every order of created being, then *taʾyīd* is that knowledge which actualizes that potency. This reading finds support in Ṭūsī's delineation of the *ᶜAql:* "It is also called the Agent or Active *(faᶜᶜāl) ᶜAql* because it is through its help *(taʾyīd)* that things in this world come from the state of potential existence into the state of actual being",[53] a notion highly reminiscent of, if indeed not derived directly from, the Aristotelian dictum that things can only be brought from the state of potentiality to actualization by something that is itself actualized.[54]

ᶜAql and *Nafs*

In a discussion on existence,[55] Ṭūsī outlines three categories: the necessary *(wājib)*, the possible *(mumkin)* and the impossible *(mumtanaᶜ)*. The necessary is that category of existence which is the source of all influence *(mufayyiḍ-i fayḍhā)*. The impossible is that which is prevented from accepting any influence whatsoever. All existents in this world belong to the category of the possible, which lies between the two limits, the necessary and the impossible. The category of possible existence is that which is able to accept *fayḍ* from elsewhere.[56] Ṭūsī does not give us much information about the *ᶜAql* and the *Nafs*, and if we are to accept his categories of existence *prima facie*, we may advance the notion that all existents including the *ᶜAql* and the *Nafs* are possible existents. Both *ᶜAql* and *Nafs* accept influence: "Among its [the *ᶜAql's]* properties, is its always remaining static in what creative force it receives from the *Kalima*."[57] Regarding the *Nafs:* "The *Nafs-i Kullī*, however, ... received its existence from the Command *(Amr)* through the *ᶜAql*, and was able, with the latter's assistance *(taʾyīd)* to govern *(taṣarruf)* and organize *(tadbīr)* [Universal] Matter *(jism)* ... ."[58] However, neither the *ᶜAql* or the *Nafs* are possible existents in the manner that the existents of this world are, for although both are from the point of the view of the Absolute contingent upon the Will *(Amr)* of God, from the point of view of created entities, they reside in the horizon of perfection. The *ᶜAql*, indeed, is described as perfect, and "it is through its help *(taʾyīd)* that things in this world come from the state of potential existence into the state of actual being."[59] The *Nafs* is described by Ṭūsī with the epithet "holy" *(muqaddas)* and is conceived of as being the soul of the macrocosm *(ᶜālam-i kabīr)*, which consists of the area "(f)rom the circumference of the highest sphere *(al-falak al-aᶜlā)* to the centre of the depth of the earth."[60] Elsewhere he says, "When the Universal Soul *(Nafs)* submits to the Universal Intellect, it becomes perfect."[61] Indeed, he adds, "[The purpose] of the emanation *(fayḍ)* of the *ᶜAql* upon the

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[53] T 19, P 17; B 161, BP 17. (I) In this regard, according to al-Fārābi in his *Risāla fīʾl ᶜAql* (24–25), "the agent intellect is that principle which makes that essence which was an intellect in potentiality, an intellect in actuality and which makes the intelligibles which are intelligibles in potentiality, intelligibles in actuality." See Ian Richard Netton, *Al-Fārābī and his School* (London: Routledge, 1992), 49. According to Davidson, "Avicenna postulates, following Aristotle, that 'whatever passes from potentiality to actuality' does so 'only through a cause that is actually [what the other is potentially].' 'There must consequently be a [wholly actual] cause that makes our souls pass from potentiality to actuality in respect to intelligible thoughts,' and the cause is the 'active intellect.'" See Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, & Averröes, on Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992), 87.

[54] See Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, & Averröes*, 18–19: "Whenever 'what exists actually is generated from what exists potentially,' the transition from potentiality to actuality is effect 'by means of what [already] actually is [in possession of the characteristic in question].'" He gives Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 9.8.1049b, 24–25 in W.D. Ross's Oxford, 1924 edition of the *Metaphysics*, as the source.

[55] T 12–13, P 12–13; BP 12–13.

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[56] T 12–13, P 13; BP 13.
[57] T 19, P 17; B 161, BP 17. (I) Lit. "in what emanates upon it from the lights of the *Kalima*".
[58] T 18, P 17; B 160, BP 17. (KH)
[59] T 19, P 17; B 161, BP 17. (I)
[60] T 19, P 17–18; B 161, BP 17–18. (B)
[61] T 110, P 76; B 191, BP 76. (B)

Nafs was to grant it that perfection which it had the potentiality to accept."[62] In additional comments regarding existence, Ṭūsī outlines four categories: individual *(juzwī)* existence, individual inclined toward generic existence, generic *(kullī)* existence and existence that is beyond both the individual and the generic. Generic existence is that of those who belong to the realm of absolute distinction *(mubāyanat-i muṭlaq)*, which is removed *(mujarrad)* from false ascription of partners (to God) *(ishtirāk-i mubṭil)*.[63] Although this is aimed at human beings, who start out in life with individual existence *(wujūd-i juzwī)*, we may read that generic existence *(wujūd-i kullī)* is the rank of existence also enjoyed by the *ᶜAql* and the *Nafs*, both of whom are also termed *'ᶜAql-i Kull'* and *'Nafs-i Kull'* by Ṭūsī. There is no doubt that Ṭūsī, along with earlier Ismāᶜīlī thinkers, conceives of the *Nafs* as housing an imperfection *(nuqsān)* in its substance.[64] However, the *Nafs* appears to have been assisted by the *ᶜAql* in moving towards perfection by the latter's assistance *(taʾyīd)*, and becomes thereby both the soul of the macrocosm and the first "preserved tablet" *(lawh-i maḥfūz)*[65] upon which are inscribed the divine mysteries. Although Ṭūsī does not say so explicitly, it is clear that for him the *Nafs* holds an exalted position with respect to creation and humans. In the final analysis, for Ṭūsī the traces of the cause, the divine Will or *Amr* that are to be found in the effects are *fayḍ* and *taʾyīd.* Although the *Amr* is the source of both of these—however interchangeable these concepts may appear to be—they reach all subsequent existents through the mediation of the *ᶜAql* and the *Nafs*, as we shall see presently.

The Processes of Creation

We have already seen how the First Intellect originates from the divine Command *(Amr)* in an act of mysterious origination, explainable only by the simile of light spreading indiscriminately, that is, without differentiation, from a lamp. This first existent *(mawjūd)*, known as the Universal Intellect or *ᶜAql-i Kull*, is well-nigh perfect, having come into existence from the divine Will *(Amr)* directly without any intermediary *(ba-ibdāᶜ-i maḥḍ bī tawassuṭ)*.

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[62] T 111, P 77; B 191, BP 77. (KH)
[63] T 84, P 59; B 173, BP 59. (KH)
[64] T 10, P 11; BP 11, which consists of the awareness that it is separated from the divine will by the *ᶜAql.*
[65] T 120, P 83; B 197, BP 82.

Ṭūsī then gives two explanations of how the rest of creation proceeded. The first, his answer "as a whole", states that the First Intellect:

> by the power of Divine assistance *(taʾyīd)* of the highest Word *(kalimaʾi aᶜlā)*, conceived the idea *(taṣawwur)* of all things *(ashyā)*, both spiritual and material, to the utmost limits. That is, [it conceived] all that comprises the world, from the outer sphere *(al-falak al-muḥīṭ)* to the core of the earth *(markazu'l-arḍ)*, in the form *(shakl)* and being *(hayʾat)* that it now has, [that of] a universal organism *(shakhṣī kullī)* .... This idea *(taṣawwur)* became the cause of the coming into existence of the origin (lit. commencement, Ar. *badāyat)* of all things *(ashyāʾ)* with all that was required *(mā yaḥtāj)* by every existent *(mawjūd)*, such as intellects *(ᶜuqūl)* with (lit. and) their illuminative *(ishrāqāt)* [abilities], souls with their properties *(taṣarrufāt)*, spheres with their regulating [abilities], the elements *(arkān)* with their [abilities to exert] influence *(taʾthīrāt)*, and the kingdoms of nature *(mawālid)* with their proportionating [tendencies] *(tanāsubāt)*—for all their activities they were established and their requirements for perpetuity ensured. ... while this conception [of the *ᶜAql]* was being formed, in a single moment [that is, instantly] all this by way of *ibdāᶜ* and *ikhtirāᶜ* came into existence *(wujūd)*. Both [kinds of creation, i.e., *ibdāᶜ* and *ikhtirāᶜ]* were one: *ibdāᶜ*, that is, [everything] intellectual *(ᶜaqlānī)* came into existence unmediated from the Command, and *ikhtirāᶜ*, that is, [everything] spiritual *(rūḥānī)* and material *(jismānī)* came into existence from the Command *(Amr)* through the mediation of the Intellect *(ᶜAql)* and the Soul *(Nafs)*.[66]

How is this passage to be interpreted? It appears from the passage quoted above that the direct outcome of the power of divine assistance *(taʾyīd)* that is the hallmark of the Divine Will is to produce within the First Intellect the idea *(taṣawwur)* of all things, both spiritual and material. Since the idea precedes the existence of anything, the very fact of this idea having arisen in the First Intellect necessitates the coming into being of all existents that it has conceived. While the creation of the First Intellect is through *ibdāᶜ*,[67] that is, directly, immediately, and out of divine mystery through the Will of God, the coming into being of all other existents—spiritual and material—is through the process of *ikhtirāᵓ*, a form of creating that implies—from its verbal root connoting "to split, to break apart"—a connection with the source of its creation. Ṭūsī maintains that the idea arose at the same moment[68] as the First Intellect came into being, and appears to be a logical corollary of its existence. That is, both the *ibdāᶜ* (creation of the First Intellect[69]) and the *ikhtirāᶜ* (creation of all the spiritual and material existents through the agency of the *ᶜAql* and the *Nafs)* occur at once, in the same moment, although logically *ibdāᶜ* must precede *ikhtirāᶜ*.

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[66] T 8–9, P 10; BP 9–10. (KH)

The effect of the *ibdāᶜ*—the process through which the First Intellect came into being—is direct and immediate, while the effect of creation through *ikhtirāᶜ*, the process through which all spiritual and material existents necessary to bring into existence all things *(ashyāᵓ)* with everything that each existent *(mawjūd)* would require *(mā yaḥtāj)*, is not quite so direct even if its origin or commencement *(badāyat)* is immediate.

Ṭūsī then outlines his understanding of creation through *ikhtirāᶜ*, that is, relating to all spiritual and material existents. The First Intellect meditates upon three aspects of its existence, which Ṭūsī is quick to point out are in reality only one, although when viewed from the aspect of relativity, they comprise three meditative "moments", so to speak.[70] In the first meditation, the *ᶜAql-i Kull* examines its own cause, which has a higher affinity *(nisbat-i sharīftar dāsht),* that is, with the divine Word. The result of this cogitation is the coming into existence of the second intellect, the intellect *(ᶜaql)* of the outer sphere *(falak al-aflāk).* In its second meditation, the First Intellect reflects on its own substance, and finds it to have intermediary affinities *(nisbat-i wasaṭ dāsht).* In this connection Ṭūsī states that the First Intellect recognizes that its substance is necessitated by something else *(wājib bi-ghayr ast),* that is, that it is necessitated by the divine Will *(Amr).* This meditation leads to the coming into existence of the Universal Soul, or *Nafs-i Kull,* that is, the soul of the outer sphere. In the final moment, when the First Intellect reflects on its own existence by possibility *(imkān),* it realizes that it itself was merely a possibility *(mumkin)* and hence, has inferior affinities *(nisbat-i adwan).*[71] Ṭūsī has noted elsewhere that possible existence means that it is capable of accepting influence, which we may understand as being the *fayḍ* and *taʾyīd* that it receives from the *Amr.* This thought becomes the cause of the coming into being of the outer sphere, the *falak al-aflāk* itself.

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[67] The term *ibdāᶜ*, used by Ismāᶜīlī thinkers prior to Ṭūsī, connotes the idea of direct, immediate creation or coming into being out of no prior substance to which it bears a connection. That is, it is coming into existence not from a thing; that is, not from anything that is accessible to human perception. See Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Kitāb Jamiᶜ al-Ḥikmatayn,* edited with a double introduction by Henry Corbin and Moh. Moᶜin (Tehran and Paris: L'Institut Franco-Iranien, 1953), P 211, #227. The verbal root of this term signifies an innovation, something new, and hence the idea that it bears no relation to anything prior to it. It was perhaps a term used by Ismāᶜīlī thinkers in order to safeguard, at one and the same time, both the positive aspect of the Creatorship of God through His Will, and the negative aspect of keeping the Divine free of all association with created entities.

[68] Nowhere does Ṭūsī speak of time and how or when it came into being. However, based on previous Ismāᶜīlī thinkers such as Nāṣir-i Khusraw, we may safely assume that linear Time is not part of the primordial configuration here.

[69] This is how we must necessarily understand the creation of that which is intellectual *(ᶜaqlānī)*; it implies, of course, that the traces *(āthār)* of the Intellect must be included.

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[70] T 10, P 11; BP 11. Precursors of this notion are to be found in al-Fārābī, who depicted Aristotle—who himself does not appear to have made a causal connection between the First Cause and the incorporeal movers of the spheres—as imputing to the First Cause only two thoughts, "a thought of the First Cause and a thought of its own essence", which brought into existence a second intelligence and the first sphere. Al-Fārābī depicted 'Plato' as holding the view that the First eternally emanates the first intelligence *(ᶜaql, nous)* that, in turn, eternally emanates both the soul and the intellect of the first sphere, and the body of the first sphere. This process is continued by the second intelligence, proceeding to the existence of the tenth intelligence. Ibn Sīnā tempered this theory, ascribing "three aspects to the thought of each intelligence, in order to explain the intelligence's emanation of three things—the soul and body of the corresponding sphere and the next intelligence in the series." See Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna & Averröes,* 44–46; n. 10; 74ff., esp. 75, and 76, n. 6.

[71] Ṭūsī does not specify what he means when he talks about superior, mediary and inferior affinities. We assume that he means that the *ᶜAql* recognizes three aspects pertaining to its existence: that its cause is indicative of something higher, beyond its ability to understand, that is God; that its substance is necessitated by the divine will, and that its existence is possible, which as he explains elsewhere, means that it is capable of accepting influence, that is, the *fayḍ* and *taʾyīd* of the *Amr.* The notion of higher and lower affinities is also found in al-Kirmānī's *Rāḥat al-ᶜAql,* which explains the emanation of the second and third intellects, respectively (following Aristotle). See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāᶜīlīs: Their history and doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 246.

It must be noted that Ṭūsī appears to use the device of three moments, that is, the first meditation on cause, the second meditation on substance, and the third meditation on existence to clarify what he considers to be a unified thought within the First Intellect, since the *ᶜAql* knows no plurality. What is of interest, however, is that these moments indicate that the First Intellect cogitates on its cause as necessary in and of itself; on its substance as necessitated by someone or something else, that is, on its substance as contingent; and on its existence as a mere possibility even if, as is mentioned elsewhere[72] in the text, it comes into existence directly. As necessary cause, it brings forth the Second Intellect, the intellect of the outer sphere; as contingent substance, it brings forth the Universal Soul; and as possible existent, it brings forth the outer sphere. As a result, the outer sphere possesses an independent *(mufāriq)* controller *(mudabbir),* that is to say, the *ᶜaql* of that sphere, and a direct *(mubāshir)* moving agent *(muḥarrik),* that is to say, the *Nafs-i Kull.* In other words, there is a resonating pattern at work here.

Since no material body *(jism)* can come into existence without form *(ṣūrat)* and primordial material substance, if we may translate the term *Hayūlā* thus, the coming into existence of these latter two, form and substance, is attributed to two moments of reflection originating from the Universal Soul or *Nafs-i Kull.* In the first moment, the *Nafs-i Kull* reflects on the substance of the *ᶜAql-i Kull* and recognizes it to be perfect. This recognition leads to the existence of form *(ṣūrat),* that "comes from the field of perfection *(ḥayz-i kamāl).*"[73] Elsewhere, Ṭūsī calls this Universal Nature, *ṭabīᶜat-i kullī,* and he identifies this as one of the powers *(quwwathā)* of the *Nafs-i Kull,* of which all spiritual entities are a part.[74]

The second moment of reflection occurs when the *Nafs-i Kull* meditates on its own substance and cognizes it to be imperfect, presumably because its existence has not taken place directly from the divine Word but is mediated by the *ᶜAql-i Kull.* From this realization comes into being, from the field of defect *(ḥayz-i nuqsān)*, the *Hayūlā*, described elsewhere as a simple abstract substance *(jawhar-i basīṭ-i maᶜqūl)*, which is also passive *(munfaᶜal)* and may perhaps be identified with what Ṭūsī elsewhere calls the absolute body *(jism-i muṭlaq)*. Ṭūsī elaborates: "... no action *(fiᶜl)* occurs through itself, and, before it is connected with anything, it is not manifest in any form *(ṣūrat)*. Its function lies in being a receiver of all forms that are emanated upon it *(ki bar ū fayḍ kunand)*."[75] Ṭūsī points out that the Universal Soul's movement towards perfection is made possible by the first body *(jism-i awwal)*.[76] To be more precise, the action undertaken by the *Nafs-i Kull* upon its realization that it is not perfect, is precisely a movement towards achieving perfection, and this results in the coming into being of the *Hayūlā*, described as "a simple intelligible substance *(jawhar-i baṣīt-i maᶜqūl)* that is not perceptible to the senses, and is existence *(wujūd)*, that is, the ipseity *(huwiyyat)* of things: each existent *(mawjūdāt)* possesses existence *(wujūdī)* by which it is [rendered] existent *(mawjūd)*.[77] According to this, the *Hayūlā* is essential in imparting existence to forms.

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[72] T 19, P 17; BP 17 .
[73] T 9, P 10; BP 10.
[74] T 22, P 19; BP 19.

Ṭūsī is not very clear when he asserts: "It was so because the movement towards perfection was inevitable for the *Nafs*, and it followed from this that the First Nature *(ṭabīᶜat-i awwal)* should be the starting point of that movement, and the beginning of progress *(mabdaʾi qabūl-i ḥarakat-i awwal)* should be the "first body" *(jism-i awwal)*."[78] However, this is likely not a contradiction if we consider that since the *Nafs* was destined to move toward perfection, it began that movement immediately that it acknowledged the perfection of the *ᶜAql*, thereby causing the existence of the universal or first nature *(ṭabīᶜat-i kullī, awwal)*.

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[75] T 21, P 19; BP 19. (KH)
[76] T 22, P 19.
[77] T 21, P 19, BP 19.
[78] T 22, P 19; BP 19. (I)

The Universal Soul *(Nafs-i Kull)* lays this Universal Nature *(ṭabīᶜat-i Kullī)* into the Universal Body *(jism-i kull)* or, put in another way, the Universal Body receives the energy *(taʾthir)* of the *Nafs-i Kull* through the mediation of the Universal Nature. Each material body derives its individual nature *(ṭabīᶜat-i juzwī)* from the Universal Body, and it is this individual nature that enables every material body, from the outer sphere to the core of the earth, to remain in its allotted, fixed position. Thus, although the movement *(taḥrīk)* of all bodies *(ajsām)* comes from the Will *(Amr)* of God, it is mediated by the *Nafs-i Kull.* Since the Universal Body could not receive the energy of the *Nafs-i Kull* directly, it was necessary for the *Nafs-i Kull* to produce the Universal Nature, through which the *Nafs-i Kull's* energy could be transmitted to the Universal Body. The purpose of the Universal Nature is at first to give bodies motion, and in the end to bring them to rest. Just as the agency of the *Nafs-i Kull* was required in order to give things form, similarly the agency of the Universal Nature was required to give bodies motion and passivity, in which lies their "secondary" perfection.[79] By this Ṭūsī appears to mean that bodies are thus able to fulfill the vision of the *ᶜAql-i Kull* and give form to all that it conceived pertaining to the physical world. Of course, this "manifestation" presupposes all previous existents, such as the Universal Nature, the Universal Soul and the Universal Intellect.

Having delineated the processes by which the Second Intellect, the Universal Soul and the outer sphere come into being, Ṭūsī notes that the process is replicated by each intellect and each soul to bring into existence a total of ten intellects (including the Universal Intellect), nine souls and nine spheres, culminating in the sphere of the Moon, whose reigning intellect is called the *ᶜAql-i faᶜᶜāl,* the "Active" intellect. This is the intellect that brings "the things of this world from the state of potentiality into the state of actuality" and hence is also called "the giver of forms" (*wāhibu'ṣ-ṣuwar).*[80]

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[79] T 22–23, P 19–20. Since BP pagination seems to concord with Ivanow's ms. pagination, it will henceforth be omitted in cases where B provides only a synopsis.

It is here, at the sphere of the Moon, that the force of the creative act *(fayḍ-i amr)*, which has descended through *ibdāᶜ* to each sphere, enables the emanations and rays of the stars to fall upon the elements *(arkān)* comprising the nature *(ṭabīᶜī)* of the sphere of the Moon. This stimulates the passive activity *(taḥarruk-i infiᶜālātī)* of the four elements *(ᶜanāṣir)* namely, fire, air, water and earth, resulting in a generated product *(mawlad)* capable of accepting form *(shāyastagī-y-i qabūl-i ṣūrat).* The "Giver of forms", that is, the Active Intellect, gives to each of the kingdoms of nature, namely, minerals, plants, animals and humans, a form appropriate to each. "All these, in proportion to their merits *(istiᶜdād)*, received a share of the force*(athar)* from the energy of the *Nafs-i Kull* and a light from the lights of the First *ᶜAql,* e.g. compactness in minerals, growth in plants, sensibility and free movement in animals, reason and intellect in man."[81] There is an innate hierarchy in the order of creation, so that although minerals, plants and speechless animals precede humans, the ultimate purpose of all of these having been brought into existence is to set the stage for the entrance of the human being:

> Such a hierarchy of creations *(silsilaʾi wujūd)* in the periodicity of things *(iᶜādatu'l-ashyāʾ)* has by the will *(Amr)* of God the All-High reached its top and perfection in the rank of the human being, who has the ability *(istiᶜdād)* to receive that perfection which consists of the possession of those intellectual means *(asbāb-i ᶜaqlānī)* and physical possibilities which are characteristic of him/her.[82]

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[80] T 10–11, P 11. See also Ibn Sīnā, *Shifāʾ (Ilāhiyyāt)* m 413, quoted in Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna & Averröes,* 78, n. 16, where Ibn Sīnā also calls the Active Intellect the "giver of forms" based on the notion articulated by Davidson that "(a)ll natural forms are contained in the active intellect in a unified, undifferentiated mode, and the active intellect eternally emanates them not through choice but as an eternal, constant, and necessary expression of its being."

[81] T 14, P 14. (I)

[82] T 15, P 14–15. (I; KH)

Although the will *(taqdīr)* of God, according to Ṭūsī, was "to make all that was potential in individual souls come into a state of actuality by the influence of the spheres and stars," it appears that the conflicting actions of stars "could have produced different forms in the basic categories of beings *(uṣūl-i mawālīd).*" [83] The divine purpose inherent in the divine Will *(Amr)* was to have been to bring the potential inherent in all the different souls of creatures into a state of actualization. However, in reality, due to the inherent imperfection of the various components involved in the process of creation, there are differences in degree to which the potential in souls is actualized. Ṭūsī does not elaborate upon the differences found within the forms of the various categories of creation, nor does he dwell upon why souls are different from each other, but only states that such is the case.

The Aims of Creation

At this point, several key features need to be highlighted. Firstly, we briefly sketched the details of the process through which the initial idea *(taṣawwur)* of the Universal Intellect is played out. We found that the *ᶜAql's* conception of a macrocosmic organism regulated and controlled by a soul—the *Nafs-i Kull*—finds expression in a universe ranging from the core of the earth to the extremities of the outer sphere. The Universal Soul controls the universe through its effects, the Universal Nature, which is a power of the Universal Soul, and the simple substance *(Hayūlā)*, also termed Pure Matter *(jism-i muṭlaq).* Ṭūsī does not state clearly whether Pure Matter and Universal Matter are the same; in any case, Universal Matter forms the body of the outer sphere. It is purely a substance that is capable of accepting an effect, and since it cannot directly accept the energy of the *Nafs-i Kull,* it requires the agency of an intermediary, the Universal Nature *(ṭabīᶜat-i kull),* which is created precisely for that purpose by the *Nafs-i Kull.* Thus, we may identify the two key players in the cosmic drama of unfolding the universe: the *ᶜAql-i Kull,* which conceives the thought of the universe and its controlling soul, and the *Nafs-i Kull,* which moves towards its own perfection through providing the power *(quwwat),* that is, the Universal Nature, and the material *(Hayūlā)* necessary for the actualization of the *ᶜAql's* thought.

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[83] T 15, P 15. (I)

Secondly, both the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul and, it may be argued, every existent brought into being by the actions of these two universals, are recipients of divine assistance in the form of an emanation *(fayḍ),* previously identified as a kind of power or illumination originating indiscriminately, that is, without differentiation, from the divine Will *(Amr).* The ability of each existent to benefit from this divine assistance in the form of *fayḍ* depends upon its capacity to receive this illumination, and this is determined by its place in the hierarchy of creation. Given this data, it appears from Ṭūsī's description that the entirety of creation is the recipient of some amount of divine energy or influence. This suggests that Ṭūsī views every existent as a product of the divine Will *(Amr),* even if the latter's only direct creation (through *ibdāᶜ)* is the *ᶜAql-i Kull.*

Thirdly, the cause of "the coming into existence of the origin of all things with all that every creation required" is identified as the initial thought of the *ᶜAql-i Kull.* That is, immediately upon its existentiation, the *ᶜAql-i Kull* formed the idea of a macrocosmic being *(shakhṣ-i kullī),* regulated and controlled by its soul, and this idea gave impetus to the process of creation *(ikhtirāᶜ).* However, Ṭūsī gives us an elaborate account of the processes of creation, more precisely *ikhtirāᶜ,* only to reinforce the notion that the entire purpose and intent of creation is fulfilled by the microcosmic being, that is, the human being. Ṭūsī describes human beings as "the ultimate purpose" for which minerals, plants and speechless animals were brought into existence.[84] Further on in the text, Ṭūsī elaborates:

> It is known that no being which has claims to the perfection of creation (lit. createdness) and nobility of descent in the whole world is more noble than man, because he is a synthesis *(majmuᶜ)* of the most important lights of the

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[84] T 15, P 15. (I)

> First *ᶜAql (laṭāᶜif-i anwār-i ᶜaql-i awwal)*, the main object of the forces of the *Nafs-i Kullī*, of the most wonderful order of spheres, of the division of the constellations of the Zodiac, of the movements of the stars, of influences of the elements of nature, of the variation of mineral substances, the action of different species of plants... .[85]

Ṭūsī expresses in yet another way his conception that humanity is the teleological aim of creation. He notes that to humanity applies the principle of "first comes the thought, and then the action." [86] That is, when a person requires a bench to sit on, he first prepares the wood, calls a carpenter who makes it, and then finally the person is able to sit on it. The final product and the processes involved in its manufacture reveal the original intention. Similarly, it is evident from the processes of creation and the delay in the arrival of humanity on the creaturely scene that the purpose of creation was the human being.

In support of this notion, Ṭūsī notes that when divine bounty *(fayḍ)* fell upon the Universal Intellect, it did not stop there. Rather, the coming into existence of another creation, namely the Universal Soul, was destined. Nor did the divine grace stop there, continuing instead to the spheres, and the elements, and the kingdoms of nature, and finally to humanity. There the divine grace *(fayḍ)* stopped, indicating that creation had reached its limit, its purpose. A human being, therefore, is:

> ... the synthesis *(majmūᶜ)* of all these phases *(maqāmāt)* and perfections, bearing resemblance to the whole of the world by the wonders of the constitution of his body, and the wonderful activities *(taṣānīf)* of his soul, while the purely spiritual entities remained in possession of only one perfection. This is why man, being in semblence the model of the mysteries of both forms of existence, and the combination of the activities [lit. traces] *(āthār)* of both worlds, is ennobled and enlightened by all these perfections, both spiritual and material.[87]

The human being is not simply the ultimate purpose of creation. Ṭūsī introduces the notion that when the *ᶜAql* conceived the idea of all things with the assistance *(taᵓyīd)* of the *Amr*, it conceived it in the form of an organism, the macrocosm, *shakhṣī-i kullī*, complete with a soul that would control, regulate and sustain it.[88] This thought became the cause of creation *(ikhtirāᶜ)* [89] through the agency of the *ᶜAql* and the *Nafs.* Ṭūsī adds that we know that a man has reached maturity when he is able to procreate. Similarly, when the macrocosm—whom he terms the Universal Human *(insān-i kullī)*—reached maturity, it produced the like of itself, that is, the individual human being *(insān-i juzwī).* Although the human being appears to be the microcosm contained in the macrocosm, in reality it is the macrocosm contained in the microcosm.[90] This point is the fulcrum of Ṭūsī's Ismāᶜīlī persuasion for it is on this point, we suggest, that the entire edifice of his justification of the notion of the *imām* as a human being rests.

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[85] T 34, P 27–28. (I)

[86] T 15, P 15; also T 185, P 128. (I)

[87] T 186, P 128. (I)

Since the entire macrocosm is contained in the human being, and since the human being is the ultimate purpose for which all of creation came into being, then it is clear that every substance in the macrocosm should find manifestation in the microcosm.[91] Accordingly, Ṭūsī says,

> The Highest Word, the First *ᶜAql*, the *Nafs-i Kullī*, each has an embodiment, or manifestation *(maẓhar)* in this world. The manifestation of the Highest Word is the *Imām*—upon whose mention be peace, who is beyond conception and representation *(taṣawwur wa taṣwīr)* and exalted above attributes and their negations *(waṣf wa tanzīh).* The manifestation of the First *ᶜAql* is the *ḥujjat* of the *Imām*—upon whose mention be peace, who gives form to perfection *(ṣūrat-bakhsh-i kamāl).* The manifestation of the *Nafs-i Kullī* is the Prophet. He is the giver, to souls, of the ability to receive during origination *(kawn-i [dawr-i?] mabdaᵓ)* that form *(ṣūrat)* which is the ultimate perfection *(kamāl-i ghāyatī).*[92]

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[88] T 8, P 9.

[89] In contrast to *ibdāᶜ*, which is the process by which the *Amr* created the *ᶜAql*, and which remains a mystery inaccessible to human thought as well as to the Intellect.

[90] T 34, P 27.

[91] T 186, P 129: "It is known that every substance that has its origin in the higher world has a manifestation *(maẓhar)* in this world." (I)

[92] T 119, P 82; B 197, BP 82. (I, B, KH)

Amr as *Imām*

There are several facets of this identification that we must consider. First, are there any limitations posed on the divinity of God by the manifestation of his Command in the corporeal realm in the *Imām*? That is, do the limitations attached to the corporeal realm thereby also apply to the *Imām*? This issue will also be addressed in the next section with respect to Rāmānuja's conception of *avatāra*. Ṭūsī's awareness of this issue is reflected in his statement that "in terms of the reality of realities, he [the *Imām]* has never come and will never come to these relative realms *(akwān-i iḍāfī)*."[93] For Ṭūsī, the purpose in assuming existence in the realms of relativity, that is, this world, is "so that each of these realms may acquire a perfection which it does not have."[94] However, the *Imām* "does not need any perfection outside of his essence, not only in these realms, but in the whole universe. Does he not in reality bestow existence and perfection on these relative realms and all creation?"[95] The mode and purpose of the *Imām's* manifestation in the realms of relativity is explained thus:

> But relatively, and because of 'manifesting *(taẓāhur)* in relation to the inhabitants of [these realms] and not manifesting *(ẓuhūr)* in his essence *(dhāt)*,'[96] he manifests *(taẓāhurī dārad)* himself actually *(ḥaqīqat)*[97] in each of these realms *(kawn al-akwān)*, for the sake of their existence *(wujūd)*. For if he were not to be seen *(naẓarī)* and manifested *(ẓuhūrī)* in each of these realms, and [if] each realm were not to be related to *(iḍāfī)* and connected *(ittiṣālī)* with him, then those worlds would not be in existence. Accordingly, in terms of relativity, the *abdāl*[98] are, and have been, eternally manifest. It is for this reason that he is both father and son, sometimes a child and sometimes an old man, and so forth.[99]

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[93] T 140, P 95; B 209, BP 95. (B)

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ṭūsī appears to be quoting someone here, not identified by either of the editors of the text.

[97] Ivanow translates this as "he really appears".

[98] Neither Ivanow or Badakhchani translates this term. I assume, with them, that it is simply another way of saying *Imām*. Steingass offers by way of definition: "certain persons by whom God continues the world in existence ... ." See F. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1973), 5.

[99] T 140, P 95; B 209, P 95. (B & KH)

The second aspect, which is by far the weightier in the context of Islamic thought, concerns the larger discussion with respect to God's attributes. As we have explored above, Ṭūsī succeeds in rendering our conception of God such that God *qua* God is entirely free or beyond anything we might say of him. In this respect, Ṭūsī remains a strict monotheist, refusing to attach anything from the creaturely world to God. In safeguarding God's *tawḥīd* or oneness, he divests our notion of God from *tashbīh*—the anthropomorphization of God—or *tajsīm*—the ascription of corporeal notions to God. However, it may be argued that by doing so, he has rendered the concept of God meaningless for the purposes of religiosity, which demands that there be a link between God and creation. In addition, has he not taken away the force of those Qurʾānic statements that refer to God's hands, face, wisdom and other such attributes? Such a stance was known as *taᶜṭīl*, denying God all attributes.

Ṭūsī was well aware of the need to strike a balance between the two concepts, *tashbīh* and *taᶜṭīl*, when constructing an articulation of God. In the tradition of Ismāᶜīlī thinkers prior to him, he draws upon the Qurᶜānic notion of creation through God's Command in the form of a word—"Be!"[100] The Word, *Kalima ("Kun!")*, and God's Command, *Amr*, are considered by Ismāᶜīlī thinkers to be synonymous: the *Kalima* is the *Amr*, and the *Amr* is the *Kalima*. Ṭūsī places this *Kalima–Amr* in front of God, so to speak, so as to retain the imponderable, unknowable mystery of God. Nāṣir-i Khusraw suggests that the divine Word *(Kalima)* is simply a metaphorical way for us to understand God's creatorship, but that is not the way in which it literally happened—no one can know that. All we know is that the *Kalima–Amr* brought the first existent, the *ᶜAql-i Kull* or Universal Intellect, into being through *ibdāᶜ* "bringing [of something] into existence not from a thing [that is, *ex nihilo]*."[101] This Ismāᶜīlī thinker, who lived almost two centuries before Ṭūsī, then focuses his energies on the role played by the Universal Intellect, the *ᶜAql-i Kull*, in the creation of the world. He draws upon a Neoplatonic scheme, and he too views the human plane of existence as one upon which the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul are manifested in the *imām* and the messenger-prophet *(rasūl)*, respectively. His resolution of the problem of the attributes of God is, accordingly, by locating the manifestation of all God's attributes in the Intellect as *Imām*. This notion bears comparison with the idea of the divine logos personified.

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[100] Qurʾān 36:82: "Verily, His command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it, 'Be!' *(kun)*, and it is."

[101] See n. 66 above.

We have seen that Ṭūsī concurs with Nāṣir-i Khusraw insofar as *Kalima–Amr, ibdāᶜ*, and the universal existents are concerned. Along with Nāṣir-i Khusraw, he draws upon the Neoplatonic schema along with the injection of the *Kalima–Amr* and the concept of *ibdāᶜ* in order to provide a Muslim framework within which the Neoplatonic scheme operates. In addition, he also utilizes an Aristotelian system when he introduces the notion of the ten intellects and the nine souls *(nufūs)* and spheres *(aflāk)*.[102] Ṭūsī was no doubt familiar with the Aristotelian tradition in Islamic philosophical thought, and would also have been familiar with the writings of Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī, an Ismāᶜīlī Aristotelian philosopher of eminent standing at the Fāṭimid court.

Earlier Ismāᶜīlī thinkers had identified the *ᶜAql* as the repository of all divine attributes, and had advanced the view that it found manifestation on earth in the person of the *Imām*. Ṭūsī, while retaining some of the philosophical underpinnings of this view, goes a step further.

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[102] The utilization in Islamic philosophy of elements from Aristotle and Plotinus to arrive at a view integrating the thought of both thinkers began perhaps with the attribution of paraphrases by Porphyry of parts of the *Enneads* of Plotinus to Aristotle, the best known of which in the Arab world are (i) the work commonly known as the *Theology of Aristotle (Uthūlūjiyā Arisṭāṭālis)* and (ii) Proclus's *Elements of Theology* known as *Kalam fī maḥḍ al-khayr (Liber de Causis)*. On these works, see P. Kraus, "Plotin chez les arabes," in *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Egypte* 23 (1941), 263– 295, as well as studies such as those included in Parviz Morewedge, ed., *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992). Translations of the Arabic Plotinus may be found in Plotinus, *Plotini Opera*, 3 vols., ed. P. Henry and H-R. Schwyzer (Paris and Bruxelles: Desclée de Brouwer and L'Édition Universelle, 1959). See v.2, trans. Geoffrey Lewis, *Plotiniana Arabica ad codicvm fidem anglice vertit.*

He identifies the *Amr* as the repository of all divine attributes, and uses the vocabulary of manifestation—*maẓhar*—instead of that of *ḥudūd*. In function both terms appear to be similar, in that the term *ḥudūd* was conceived of as the outer limit, the periphery that joins the higher order to the lower, and is therefore the best in its class. In Nāṣir-i Khusraw's view, the five universals necessary for creation find their corresponding counterparts in the world of humans, stacked in hierarchical order, with the *imām* at the top representing the *ᶜAql-i Kull*. The *imām* therefore represents the uppermost spiritual limit accessible to humans, and it is through him that both divine grace *(fayḍ)* and divine assistance *(taʾyīd)*, originating from the *Kalima*, are channelled to human beings. God's attributes, then, must rightly be applied to the *ᶜAql-i Kull-cum-Imām* since, for humans, he is the source of all divine treasures.

Ṭūsī departs from this earlier conceptualization. First, he points out that in reality, the *Imām* has no attachment to the relative world, a view that is consonant with the notion that God is free from any connection with the created world. However, from the point of view of relative existence, the *Imām* takes on manifestation *(taẓāhurī dārad)* in every realm *(kawn)* of existence in order that that realm may exist.[103] All realms have a relation *(iḍāfa)* and connection *(ittiṣāl)* with him, for their very existence depends on it. Ṭūsī does not elaborate in the text itself how this parallels the function of the *Amr* in the macrocosm. We can only speculate that the *Amr*, too, is related to and connected with every realm of existence through its emanation or *fayḍ* that spreads like a kind of illumination throughout existence and is manifested in traces *(āthār)* and actions *(aᶜmāl)*.[104] It has been suggested earlier that this *fayḍ* may be likened to a kind of existentiating force, and it is evident that Ṭūsī attempts to carry this notion forward into his conception of the *Imām* as necessary for every category of existence. In its aspect of pure divinity, that is, as God *qua* God, the *Amr* has no relation to the created world.

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[103] T 140, P 95; B 209, BP 95.
[104] T 7, P 9.

Similarly, knowledge *(maᶜrifah)* of the *Imām* from the standpoint of the *Imām* is impossible for creatures (to attain). However, with respect to [the *Imām's]* relation to creatures, "knowledge of him has been arranged into four categories so that no one may be deprived from recognizing him in accordance with [that creature's] existential rank."[105] Indeed, the fourth category approximates the recognition of the *Imām's* essence through the reality of his attributes, and Ṭūsī likens this category of knowledge of the *Imām* to pure light that blinds the eyes of perspicacity.[106] By virtue of his substance, the *Imām* is the bearer of the truth *(muḥiqq)*, and this truth becomes, for those who accept it, the *Imām's* emanation *(fayḍ)* and effect *(athar)* upon them.[107] Ṭūsī has already mentioned that the Amr's emanation *(fayḍ)* spreads uniformly; however, substances accept it according to their position in the scale of existence and to the extent that they are capable of accepting it.[108]

The purpose of the *Imām* is to be recognized for what he is. Although he himself is above learning or not learning, he is the source or giver of this recognition or knowledge *(maᶜrifah)*, through which the *ᶜAql* attains its perfection. The *ᶜAql* is manifested in the person of the *ḥujjah*, a human functionary in whom this knowledge *(maᶜrifah)* is attained "by the effusion of the illuminations *(az fayḍ-i anwār)* by means of [divine, i.e., the *Imām's]* assistance *(taʾyīd)*."[109] The *ḥujjah's* mission is to teach others. We find here a delineation of the position and role of the *ḥujjah* in the *daᶜwah* (lit. "mission"; "that which calls"):

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[105] T 136, P 93; B 207, BP 93. (B)
[106] T 137, P 93; B 207–208, P 93.
[107] T 141, P 96; B 210, BP 96.
[108] Literally, "in proportion to the effects/traces *(āthār)* which are manifested in its substance *(dhāt)*." T 17, P 16–17.
[109] T 143, P 97; B 211, BP 97. (B & KH)

> His position has been likened to that of the moon, because just as the body of the moon is in itself dark, and is illuminated by the sun, and in the absence of the sun becomes its lieutenant *(khalīfat-i ū bāshad)* and lights up the earth in proportion to its strength and the amount of light that it has obtained from the sun, so is the soul of the supreme *ḥujjat,* which by itself knows nothing and is nothing, lit by the effusions of the illuminations of the Imām's assistance *(lamaᶜāt-i anwār-i taʾyīd).* When the *Imām* is concealed, he acts as his vicegerent *(khalīfa).* Through the power to accept the emanations *(fayḍ)* of the lights of knowledge *(anwār-i ᶜilm),* which he has obtained in proportion to his capacity *(istiᶜdād),* the *ḥujjat* gives the people awareness of the *Imām*, may greeting be upon mention of him, and shows them the path to him. He establishes the truth of the *imāmat* of the *Imām*, and of his community, with arguments and proofs that no impartial and intelligent person can deny. He causes the souls of pupils that are prepared to accept the form of perfection *(ṣūrat-i kamāl)*—the potentially learned—to be actually learned by the forms of perfection he bestows *(bakhshad)* ... .[110]

It is because the *ḥujjah* is able to bring others than himself to perfection[111]—a perfection that must needs be viewed in terms of knowledge, as we will discuss under the section on epistemology—that the *ḥujjah* is conceived by Ṭūsī to be the manifestation of the *ᶜAql.* For the *ᶜAql* is, by virtue of the *taʾyīd* it receives from the *Amr*, perfection itself, and because it is an actualized existent, it is able to bring potential existents from a state of potentiality into actualization.

Ṭūsī advances the argument that since the ultimate purpose of creation is the human being, it is logical that the manifestation of the *Amr* should be in the form of a human being, albeit from the human perspective. In this respect, the origin *(mabdaʾ)* of creation is made manifest on the creaturely plane. Existence, however, has both a beginning and an end. If the source is manifest on the human plane, then it is evident that the end or "return" *(maᶜād)* should touch the source[112]: such is the feature of the chain of existence. In this respect, the function of the *ḥujjah* is crucial, for the *ḥujjah* touches the source, that is, the *Imām*, by virtue of his ability to receive the *Imām's* guidance in the form of the illumination that is *taʾyīd.* At the same time, by bringing other human beings into a state of perfection through his teachings, the *ḥujjah* is connected, in knowledge, to human beings in a hierarchy of varying degrees of knowledge. The implication is that ultimately every human being may strive to prepare his or her soul such that it is able to reach the status of the soul of the *ḥujjah*, and thereby receive the emanation of the *Imām's* guidance *(taʾyīd).* This guidance consists, ultimately, in knowledge of reality as it is; it is the realm of disclosure *(mubāyanat)*, and it consists in a correct understanding of *tawḥīd* or God's unity.

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[110] T 143–144, P 97–98; B 211, BP 97. (B & KH)

[111] T 186, P 129: "He is perfect in his own substance and also brings others than himself into perfection. For this reason we know that he is the manifestation of the First *ᶜAql.*" (I)

[112] T 186–187, P 129.

The notion that perfection consists in preparing the soul to rise through degrees of knowledge until it is able to perceive directly the truths of reality by divine illumination sets the stage for the entrance and role of the messenger–prophet *(rasūl).* Souls differ, says Ṭūsī, with regard to their ability to accept the light of illumination coming from the divine *Amr.* Since human beings "were unable to receive the *Amr* of God without any intermediary", it became necessary for there to be intermediary agents. The thoughts of these intermediaries are similar to transparent glass, able to take light from one side and give it out from the other. These intermediaries are the messenger–prophets.[113] The role of the messenger–prophets is to esablish two laws: the *sharīʿah*, and the *qiyāmah* and *ākhirah.* The *sharīʿah* concerns relations among human beings, while the *qiyāmah* and *ākhirah*, the resurrection and the hereafter, respectively, relate to establishing the institution of the *imāmate.*

Unlike the manifestation of the *Imām* and the *ḥujjah*, the manifestation of the *rasūl* occurs only at the time of origination of a cycle *(bar sar-i dawr-i mabdaʾ).*[114] His soul is the manifestation of the Universal Soul, the *Nafs-i Kull,* and accordingly, he is entrusted with divine inspiration *(amānat-i waḥy-i ilāhī).*[115] Ṭūsī views the prophet as someone who is able to make pure intelligibles *(maᶜqūlāt-i muṭlaq)* and divine forms of assistance *(taʾyīdāt-i maḥẓ)*—the source of which is the *Amr,* by way of the Intellect, *ᶜAql*—perceptible to the senses, the faculty of estimation and to the imagination.[116] He does this through *taʾyīd;*[117] having received divine assistance himself, he is able to use it to govern the affairs of the physical world.[118] The role of the messenger–prophet is to establish uniform rules that would govern the righteous behaviour of a community[119] and establish obedience, since, according to the Qurʾān, obedience to the prophet is obedience to God.[120]

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[113] T 115, P 79; B 194, BP 80.

[114] This is a reference to the cyclical notion of time held by the Ismāʿīlīs: the history of the world is divided into several periods *(dawr)*; each period is heralded by the appearance of a major messenger–prophet. Previous such prophets include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

Having established the *sharīᶜah,* the messenger–prophet will have set human souls on the path to perfection through the revelation *(tanzīl)* he brings. That is, he will have enabled humans to rise "from (righteous) activity to [matters of] knowledge, and from [matters of] knowledge to [matters of the] intellect *[az ᶜilmiyyāt bar ᶜaqliyyāt].*[121] The time of the coming of the *imām* is then established, this time being the beginning of the period of perfection *(dawr-i kamāl).* This takes the form of an instruction, detailed in Qurʾān 5:71[122] to the messenger–prophet to make explicit the appointment of ᶜAlī, the son-in-law and cousin of Muḥammad, the messenger–prophet as the *waṣī,* executor of the prophet's will.

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[115] T 120, P 82; B 197, BP 82.
[116] T 116, P 80; B 195; BP 80.
[117] Ibid.
[118] T 122, P 84; B 198–199, BP 85 *(az fayḍ-i mawādd-i ilāhī).*
[119] T 118, P 81; B 196, BP 81: Humanity "needs to unite *(ijtimāᶜ)* around righteousness *(ṣalāḥ),* which is called religion *(millat)* and religious law *(sharīᶜah),* for the sake of two things: mutual prevention *(tamānuᶜ)* and cooperation *(taᶜāwun).*" (B)
[120] T 119, P 81; B 196, BP 81; Qurʾān 4:80.
[121] T 117, P 80; B 195, BP 80; (B) (brackets mine).
[122] "O Prophet! Preach what has been revealed to you from your Lord. And if you do not, you will not have preached His message." Ṭūsī takes this as Qurʾānic evidence that the Prophet was to appoint ᶜAlī as his *waṣī,* executor, and says that he did so by declaring (at the oasis of Ghadīr al-Khumm): "ᶜAlī is the lord *(mawla)* of those whose lord I am. O God, love him who loves ᶜAlī, and hate him who hates ᶜAlī; help him who helps ᶜAlī, forsake him who forsakes ᶜAlī, and make truth go with him, wherever he goes." See T 155–156, P 105. ᶜAlī is considered by the Shīᶜah to be the first *Imām.*

Ṭūsī makes the statement that the *imām* dominates both the initial and the final stage of religion. He has already said that the messenger–prophet makes his appearance at the period of origination *(dawr-i mabdaʾ)*. We can only understand by this apparent contradiction that what Ṭūsī means is that even during the period of origination of religion, the *imām* is present in that it is his light that emanates upon the soul of the messenger–prophet. During the period of perfection *(dawr-i kamāl)*, the *imām* reveals himself to be such, as by now the messenger–prophet has left the human realm, having established the *sharīʿah:*

> The illuminations *(anwār)* of the instaurating Command *(amr ibdāʿī)*, through his [the *Imām's]* Command *(farmān)*, enlighten the souls of those—the select in reality—who are prepared *(mustaʿad)* through the form of the[ir] recognition *(ṣūrat-i maʿrifat)*, love *(muḥabbat)*, obedience *(ṭāʿat)* and meditations/contemplations *(ʿibādat)* for the perfection of the divine Command *(amr)*. Through the *Imām* ... all sensory, estimative and imaginative perceptions *(maḥsūsāt wa mawhūmāt wa mukhayyalāt)* will be opened to the certitude of the intelligibles and pure [divine] assistance *(ʿayn-i maʿqūlāt wa maḥḍ-i taʾyīdāt)*, in accordance with the principle: "*taʿwīl* increases my love for God."[123]

The *Imām*, therefore, builds upon the structure the messenger–prophet has already put into place. While the latter has begun the task of perfection for the human soul by establishing the *sharīʿah* and entailing obedience to him, the *Imām* continues this mission by providing *taʿwīl* or interpretation of the mysteries contained in the Qurʾān. We will discuss the notion of *taʿwīl* in a later section; suffice it here to note that the entire enterprise of human "return" and perfection is envisioned by Ṭūsī, in the tradition of Ismāʿīlī thinkers before him, as consisting of a perfection of knowledge aided by love, obedience and worship.

Crucial to this knowledge is the correct understanding of God, which brings us back to our discussion of God's attributes. Throughout his work, Ṭūsī attempts to delineate the function of the *Imām* with respect to both creation and the perfection of human beings.

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[123] T 117, P 80; B 195; BP 80. (KH) Ivanow's edition cites instead another principle: "*taʿwīl* is the taking of things back to their origin." (I)

While human beings are the ultimate purpose of creation, they are, nonetheless, only potentially perfect. In order for creation to come to its end, that is, in order for creation to attain actual perfection, key roles have to be played by the messenger–prophet *(rasūl)*, the *ḥujjah* and the *imām* as manifestations of the *Nafs, ᶜAql* and *Amr*, respectively. Having linked the *Amr* to the *Imām*, Ṭūsī says:

> You may call the *Imām*, may greetings be upon mention of him, either the *Imām*, or the Eternal Face of God *(wajh allāh)*, or the Greatest Attribute *(ṣifat-i aᶜẓam)* and the Great Name of God, or the Manifestation of the Sublime Word *(maẓhar-i kalimaʾi aᶜlā)*, or the bearer of truth of the age *(muḥiqq-i waqt)*. He without creatures [is] all, but all creatures without him [are] nothing—that is, all [that you call him] has one and the same meaning. Peace![124]

In the context of our present discussion of the problem of *tashbīh* and *taᶜṭīl* as they relate to God's nature, Ṭūsī suggests that this manifestation of *Amr* as *Imām* is an act of God's mercy, "as a man among others, so that, through him man may know God in the true sense of recognizing Him, and obey God in the true sense of obeying Him."[125] Further, he says:

> [God] has made him truly independent of both the material and the spiritual and has made both of them dependent upon him. ... God has clothed him in the garment of His own oneness and has granted him His own eternity and perpetuity. God has bestowed on him something of His own names and attributes by which he manifests himself, and the lights of that name and the traces of that attribute appears in him. His speech is the speech of God, his acts are the acts of God, his command is the command of God, his word is the word of God, his decree is the decree of God, his will is the will of God, his knowledge is the knowledge of God, his power is the power of God, his face is the face of God, his hand is the hand of God, his hearing is the hearing of God, and his sight is the sight of God. [Thus] can he say: 'We are God's beautiful names and His exalted attributes' meaning that the great name and the greatest attribute of God are specified and personified [in] me. And ... 'I knew God before the creation of the heavens and the earth.' And ... 'I am the one who raised the heavens and spread the earth. I am the first and the last, the manifest and the hidden, I have knowledge of everything.'[126]

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[124] T 145, P 98; B 212, BP 98. (B & KH)
[125] T 128, P 88; B 202, BP 88. (B)
[126] T 129, P 88–89; B 202–203, BP 88–89. (B)

Ṭūsī is well aware that such a stance stands to earn him instantaneous ejection from the community of Muslims dominated by the interpretations of Sunnī theologians. However, he stands his ground. Indeed, he argues, to be a true monotheist demands that God be kept free from all associations with any creaturely concepts or attributes that we, given our limited understanding of divine reality, may assign to him. Having already established that in reality God is above any association with creation, and that the notion of creation is itself a mystery (as connoted by the term *ibdā*ᶜ), he pinpoints the primary function of the *Imām*: to communicate this truth about monotheism to those whose souls have undergone the necessary preparation. At the same time, he seeks to hold together the veracity of religious language used in the Qurᵓān that speaks of God as having attributes by suggesting that these attributes are, indeed, very real. However, as the following will show, they are not real in the sense that God has attributes that have an independent reality from him. Rather, they are real in that they are means for humans, from the human point of view, through which he may be recognized as "exalted above the description and the describer".[127] He explains: the meaning of the claims made by the *Imāms*, viz., 'We are the most beautiful names of God and His brightest attributes' and 'God is recognized through us, obeyed through us and disobeyed [through us]' is "that God is recognized through us and worshipped through us ... Thus, whoever wishes to pronounce the real name of God, the Exalted, and to recognize the Exalted by His real name should recognize the person whose claim and summons this is and who is unique in this claim and summons."[128] That is, God, the Exalted, "has a true name through which He can be known",[129] and this true name is the *Imām*, who is recognized by each category of worshipper according to that worshipper's station.

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[127] T 160, P 108; B221, BP 108. (B)
[128] Ibid. (B)
[129] T 159, P 107; B 221, BP 107. (B)

We may understand more clearly what he means if we turn our attention to his explanation of what is perhaps the most oft-repeated declaration concerning God: *Allāhu akbar* (God is great). This explanation contains clues to his conceptualization of *tawḥīd* with respect to *tashbīh* and *taᶜṭīl.* Ṭūsī declares that the formula, *"Allāhu akbar* (God is Great)" means "He is too great to be described and too great not to be described".[130] However, the profession *(iqrār)* of the phrase "God is Great ... will appear as a belief into a certain form *(ṣūrat),* and in word as an attribute *(ṣifat).*"[131] If, from the point of the origin *(mabdaᵓ)* this profession were not to exist, then, "the result would be denial of [God's] attribute *(taᶜṭīl).*"[132] At the same time, from the point of view of the return *(maᶜād),* we must be clear that the form and attribute *(ṣūrat wa ṣifat)* captured by the phrase cannot properly be applied to God, "because the reality of the essence of God, the Exalted, can only be known by Him, the Exalted. Thus according to the second aspect the negation and denial of His attributes necessarily follows."[133] In addition, how the attributes of God are to be understood depends upon the rank of the believer. It is true, says Ṭūsī that God has a real *(ḥaqīqī)* name, by which he can be known. The common people repeat God's names such as *al-raḥmān* (the Compassionate) or *al-raḥīm* (the Merciful) without paying attention "to the question whether such names are relative *(iḍāfī)* or real *(ḥaqīqī)*".[134] The chosen *(khāṣṣ)* use these names mindful that they are relative, and in addition use the name which "the Exalted has specified for himself [both relatively and in reality]."[135] Perhaps by this Ṭūsī means the names given to God in various contexts, by which the chosen understand that, for example, Allāh, or *Wājib al-wujūd* (the necessary existent) mean that God is above attribution. The specially chosen *(akhaṣṣ-i khāṣṣ),* who recognize that God must not be attributed anything that belongs to the creaturely world, call him by

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[130] T 157, P 106; B 219, BP 106. (B)
[131] T 157, P 106; B 220, BP 106. (I)
[132] Ibid. (B)
[133] Ibid. (B)
[134] T 159, P 108; B 221, BP 108. (I)
[135] Ibid. (B)

> that name wherein the name and the named are the same, absolute, and exalted above the description and the describer, and this is that greatest specific and personalized name which says ... 'We are the most beautiful names of God and His brightest attributes' ... Thus whoever wishes to pronounce the real name of God, the Exalted, and to recognize the Exalted by His real name should recognize the person whose claim and summons this is and who is unique in this claim and summons.[136]

In all of this, it is clear that for Ṭūsī the path to avoiding the pitfall of both *tashbih* and *taᶜṭīl* is through asserting the manifestation of divine attributes through the manifestation of God's Will or *Amr*.

However, despite the human form of the *Imām*, Ṭūsī does not hold the position that God's attributes are corporealized in the *Imām*. In his discussion of the issue, he declares that to maintain that the *Imām* does not resemble humans in any way is to deny the senses and sense-perceptibles. On the other hand, to maintain that the *Imām* resembles humans in all aspects is to deny the intellect and intelligibles. That is, if God's attributes were to be corporealized in the *Imām*, then this would mean that the *Imām* could be recognized from the standpoint of his being the *Imām (az ān-jā ki Imām ast).* This, however, is impossible, "because no one's senses or intellect can attain recognition *(maᶜrifah)* of the *Imām's* essence *(dhāt)* and the reality of his attributes."[137] However, from the point of view of his being human *(hā bar izā-y-i khalq):*

> it is permitted that everyone should, according to [their] existential rank, know, and say, something about recognition of him. For God's greatest mercy to mankind is the appearance of the Imam of the time *(imām-izamān)*, as a man among others, so that, through him, man may know God in the true sense of recognizing Him, and obey God in the true sense of obeying Him.[138]

He maintains that on the one hand, the Imām, in his substance, is unknowable. Yet, on the other hand, just as the *Amr* appears in every category of existence since it is the existentiating force—the details of which remain a mystery to human knowledge—so, too, the *Imām* appears or manifests himself in order to sustain existence. It appears that the logical corollary of this is that as long as there is existence, there will have to be an aspect, mysterious though it may be, of God that "faces" creation, even though in reality God is far above the ability of creatures to see him. While on the cosmic ontological (or macrocosmic) plane this "face" is the *Amr*, on the terrestial plane of the world it is the *Imām* that provides the "face" through which God speaks to us and we come to know him: that he is, in reality, far above anything we may say of him. In the realm of relational or creaturely existence, however, he appears as a man, interprets the Qurʾān to reveal its real *(ḥaqīqī)* meaning, and through his assistance *(taʾyīd)* leads the human soul to perfection that consists in knowing the truth about God's unity *(tawḥīd).* We, therefore, now turn to a discussion of the characteristics of the human soul, and subsequent to that, to a discussion of epistemology and salvation and the key role played by the *Imām* regarding these.

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[136] T 160, P 108; B 221, BP 108. (B)
[137] T 128, P 88; B 202, BP 88. (B)
[138] Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

Insān: The Summum Bonum of Creation

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we examined the position occupied by divinity and the *Imām* in the larger framework of Ṭūsī's ontology. In this chapter, we will examine Ṭūsī's reflections on human psychology with respect to the soul's ontological status, its epistemological affliliations, and the mode of its salvation. The purpose of doing so is to determine the role played by the *Imām* in the development of the human soul.

Mabdaʾ—the Origins of the Human Soul

To reiterate the position occupied by the human being in the scale of existence, it was noted that Ṭūsī states that the First Intellect, empowered by the assistance *(taʾyīd)* of the divine Word *(Kalima)* "conceived the idea *(taṣawwur)* of all things *(ashyāʾ)*, both spiritual and material, to the utmost limits."[1] Ṭūsī remarks that the *ᶜAql-i Kull* conceives of this as an organism that has a soul which sustains, regulates and controls it. In addition, the *ᶜAql's* thought is the cause of "the coming into existence of the origin of all things, with all that every existent *(mawjūd)* required ... no sooner had the *ᶜAql* conceived that idea *(taṣawwur)* than all instantly came into existence by way of creation and initiation *(ibdāᶜ wa ikhtirāʾ)*."[2] While *ibdāᶜ* is the direct, non-mediated creation of the *ᶜAql* itself by the Highest Word *(Kalimaʾi aᶜlā)*, *ikhtirāʾ* is described as the creation of all the spiritual and material existents through the agency of the *ᶜAql* and the *Nafs*. Broadly, we may conceive of *ikhtirāʾ* as relating to the mechanics of how things come to be.

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[1] T 8, P 10.

[2] Ibid.

The goal, and apex, of the creative process, is the human being. In this regard, Ṭūsī says:

> Such a hierarchy of creations *(silsila'i wujūd)* in the periodicity of things *(iᶜādatu'l-ashyāᵓ)* has by the will *(Amr)* of God the All-High reached its top and perfection in the rank of the human being, who has the ability *(istiᶜdād)* to receive that perfection which consists of the possession of those intellectual means *(asbāb-i ᶜaqlānī)* and physical possibilities which are characteristic of [the human being].[3]

The appearance of the human being signals the ongoing culmination[4] of the creative process. That is, the initial conception *(taṣawwur)* of the *ᶜAql* finds actualization in the presence of the human being, who has all the intellectual and physical tools required for existence. Ṭūsī notes:

> It is known that no being which has claims to the perfection of creation and nobility of descent in the whole world is more noble than the human being, who is a synthesis *(majmuᶜ)* of the most important lights of the First *ᶜAql (laṭāᶜif-i anwār-i ᶜAql-i Awwal)*, the main object of the forces of the *Nafs-i Kullī*, of the most wonderful order of spheres, of the division of the constellations of the Zodiac, of the movements of the stars, of influences of the elements of nature, of the variation of mineral substances, the action of different species of plants ... .[5]

Such a reading of Ṭūsī—that the advent of the human being on the creaturely scene marks the ongoing culmination of the creative process is supported if we understand creation to be the outward process from the one to the many. However, if the arrival of the human being signals the actualization of the Universal Intellect's mandate, that does not mean thereby that the human being is in a state of bliss. It does mean, however, that as an existent, the human being is endowed, on the one hand, with all internal faculties, and on the other, all external means and agencies it requires in order to actualize its potential for perfection and bliss.

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[3] T 15, P 14–15. (I; KH)

[4] By this I mean, although Ṭūsī does not explicitly say so, that creation is an ongoing process since its source can never be exhausted. Also, Ibn Sīnā, whose philosophical system is followed closely by Ṭūsī, considers "prime matter, with its potentiality for exhibiting the forms of all natural objects in the sublunar world, [as] eternally emanated by the active intellect with the aid of the movement of the heavens." See Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna & Averröes*, 77.

[5] T 34, P 27–28. (I; KH)

In other words, the source *(mabdaʾ)* of creation—that is, the initial conception of the *ʿAql*—is made manifest on the creaturely plane and creaturely perfection is expressed in the form of the human being. Indeed, the human soul *(nafs-i insānī)* is the first perfection *(kamāl-i awwal)* of the *jism-i ṭabīʿī* (material nature); the first animating power.[6] What this means is that for the material nature that has been prepared by the influence of all the cosmic forces to receive the human soul, the human soul serves as the first perfection, that is, the first mover of parts.[7] In his reading of Aristotle, al-Fārābī defines the notion of first perfection thus:

> Now what is in its first perfection is still in potentiality, and the potential is generated for its act; and this is precisely the thing whose substance is not identical with its act.[8]

In other words, the soul directs the body, and for it, the body exists to serve it. The potential that exists within the body for the use of the soul, and which the soul animates, that is, activates, are the sensory and psychical or internal faculties. The latter comprise five: *ḥiss-i mushtarik*, the "combining" sense; *muṣawwira* (perception); *mufakkira* (thought); *wāhima* (estimation) and *ḥāfiẓa* (memory).[9] In his discussion on the soul, Ṭūsī establishes a hierarchy of command, as it were, between the senses and the command (amr), by which may be understood the teachings of the *Imām*. While sensation is one of the powers of the body, sense-perception—for which Ṭūsī uses the term *ḥāss*—is one of the powers of the soul. Accordingly, sensibles are those objects that are brought into perception. The hierarchy proceeds as follows:

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[6] T 27, P 23.

[7] Ibid. Just as the *Nafs-i Kullī* grants Universal Nature *(ṭabīʿat-i kullī)* motion and rest.

[8] Muhsin Mahdi, trans. with an introduction, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1962), 123.

[9] T 38–39, P30–31. In Alfarabi's reading of Aristotle: "The natural substance that admits of soul will thus be the material of the soul; and nature will be either a preparation, a material, or an instrument to be used by the soul in its acts. Thus there will be two types of nature in animate substances: a type that is material, and a type that is an instrument. Hence in the animate substances nature is not for its own sake but for the sake of the soul." See Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy*, 117.

> Imagination, *khayāl*, has, as its lower face, sensation *(ḥiss)*, and for its upper face, estimation *(wahm)*; estimation has, as its lower face, imagination, and as its upper face, the soul *(nafs)*; and the soul has, as its lower face, estimation, and as its upper, the intellect *(ᶜaql)*; and the intellect has, as its lower face, the soul, and as its upper face, the command *(amr)*.[10]

This chain of command flows through the intellect, which in turn controls the soul. The soul controls estimation, which informs the imagination, and directs the senses. Put in another way, it may be said that the senses, which bring sensibles into perception, are the basis, that is, form the material for the imagination, *khayāl*, which forms the material for estimation *(wahm)*. Estimation is the material for the soul, which itself forms the material for the intellect. The intellect looks toward the command, amr, for its own actualization. The obverse is equally true. As will be noted later in this chapter, if the intellect does not accept direction from the *Amr*, then the intellect becomes subservient to the soul, which in turn becomes subservient to the estimative faculty, which—and Ṭūsī misses mention of the imagination, perhaps because the imagination accompanies the soul beyond the mortal grave—becomes subservient to the senses, resulting in the descent of the human soul to hell.[11]

However, the soul itself, as something which is in its first perfection, is still in potentiality, that is, its substance is not identical with its act. The substance of the body is not identical with its act, for its acts are caused by the soul, which controls it. Similarly, the soul's substance is capable of being controlled by something else. Al-Fārābī noted in his reading of Aristotle that the cognitions belonging to human beings were not entirely caused by the soul. Humans are distinguished from other creatures in that they possess the power of speech; in addition, human cognitions "are an equipment for acts that go beyond, and are more powerful than, the acts of the soul."[12] Thus Aristotle, according to al-Fārābī, came to the conclusion that animate substances are of two types: "one rendered entirely substantial by the soul and another that the soul renders substantial as material or instrument for the intellect and the intellectual powers."[13] Humans, who fall into the latter category, are not complete unless endowed with an intellect, and this al-Fārābī terms an intellect in its first perfection, that is, still in its potential state.[14] Although Ṭūsī was closer to Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) than to al-Fārābī in his philosophic thought, the appeal to al-Fārābī is appropriate here. For, while Ibn Sīnā differed from his illustrious predecessor concerning the details of the intellect, it is al-Fārābī who laid the groundwork in his exposition of Aristotelian thought concerning the necessity of the intellect to complete and demarcate the human being from other animate beings. Ṭūsī alludes to this briefly when he says: "the wisdom of the Creator, the All-High, has destined that the powers *taṣarrufāt),* movements *(ḥarakāt)* and actions *(afᶜāl)* of humans *(insān)* should all [depend] on the intellect *(ham ᶜaqlī bāshad)* ... ."[15] He does not, in fact, explain precisely how the intellect is associated with the human soul, except to say that the "human soul perceives *(taᶜaqqul)* its own substance *(dhāt)* and perceives *(taᶜaqqul)* intelligibles *(maᶜqūlāt)* and distinctions *(mufāraqāt),* not through corporeal means. It perceives *(dar yābad)* all these through [the means] of its own substance."[16] In order to understand what Ṭūsī is trying to say, attention must be drawn to some elements of the intellectual tradition preceding him. Al-Fārābī, as mentioned earlier, had already drawn attention to the Aristotelian conception that human beings are a class of animate beings whose souls exist in order to serve the intellect and the intellectual powers.[17] Broadly, what this means is that just as the body exists for the sake of the soul, which directs it, so too, the soul exists for the sake of the intellect, which is in a position to direct it, thereby making it possible for the soul to actualize its potential. The human intellect, termed variously *ᶜaql-i insānī*[18] (human intellect), *nafs-i nāṭiqaʾi mumayyiza*[19] (rational/speaking and discriminating/discerning soul), and *ᶜaql-i hayūlānī*[20] (the intellect associated with the *hayūlā*, that is, the potential intellect), joins the foetus before the child is born, at the appropriate time. Thus, it is clear that just as the body is the carrier for the soul, the soul is the carrier for the intellect.

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[10] T 31–32, P 26. (KH)

[11] T 56, P 42; B 166.

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[12] Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy*, 122.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 122–123.
[15] T 35, P 29. (I & KH)
[16] T 25–26, P 21; BP 21. (KH)

Characteristics of Souls, Chiefly the Human Soul

Bodies, says Ṭūsī, are not endowed with the ability to act or to move. Rather, these properties are due to the force underlying their corporeality *(jismiyyāt)*. While elements such as fire display a certain innate movement, this is due to their nature *(ṭabīᶜī)*. In some cases, a body moves without consciousness or freedom, as in the vegetable kingdom, and this is due to the vegetative soul *(nafs-i nabātī)*. In the animal kingdom, the movement of bodies is due to the animal soul *(nafs-i ḥaywānī)*. It is free and is based on understanding and comprehension; however, this movement is lacking in clear discernment *(tamyīz)*. In the human sphere, the movement of bodies is free, made with understanding and comprehension, and coupled with "complete perception and clear discernment."[21] Such movement is due to the force of the human soul *(nafs-i insānī)*.

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[17] See above, n. 10. Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy*, 122. A closer parallel to Ibn Sīnā is likely possible given that Ṭūsī cites a definition similar to Ibn Sīnā's for the soul: "The human soul *(nafs-i insānī)* is not a body *(jism)*, nor one of the powers of the body, because matter *(jism)* is divisible and the soul is not divisible." BP 21. See Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna & Averröes*, 83.

[18] T 38, P 30.

[19] Ibid.

[20] T 30, P 25.

[21] T 24, P 21. (I; KH)

A subcategory of soul, the imagining soul *(nafs-i khayālī)*, directs itself on the one hand toward the senses and sense-perceptibles *(ḥiss wa maḥsūsāt)* and, on the other, toward the intellect and intelligibles *(ᶜaql wa maᶜqūlāt)*. When this soul unites with the animal soul, it is capable of acting in conjunction with any organ of the body, becomes dependent upon it for its action, and deteriorates when that organ deteriorates. However, when the *nafs-i khayālī* is associated with the *nafs-i insānī* (human soul, that is, the "carrier" of the intellect), it is able to perceive ideas without depending on the organs of the body, and does not deteriorate when the body deteriorates. Rather, it *(nafs-i khayālī*, the imagining soul) may become eternal with the eternity of the human soul, thereby becoming a partner of the soul in both its happiness and its misery. At the deterioration of the body, when the soul separates from it, a trace of the imagining soul remains in the *nafs-i insānī*. According to Ṭūsī, the human soul will receive the appropriate reward or punishment for the actions and knowledge of the imagining soul. Moreover, the imagining soul will remind the human soul of that reward or punishment.[22]

There are significant differences between the human soul and all other types of souls, that is, the vegetative and animal souls. While the latter are divisible *(mutajazzī wa munqasim)*, destructible *(fāsid)* and associated with the functions of the organs of the body, the human soul is a simple spiritual substance *(jawhar-i rūḥānī-y-i basīṭ)*, not a force or power *(quwwat)*. As such, it is capable of subsisting after its separation from the body. Its association with the body enables it to convey movement *(taḥrik)* to it, introduce change, control it, and keep it in order *(tadbīr)*. Although it is not eternal in the sense of being *azalī*, that is, both without beginning and without end, it is eternal in the sense of being *abadī*, that is, it has a beginning, but not an end; it is not destructible. Ṭūsī identifies the substance of the soul as belonging to a class by itself and relates that its substance *(jawhar)* "comes from the world of the *ᶜAql*". Further, the human being is, in this world, a spiritual being "dressed in flesh." [23]

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[22] T 25, P 21. For a synopsis of Ibn Sīnā's views on the soul, likely Ṭūsī's source, see Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna & Averröes*, 115–116.

The key distinctive feature of the human soul is that its substance comes from the world of the *ᶜAql.* He notes that both *ᶜaql* (that is, individual or particular intellect) and *nafs* (that is, individual human soul) come from the world of the *ᶜAql* (that is, Universal Intellect).[24] A more specific indication can be found in Ṭūsī's comment that the *ᶜAql* "is also called the Universal *(kull) ᶜAql,* because the individual *ᶜaqls,* intellects, which are connected with intelligent creatures, are its effects [lit., "traces"] *(āthār).*" [25]

The human soul associates its substance with the intellect, intelligibles and distinctions *(ᶜaql, maᶜqūlāt, mufāraqāt).*[26] It receives the emanation—conceived as illumination *(fayḍ)*—of the *ᶜAql,* and "becomes the place of gathering of the spiritual powers *(rūḥāniyyāt)* and the treasury of abstract ideas *(ṣuwar-i maᶜqūlāt)*".[27] It is necessary for the human soul to be intellectual and spiritual in its substance, for were it material *(jismānī),* it would not have the capacity to store the forms of knowable things or of intelligibles *(ṣiwar-i maᶜlūmāt, maᶜqūlāt).* However, it needs the body *(haykal)* in order to manifest itself, just as a craftsman needs his tools. Thus, "it requires the head and brain in order that it may think, or distinguish between various objects ... the eyes to see, the tongue to speak, hands to catch things ... ."[28]

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[23] T 25, P 21. (I)
[24] T 28, P 24.
[25] T 19, P 17. (I; KH)
[26] T 26, P 21.
[27] T 26, P 22. (I) This notion bears comparison with Ibn Sīnā's view that when the actualized soul is released from the body, it enjoys permanent conjunction with the active intellect, "becomes 'united with' the incorporeal region, 'enters into the company' of the incorporeal beings, 'becomes of the same substance' as they, and has 'the intelligible order of all existence' inscribed in it." See Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna & Averröes,* 104.
[28] T 27, P 23.

Another distinctive feature of the human soul is that it is the first mover of parts and the cause of change in the state of the body. Ṭūsī terms this, as discussed above, the first level of perfection of the material body. Further, the human soul is the source of the power or ability of that which can be given form *(quwwat-i ḥayūlānī).*[29] It is the principle that shapes the *hayūlā* of the body. His statement may be taken to mean that the soul controls the body in such a way as to use the body to express itself, just as a craftsman (the soul) uses wood (the body) to make a table (give expression to his conception). This is a rather crude analogy; however the intent is to show that the soul makes the faculties of the body operative. It is these faculties that are rendered inoperative when the physical organs disappear, not the human intellectual faculty that belongs to the soul, which continues to subsist.[30] Thus, although the human soul is not dependent on the physical body *(haykal)* for its existence, it utilizes the [bodily] faculties which are connected *(muḍāfāt)* to it in order to reveal *(namī*[31] *shavad)* itself, in the same manner that a king reveals [his power] through his army and craftsmen.[32] As will be seen in the following, Ṭūsī identifies the manner in which the soul reveals itself as having to do with morality, or good and evil.

Ṭūsī says that although human souls are at first simple *(sāda)*, they are formed gradually through knowledge, ethics, actions and so forth. These "states" *(ḥālat-hā)* become a singular form *(ṣūrat)* of the substance *(jawhar)* of each soul, and the *nafs* becomes the *hayūlā*—that which accepts form—of that [spiritual] form (that is, the soul takes on that

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[29] In his discussion on *Hayūlā*, Ṭūsī defines *hayūlā* as formation, *sākhtagī*, that is, *istiᶜdād*, able. He further mentions that it is like the material out of which something is made; the universal *hayūlā*, however, is the *jism-i muṭlaq*, absolute body, while the primal *hayūlā* is a simple abstract substance *(jawhar-i basīṭ-i maᶜqūl)* that is the ipseity *(huwiyyat)* from which existence is derived. T 20–21, P 18–19. From this we surmise that *hayūlā* is used in the sense of being the material out of which something is fashioned: "its function is that of being a receiver of all forms which may be given to it". (I)

[30] I take this interpretation from Ibn Sīnā's view of Aristotle's psychology. See Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna & Averröes,* 109.

[31] should be *namāī*; possibly an older form?

[32] T 27, P 23.

"constructed" form).[33] The soul's distinguishing function, according to Ṭūsī, is to purify this form so that it may achieve perfection:

> The eminence of the *nafs* depends upon its knowledge *(ᶜilm)* because, as we see, every soul which is capable of acquiring any knowledge becomes more eminent as compared with those souls which remain ignorant. It is known that the soul, by acquiring knowledge, becomes stronger than other souls, so that it may ultimately acquire the knowledge of the great *Ḥujjats.* Such a man, by the purity of his substance *(jawhar),* becomes the recipient of the benefit of the lights of the Highest Divine Word *(qābil-i fayḍ-i anwār-i Kalimaʾi ᶜalā),* and by Divine knowledge becomes distinguished from other souls.[34]

That is, the soul is itself the *hayūlā*—or material—for the form *(ṣūrat)* developed by its substance *(jawhar).* This form needs to be purifed through knowledge in order to be able to accept the benefits outlined in the quote above. In order for the human soul to gain eminence, it needs "nourishment from knowledge and [right] behaviour *(ᶜilm wa ᶜamal)*".[35] In this respect, Ṭūsī's conception of the soul is in keeping with al-Fārābī's notion that the soul is material for the intellect, whom it serves. Although the soul is the first perfection for matter, it itself is still a potential that can be developed. As Ṭūsī says:

> Just as man as an organism *(shakhṣ)* is contained in sperm potentially, so the final human perfection is potentially contained in it *(nafs).* Its (that is, the soul's) special function consists in systematically and gradually purifying that form *(ṣūrat)* so that its source of life *(ᶜayn-i ḥayāt)* through Him, the All-High, would come into the state of actuality.[36]

In the following chapter, we will see that these two notions that the soul itself is material—*hayūlā*—for the intellect and that it is, in the initial stages, something potential that is capable of being developed or actualized, are intimately connected to the stages of the development of the human intellect. In this respect, it may be said that the soul's development and attainment of actuality depends upon the extent to which the intellect is developed.

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[33] T 28, P 23.
[34] T 28, P 23. (I)
[35] T 28, P 24. (I)
[36] T 27–28, P 23. (I)

Maᶜād—the Teleological Purpose of Humanity

Earlier Ismāᶜīlī thinkers such as Nāṣir-i Khusraw had identified the purpose of human existence with the redemption of the Universal Soul.[37] In Nāṣir-i Khusraw's view, the whole process of temporal creation was spurred by the Universal Soul's attempt to redress its deficiency *(nuqṣān)* with respect to the Universal Intellect. For, in that formulation, the *Nafs-i Kull's* cognizance of its having been created through an intermediary, the Universal Intellect, resulted in the creation of the physical world, including the natural kingdoms and its most excellent creature, the human. In addition, through the assistance *(taʾyīd)* of the Universal Intellect, the *Nafs-i Kull* was able to place in the world of human beings the actualized, perfected souls of the Lords of the Truth *(khudawandān-i ḥaqq)*. The mandate of these perfected beings was to bring the souls of ordinary human beings into a state of actual perfection from their inherently potential state. The teleological purpose of human beings, who are endowed with a trace *(athar)* of the *ᶜAql-i Kull* by virtue of their intellect, lies in their acceptance of the spiritual teaching of the *khudawandān-i ḥaqq*, whereby their souls will be brought from a state of potential perfection into that of actual perfection. The achievement of such perfection in all of humanity will result in the *Nafs-i Kull* attaining its own perfection.[38]

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[37] Although this appears similar to Gnostic formulations in which the Soul is "tempted" by matter and needs to be rehabilitated through the agency of the Intellect, and which was expressed in Islamic philosophy in the writings of Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā al-Rāzī, Nāṣir-i Khusraw does not hold such a view. Rather, his conception of the *nuqṣān* or deficiency of the soul is more in keeping with Plotinus' avowedly anti-Gnostic stance, which Khusraw accessed most likely in the form that Plotinus' writings reached the Islamic world, *The Theology of Aristotle.*

[38] For a longer explication, see my earlier study "The Problem of Knowledge in Nāṣir-i Khusraw" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1984), chs. 4 and 5. A more recent analysis is that of Alice C. Hunsberger, "Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Doctrine of the Soul: From the Universal

For Ṭūsī, however, it appears that the aim of human existence has little to do with enabling the *Nafs-i Kull* to attain perfection. Ṭūsī assigns to the *Nafs* two thoughts: the first thought, directed at the *ᶜAql,* whom it recognizes as perfect, brings into existence Form *(ṣūrat),* from the plane of perfection *(ḥayz-i kamāl).* The second thought was focused on its own substance and it realized that it was imperfect.[39] This brought the *Hayūlā* into existence from the "field of defect *(ḥayz-i nuqṣān)*".[40] Nāṣir-i Khusraw indicated that although the *Nafs* held an exalted position, its *nuqṣān* or deficiency was not something that could be removed until humankind as a whole had been perfected. Ṭūsī, however, although he admits that the *Nafs* "occupies an inferior position [to the *ᶜAql]* and houses an imperfection in its substance",[41] says in a discussion on surrender *(taslīm)* that the *Nafs-i Kull* attains perfection upon surrendering itself to the *ᶜAql*: "the purpose of ... the emanation (fayḍ) of the Intellect to the Soul, i.e., the emanation of that perfection which it is able to accept ... is [so] that the chain of being should come to reach its apex in man ... ."[42] That is, for Ṭūsī, the Universal Soul does not have to wait until the whole of humankind has achieved perfection—as appears to be held by Nāṣir-i Khusraw—before it actualizes its potential perfection. Ṭūsī makes the statement that "potentiality *(imkān)* is the cause of the acceptance of an influence *(qabūl-i fayḍ).*"[43] If the actualization of the *Nafs'* potential lies in its ability to receive influence from that which will actualize it,[44] then the source of the *Nafs-i Kull's* perfection lies in its having accepted the influence of the *ᶜAql.* This,

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Intellect to the Physical World in Ismāᶜīlī Philosophy" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1992).

[39] Ṭūsī does not tell us what this imperfection consists of. It is likely that he expected his readers to have been exposed to thinkers such as Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who attributes this imperfection to the *Nafs* having come into existence via an intermediary, the *ᶜAql-i Kull.*

[40] T 9, P 10. (I) See also above, n. 9.

[41] T 10, P 11. (I)

[42] T 111, P 77; B 191, BP 77. (B)

[43] T 12, P 12. (I)

[44] According to the Aristotelian dictum that something may be brought into the state of actualization only through the agency of that which is actualized itself, which here is the *ᶜAql-i Kull.*

according to Ṭūsī, occurs at the point when the *Nafs*, "in the longing which it experiences for the perfection of the position of the First *ᶜAql*, and imitating the latter, which it usually does, keeps the spheres continually moving."[45] That is, it is when the *Nafs-i Kull* "was able, with the assistance *(taʾyīd)* of the Intellect, to govern *(taṣarruf)*, and organize *(tadbīr)* matter *(jism)*."[46] This then brings us full circle to the point at which Ṭūsī can assert that the *Nafs* in surrendering itself to the *ᶜAql*—by accepting infuence from the latter—is granted the perfection which it has the ability to receive. In other words, before the advent of the human on the plane of existence, the *Nafs-i Kull* has already attained its perfection; indeed, the very fact of human existence may be attributed to the *Nafs-i Kull's* striving for, and attainment of, perfection. That is, the purpose for which humanity comes into being, which is to play out the original conception *(taṣawwur)* of the *ᶜAql-i Kull*, entails as part of the process the *Nafs-i Kull's* attainment of perfection. This differs from Nāṣir-i Khusraw's conception, according to which the the *Nafs-i Kull's* attainment of perfection is conditional upon the realization of perfection by humanity. The consequence of Ṭūsī's departure from Nāṣir-i Khusraw's view is that the human being is the product of an already perfected Universal Soul, and no longer bears responsibility for that entity's perfection. Indeed, as we shall see shortly, the aim of human existence is linked to the human being's own self-understanding of the origin from which it comes and to which it must return, and to a striving toward the attainment of eternal happiness.

Ṭūsī points out that existence has both a beginning and an end. On the one hand, the arrival of the human being, replete with the intellectual and physical tools needed for survival, on the creaturely scene simply marks the ongoing summation of the creative process. On the other hand, it marks the beginning of the human being's end or "return" *(maᶜād)*.

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[45] T 13, P 13. (I)
[46] T 18, P 17; B 160, BP 17. (KH)

According to the Qur'ānic dictum, "As He brought you forth in the beginning, shall ye return" (7:28), the origin of the human being dictates what the return should be. The notion that the human being is the summation and the end toward which creation was directed is echoed by Ṭūsī in many different ways, some of which have been mentioned in the previous chapter. Attention may be drawn to Ṭūsī's view that, at first glance, the human being may appear to be the microcosm in the macrocosm. However, since this microcosm is itself the synthesis *(majmuᶜ)* of all the stages and perfections that are preparatory to human existence, it should be noted that in reality, the human being is the macrocosm who contains within himself the microcosm or the various components of which it is a synthesis. As such, the human species is the "field" in which these components are manifested:

> The Highest Word, the First *ᶜAql*, the *Nafs-i Kullī*, each has an embodiment, or manifestation *(maẓhar)* in this world. The manifestation of the Highest Word is the *Imām*—upon whose mention be peace, who is beyond conception and representation *(taṣawwur wa taṣwīr)* and exalted above attributes and their negations *(waṣf wa tanzīh)*. The manifestation of the First *ᶜAql* is the *ḥujjat* of the *Imām*—upon whose mention be peace, who gives form to perfection *(ṣūrat-bakhsh-i kamāl)*. The manifestation of the *Nafs-i Kullī* is the Prophet. He is the giver, to souls, of the ability to receive during origination *(kawn-i [dawr-i?] mabda')* that form *(ṣūrat)* which is the ultimate perfection *(kamāl-ighāyatī)*.[47]

It is evident from the above quote that Ṭūsī considers the physical appearance of the human being on the creaturely stage simply one part in an ongoing process of development. The physical manifestation of the human being, replete with all faculties and means requisite for survival, is the result of the collaborative work of the entities that are created by the divine word. However, this results in a human being who is the "first perfection", as mentioned above, of material nature *(jism-i ṭabīᶜi)*. Human beings have the potential to develop further, and it is in this context that Ṭūsī states that the *Nafs-i Kull,* who finds embodiment among human beings in the person of the Prophet (Muḥammad), is "the giver, to souls, of the ability to receive during origination *(kawn-i [dawr-i?] mabdaʾ)* that form *(ṣūrat)* which is the ultimate perfection *(kamāl-ighāyatī)*.[48]

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[47] T 119, P 82; B 197, BP 82. (I, B, KH)

Predestination: *Qadar* and *Qadā*

To understand what he means, we must turn briefly to Ṭūsī's discussion of predestination. In a discussion on *qadar* and *qadā*, both of which terms mean predestination, Ṭūsī defines *qadar* as the "first" destiny *(taqdīr-i awwal)*, as that "which came to the First *ᶜAql* by the first command *(Amr)*."[49] *Qadā* is defined by him as the "first imposition of duties *(taklīf-i awwal)* which by the first commad *(amr-i awwal)* was entered *(thabt gashta)* into the first Tablet *(Lawḥ-i awwal)*."[50] Two "angels", Sābiq and Shahīd, are appointed to deal with *qadar* and *qadā*, and their purpose is to "stir up *(bar mī angīzad)* all the creations to attain the perfection and ultimate limit *(ghāyat)* which is appropriate to each, and for which they were created." [51] To follow the example Ṭūsī furnishes, while the first destiny *(taqdīr)* is to lay the foundations of a house that is to be built, the first imposition *(taklīf)* is to ensure that all that the house should contain be complete. If we may transpose this analogy, then the *ᶜAql-i Kull's* initial conception becomes the laying of the foundation of the "house", that is, the human being. Divine revelation through prophecy becomes the imposition *(taklīf)* that will ensure that the "house" attains completion, that is, it has that which it needs in order to be completed. This completion, as we have seen above, lies in the actualization of the potential perfection laid into the human soul in the form of the partial intellect, which is a trace *(athar)* of the *ᶜAql-i Kull*.

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[48] Ibid.
[49] T 48, P 36. (I)
[50] T 48, P 36. (I, KH)
[51] T 48, P 36. (I)

However, even though the foundation and the necessary requirements for the perfection of the human being be present, the human soul may still be unable to realize its potential. As Ṭūsī points out:

> The evil which may be met with here *(īn-jā bā miyān mī āyad)* comes not from *qaḍā* or *qadar*, but is due *(az jihat)* to the veils *(ḥijāb-hā)* of the senses, imagination, and estimation with respect to all that is presented to the purview *(naẓar)* of thought *(fikrat)* [and] the faculties of perception *(baṣīrat-hā)*, and therefore, our choice *(ikhtiyār)* does not come right.[52]

Knowledge *(dānish)*, perception *(bīnash)*, opinion *(raʾy)* or judgement by analogy *(qiyās)*—all of these are not in themselves sufficient to help humans to make right choices with respect to their return.[53] For this, a human being must enter a state of apprenticeship *(mutaᶜallimī)*. Choosing not to be instructed by a teacher *(muᶜallim)*, deprives humans of knowledge concerning what is beneficial *(khayr)* and what is evil *(sharr)* for them.[54] In his discussion on paradise and hell, Ṭūsī describes the logical outcome of a person who deviates from the *Amr*, that is, from the guidance of the *Imām*:

> True hell is the reversed *(mankūs)* intellect, i.e., that which is separated from the Command. For example, the intellectual becomes spiritual, the spiritual estimative and the estimative perceptual, by [which is meant that] his intellect merges into his soul, his soul merges into his estimation and his estimation into his sense perception, until [it, the intellect, falls] into Hell, which is the worst destination.[55]

Earlier in the chapter attention was drawn to Ṭūsī's conception that the hierarchy of command between the command *(Amr)* and sensibles operates in both directions. That is, either a person can choose to focus on intelligibles *(maᶜqūlāt)* or on sensibles *(maḥsūsāt)*.

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[52] T 48, P 36–37; BP 37. (KH, I) Ivanow's manuscript text differs from Badakhchani's, and I have used the latter here. Ivanow's would read [literally] as follows: "... but is due to the veils of the senses, imagination, estimation, and thought that are before the purview *(naẓar)* of our faculties of perception *(baṣīrat)*, and for that reason by our choosing, the right course is not followed [that is, we do not choose the right course]." (KH) That is, Ivanow places thought *(fikrat)* among the veils.

[53] T 48, P 37.

[54] T 48, P 37.

[55] T 56, P 42; B 166, BP 42. (B)

Should the former be chosen, and this implies accepting and acting in accordance with the guidance of the teachings originating in the *Imām*, then "when the soul leaves the body, [if] it has been inclined in all aspects towards the acquisition of intellectual benefits, and if the shadow of the senses has not become a veil to the light of its free will, it will remain eternally in a state of pleasure without pain, happiness without sorrow and life without death; everything will be as it should be for it."[56] Should, however, the person be captivated by sensuous pleasures only, then eternal despair will overtake the soul from the thought that the pleasures of the bodily life can never be experienced again after death. It is in this respect that it may be said that the intellect becomes subservient to, or "perceives", that is, turns toward the soul, which becomes subservient to the estimative faculty, and so to the senses. Such persons have not succeeded in reaching the ultimate limit *(ghāyat)* for which they were created. The consequence of this is that they are bound into the world of sense-perception and experience a terrible deprivation of imagined sensory pleasures when loosened from it at the separation of the soul from the body.[57] Hence they remain in a state of need rather than attaining a state of the self-sufficiency that connotes not only happiness but also perfection.

From the above discussions, it is clear that for Ṭūsī, the soul's potential for actualization is dependent upon the development of its form. There are two aspects to this development that go hand in hand: first, the development of the human intellect, which comprises four stages, and which will be delineated in the chapter following, on epistemology; and second, the acceptance of the form given by the Prophet in the form of the law, or *sharīᶜah*. This form may be developed further through apprenticeship to the *Ḥujjah*, whose knowledge comes from the *Imām*. The details pertaining to this apprenticeship will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Central to the development of the soul is the notion that teaching or instruction is required in order that the human being may distinguish between good and evil.

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[56] T 54–55, P 41; B 165, BP 41. (B) See in this connection Ibn Sīnā's depiction, in Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, & Averrōes*, 109ff.
[57] T 55, P 41; B 165–166, BP 41.

Good and Evil

Ṭūsī conceives the whole order of creation in terms of good and evil. Because the *ᶜAql-i Kull* is the first to emerge out of the divine command *(Amr)*, it is "by its existence the most perfect, and by its position the highest, (and) it possesses absolute perfection *(kamāl-i muṭlaq)*. Therefore, where it is, there is pure good *(khayr-i maḥḍ)*."[58] Similarly, the *Nafs-i Kull*, by virtue of its position as having been created through the intermediary of the *ᶜAql-i Kull*, is a mixture of perfection and deficiency, that is, of good and evil. Finally, the *Jism-i Kull*, or Universal Matter, is in a state of absolute deficiency, and therefore, "where it is, there is pure evil *(sharr-i maḥḍ)*."[59]

While evil is generally conceived of in terms of morality, here Ṭūsī's understanding of evil is equated with the state of deficiency *(nuqṣān)*. As we shall see presently, he does not exclude the moral dimension of evil from his discussion. However, he would like to clarify the ontological underpinnings of evil before he enters upon any discussion of the various dimensions of evil, including morality. We have previously seen that the state of deficiency indicates the distance between that existent and the will of God. The farther that an existent is from the will of God, the greater its deficiency. The *Nafs-i Kull* is deficient because it came into being only after the *ᶜAql* came into being, and as a result, it was not the direct recipient of the *Amr's* emanation.

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[58] T 46, P 35. (I)
[59] T 46, P 35. (I)

Closely tied to the concept of deficiency is that of possibility—*imkān*. The perfection that is actual for the *ᶜAql* by virtue of its having been directly created through *ibdāᶜ* by the *Amr* is only a potential for the *Nafs*. Whatever perfection it had the potential to receive was given to it by the *ᶜAql's* emanation *(fayḍ)* upon it.[60] However, the position of the *Nafs* even when it is granted perfection is still inferior to that of the *ᶜAql*, since the latter's surrender *(taslīm)* to the *Amr* is "purer and more sincere" than that of any other created being.[61] Therefore, the place of the universal existents in the order of creation determines both the level of their deficiency and the perfection that may potentially be attained by each of them. In this regard, if their level of deficiency is linked to the level of their potential perfection, then we may say that this deficiency determines the extent to which that universal substance is capable of acting and of receiving influence. Matter is incapable of acting, only of being acted upon: hence, where it is, there is absolute evil. The *Nafs-i Kull*, which is a mixture of both deficiency and perfection, that is, both good and evil, is capable both of acting and of being acted upon, and we have seen previously that when it submits to and receives the *ᶜAql-i Kull's* emanation *(fayḍ)*, its potential for perfection is actualized.

In this connection, pure goodness is seen as the characteristic that renders an entity or existent independent, that is, not in need of anything, and generally, the *ᶜAql-i Kull* is regarded as perfect primarily because it does not stand in need of anything; it is self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency and the ability to act are also connected, for not only is matter not self-sufficient, it also cannot act by itself. Thus, we may understand Ṭūsī's conception of cosmic evil as being that where there is absence of good, that is, absence of self-sufficiency and the power to act.

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[60] T 111, P 77; B 191, BP 77.
[61] T 110, P 76.

Where does the human being appear in Ṭūsī's schema of good and evil? It would appear that since human beings are the last to come into being, their place in the order of creation would indicate that they, too, must be totally evil. However, we must clarify that Ṭūsī's principle of the gradation of goodness according to order of creation applies to universals *(kullī)* and not to individual *(juzwī)* forms of existence. The human being is a composite of matter, soul and intellect. As such, the potential toward perfection contained within a human being is determined by two factors: first, the *Nafs-i Kull's* action *(fiᶜl)* consists of communicating the forms *(ṣuwar)* of things it received from the intellects *(ᶜaql-hā)* [62] to matter, and the resulting chain of existence comes to an end in the human being. Human beings thus originate in both the *ᶜAql* and the *Nafs*;[63] for their souls, which originate in the Universal Soul, bear traces *(āthār)*—in the form of their individualized intellects—of the Universal Intellect, the *ᶜAql*.[64] Therefore, although human beings are the last to appear among creatures, they have the potential for perfection. It is on this basis that Ṭūsī asserts: "Thus the surrender which formed the perfection of the *ᶜAql* has become his [that is, the human being's] exclusive property."[65] Ṭūsī images this actualized potential as a state in which:

> Such a man, by the purity of his substance *(jawhar)*, becomes the recipient of the benefit of the lights of the Highest Divine Word *(qābil-i fayḍ-i anwār-i Kalima'i ᶜalā)*, and by Divine knowledge becomes distinguished from other souls. They bring salvation to the souls of those creations who sink in the

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[62] It is possible here to see a collapsing of the Active Intellect of Ibn Sīnā—implied in Aristotle's *De Anima*—and the second hypostasis of Plotinus. Some of the functions of this active intellect are detailed in Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, & Averröes*, 76. Had Ṭūsī been following the purely Plotinian system, the term *ᶜaql-hā* would have been simply *ᶜAql*, which, in fact, is how Ivanow translates it.

[63] T 28, P 24: "The human soul, however, being the product of the force of the *ᶜAql*—since both the *ᶜaql* (individual intellect) and the *nafs* (individual soul) come from the world of the *ᶜAql*—derive their nourishment from knowledge and acts *(ᶜilm wa ᶜamal)*."

[64] T 19, P 17: "[The First *ᶜAql]* is also called the Universal Intellect because individual intellects *(ᶜuqūl)*, which are connected with intelligent beings, are its traces *(āthār)*."

[65] T 111, P 77; B 191, BP 77. (I)

> sea of the *Hayūlā*, and are tied by the ties of nature *(ṭabīᶜat)*, by their teaching and learning releasing them from the darkness of error.[66]

Thus, Ṭūsī envisions actualized perfection to be primarily epistemological in nature: it allows the direct reception of the radiance of the divine Word *(Kalima)*. This is understood by him as distinguishing that person with knowledge of the divine. Simultaneously, it enables that person to aid others in attaining salvation, through teaching. However, in order to reach such a state of perfection, the human soul must derive its nourishment "from knowledge and right behaviour *(ᶜilm wa ᶜamal)*."[67] This indicates the importance of ethics for Ṭūsī in his framework, along with his emphasis on intellectual achievement.

Drawing upon the cosmic framework of three possible states of existence, viz., good, mixed and evil, Ṭūsī goes on to suggest that accordingly, there are three component worlds in this realm. Corresponding to the *ᶜAql-i Kull* is the world of intelligibilia *(ᶜālam-i ᶜaqlānī)*, which is pure good. Then there is the spiritual world, or the world of life *(ᶜālam-i nafsānī)*, where good and evil are found mixed together. Finally, there is the world of materiality or corporeality *(ᶜālam-ijismānī)*, which is pure evil.

Each of these worlds finds its correspondence in people. The people of the world of intelligibilia are the "people of unity" *(ahl-i waḥdat)*; those of the world of life are the "people of gradation" *(ahl-i tarattub)*; and those of the corporeal world are the "people of opposition" *(ahl-i taḍādd)*. The first are those who believe in the *Qiyāmah* (Resurrection); the second are those who profess religion; and the third are those who are opposed to religion.[68]

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[66] T 28, P 23. (I)

[67] T 28, P 24. (I)

[68] T 46–47, P 35–36. By the first category he means those who have given their allegiance to the Imām, that is, the Ismāᶜīlīs; by the second, he means Muslims in general, and by the third, those who oppose religious affiliation. See T 115–117, P 80–81 for the relationship between the *sharīᶜah* (prophetic law) and the *Qiyāmah*, and the view that the prophet rules

In another classification, Ṭūsī suggests that there are really four categories of existence, by which he appears to mean final existence: individual or partial *(wujūd-i juzwī)*; individual inclined toward the generic *(wujūd-i juzwī ki rūy ba kullī dārad)*; generic *(wujūd-i kullī)*; and that which is beyond either the individual or the generic *(wujūd-i bālā-y-i juzwī wa kullī)*. Given the discussions above, we may relate partial existence to the world of corporeality and the people of opposition; the second category to the world of life or soul and the people of gradation; and the generic category to the world of intelligibles and the people of unity. Ṭūsī confirms this with his statement that those who attain generic existence "belong to the world of absolute self-evidence *(mubāyanat-imuṭlaq)* [and] are free from mingling with the false *(mubṭil)* in any way."[69] Indeed, he declares that one who has a partial existence will become dissociated from the origin it was thought to have but did not in fact have, and therefore, it will have no "return."

The implication of the above is that the goal of each individual person, that is, the "return" of each individual is already predestined by the origin of that person. Ṭūsī accounts for differences, that is, gradation *(tarattub)* and qualitative difference *(tafāḍul)* in the various types of intellects found in humans by pointing out that these are, in any case, at first a

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the first period—of *sharīᶜah*—while the *Imām* rules the second period. Daftary, drawing on several Nizārī sources, explains these categories as follows: "There are the opponents of the *imām (ahl al-taḍādd)*, the non-Nizārī bulk of mankind, including both Muslims and non-Muslims. ... Secondly, there are the ordinary followers of the *imām*, the so-called people of gradation *(ahl al-tarattub)*, representing the elite of mankind *(khāṣṣ)*. These ordinary Nizārīs have gone beyond the *Sharīᶜa* and the *ẓāhir* to the *bāṭin*, the inner meaning of religion. Having found only partial truth, however, they still see both the *ẓāhir* and the*bāṭin*. As a result, they still see both themselves and the *imām*, and as such, they are not fully saved in the *qiyāma*. Finally, there are the people of union *(ahl al-waḥda)*, the super-elite *(akhaṣṣ-i khāṣṣ)* amongst the Nizārīs, who see only the *imām* in his true nature. Discarding all appearances, the people of union have found full *(kullī)* as opposed to partial *(juzʾī)* truth. They have arrived in the realm of *ḥaqīqa*, the *bāṭin* behind the *bāṭin*, and see only the *imām* in his true spiritual reality. It is the people of union who are truly resurrected and existent in eternal Paradise; they have obtained full salvation in the *qiyāma*." See Daftary, *The Ismāᶜīlīs*, 395; also n. 149 in which he mentions his sources.

[69] T 84, P 59; B 173; BP 59. (I). Or, "devoid of any kind of falsifying commonality *(ishtirāk-i mubṭil)*." (B)

potential within the human soul.[70] Ṭūsī states clearly here that by this he means the stages of the development of the human intellect, which will be explored further in the chapter on epistemology. However, the development of the intellect, though essential, is not in itself sufficient, for the human being must also develop the potential for goodness. Thus he articulated the view that the ultimate goal of the individual endowed with a partial intellect—which is the case with humans—is "to progress from the partial intelligence of ordinary life to the prophetic intelligence of the religious law, and from [this] to the resurrectional intelligence of the Hereafter."[71] Further, he says:

> The origin is also relative self-recognition *(khwīshtan-shināsī-y-i iḍāfī)*, i.e., knowing why one has been created; and the return *(maᶜād)* is true self-recognition *(khwīshtan-shināsī-y-i ḥaqīqī)*, i.e., doing that for which one has been created.[72]

All human beings, by virtue of the effect *(athar)* of the *ᶜAql-i Kull* in their souls *(nafs-i insānī)*, have the potential to develop. Ṭūsī states:

> There are souls which so vigorously follow the path towards perfection that, when their potentialities are actualized, they make the best creations. And there are also souls who lean towards opposition *(taḍādd)* and may so badly fall into the following of deficiency *(nuqṣān)* that, when their potentialities are actualized, they become the worst creations. And there are souls keeping to the middle course, sometimes following the road to good, and sometimes to evil.[73]

Thus, differences among human souls arise in the manner in which this potential is allowed to develop. The extent to which humans strive toward perfection or opposition will determine the category of existence they will ultimately attain. That is, importance is to be given to the mode of the actualization of human potential in determining the return of that human soul. Should the soul actualize the evil that is potential within it, then it will suffer the fate of those who have partial existence. On the other hand, should the human soul strive toward goodness and actualize the potential for goodness within it, then that soul may attain existence that is inclined to generic existence, or attain generic existence itself. In following the path toward perfection, the human being who possesses practical intellect *(ᶜaql-i maᶜīshatī-yi dunyawī)*—a property that is common to most normal human beings—is assisted "by the prophetic intelligence of the religious law *(ᶜaql-i sharᶜī-y-i nabawī)*."[74] This gives rise to the form attained in the first realm *(kawn-i awwal)*, which "is the realm of the origin *(mabdaʾ)* in which, by virtue of the creation of the physical world, the general relative testimony *(shahādat-i ᶜāmm-i iẓāfī)* is realized, and the signs of His Exalted action which are the effect of His Exalted power, are a guide to Him, the Exalted."[75] In other words, it is through prophecy that "the general well-being of creation is maintained."[76] Thence humans are assisted by "the resurrectional intelligence of the Hereafter *(ᶜaql-i qiyāmatī-yi ākhiratī)*,"[77] through which they may enter the second realm *(kawn-i duwwum)*. This realm "is the intermediary realm in which, by virtue of the creation of the realm of the divine Command, the real specific testimony is realized and the signs of His Exalted speech which are effect of His Exalted knowledge, are a guide to Him, the Exalted."[78] Through the manifestation of the *ᶜAql* (that is, the *ḥujjat)*, the realm of dissemblance *(kawn-i mushābahat)* unites with the realm of disclosure *(kawn-i mubāyanat)*.[79] Humans gain access to knowledge of good and evil, and this knowledge is essential in enabling them to choose a path promoting the development both of intelligence and ethical virtues. By following the twin paths of rightly-guided knowledge *(ᶜilm)* and behaviour *(ᶜamal)*, the soul then becomes prime material for constructing a form through which it can both actualize its potential and attain its salvation in the form of returning to its origin. This third realm is spoken of as where there is "unalloyed unity." The fate of the soul according to the various stages of its development is imaged graphically in the following account of paradise and hell.

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[70] T 30, P 25.
[71] T 85, P 59; B 174, BP 59. (B)
[72] T 85–86, P 59–60; B 174, BP 59–60. (B)
[73] T 49–50, P 37–38. (B)

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[74] T 82, P 58; B 172, BP 58. (B)
[75] T 92–3, P 64; B 178, BP 64. (B)
[76] T 82, P 58; B 172, BP 58. (B)
[77] Ibid.
[78] T 93, P 64; B 178, BP 64. (B)
[79] T 93, P 64, B 178–179, BP 64.

Paradise and Hell

In a discussion on paradise and hell, Ṭūsī identifies the real paradise as the absolute free will *(ikhtīyār-i maḥẓ),* "where everything is as it should be", "a realm of eternal reward, everlasting perfection and limitless existence", the meaning of all of which "is to attain God in all aspects".[80] The real hell, on the other hand, is absolute predestination or compulsion *(jabr-i maḥẓ),* and is where "everything is as it should not be", a realm of "eternal punishment, everlasting disappointment and limitless non-existence", meaning that it is "falling from God in all aspects."[81]

Having connected paradise and hell to one's ethical behaviour in accordance with the Qurʾānic vs. 53:31,[82] Ṭūsī goes on to state that the real paradise and hell are not according to the physical descriptions of them given by the prophets. For, if paradise and hell "were made of bodily matter and composed of material things", there would have been no difference "between this world and the Hereafter."[83] Rather, prophetic descriptions are "given in accordance with intellectual capacity, and they were said in order to encourage desire and induce fear, so that ordinary people might incline to obedience and abstain from disobedience."[84]

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[80] T 54, P 41; B 165, BP 41. (B)

[81] T 52, P 39; B 164, BP 39. (B)

[82] "[He] punishes those who do evil according to their deeds and rewards those who do good with what is best." Cited on B 164, BP 39.

[83] T 52, P 39; B 164, BP 39. (B)

[84] Ibid.

Indeed, Ṭūsī identifies the everyday phenomenal world—the realm of dissimulation *(kawn-i mushābahat)*—in which the true are mixed with the false, the good with the wicked, the truthful with the liars, as absolute hell. Absolute paradise, on the other hand, is the realm of disclosure *(kawn-i mubāyanat)*, in which the truth is separated from the false, the godly from the ungodly, the good from the wicked, the good from the evil. It is, Ṭūsī implies, in order to escape the realm of hell that even those who have no need of the prophetic law and its rites and rituals, conscientiously regard these as their absolute duty. This is so that religion may be firmly established. However, the "expressions of Revelation belong to the *kawn-i mushābahat* and are characterized by multiplicity and are by nature Hell."[85] Thus, it is essential that the symbolic interpretation *(taʾwīl)* of Revelation be sought by those who wish to advance to the realm of disclosure *(kawn-i mubāyanat)*, which is paradise: "And whoever arrives at the *kawn-i mubāyanat* from the *kawn-i mushābahat* and seeks and attains *taʾwīl* in the expression of the Revelation *(ʿibārāt-i tanzīlī)* is a denizen of Paradise."[86] Thus, for Ṭūsī there is both an epistemological and an ethical dimension to his conception of paradise and hell.

Both paradise and hell are conceptions *(taṣawwur)* in the imagination *(khayāl)*. Thoughts are connected to the senses, to the soul, or to the intellect. If thoughts remain in any one of these spheres, then the result, correspondingly, will be different. So, for example, a person who remains in the sphere of the senses will become imprisoned by them, and this will be a veritable hell. Those persons who remain in the sphere of the soul will gain a glimpse of paradise, while those who remain in the sphere of the intellect will find real paradise in their souls, and their souls will be in paradise.[87] Indeed, true paradise is "the straight (lit.

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[85] T 54, P 40; B 165, BP 40. (B)
[86] T 54, P 40–41; B 165, BP 41.
[87] T 55, P 42; B 166, BP 41–42.

established, upright, *mustaqīm)* intellect, i.e. united with the Command."[88] Since the human soul is eternal *(abadī)*,[89] its fate when it separates from the body will be decided according to its level of actualization while still connected to the body. Hence, the path[90] followed during its connection with the body will determine the extent of its pleasure or pain in the disembodied state, and that pleasure or pain will be eternal.[91] This eternal state comprises the "return" *(maᶜād)* of human beings.

The notion of union or conjunction with the Command *(Amr)* is significant in two aspects. The first concerns the human intellect, while the second concerns the Command. With respect to the first, to a philosophically attuned audience, this would connote the notion of a human intellect that had been actualized from the state of potentiality; that is, was able to attain conjunction either with the Active Intellect (following Aristotelian legacies) or the Universal Intellect (following the Neoplatonic scheme). However, the Active Intellect, in the Aristotelian-inspired scheme, was the tenth intellect in the ontological hierarchy, and the intellect responsible for giving form to the sublunar world. The Universal Intellect, in the Neoplatonic scheme, was the first of the hypostases to emanate from the *ontos.* Ṭūsī, here at least, does not subscribe to either of these notions. Rather, he views the human intellect, in its perfect state, to unite with or conjoin with the Command, which is viewed by Muslim philosophers as ontologically the source of either the incorporeal intelligences, of which the active intellect is the last—following Aristotle, or the universal intellect in Neoplatonic terms. That is, the Command is associated with the First Cause—in al-Fārābī's terms, who stands above the movers, or with the *ontos*, from which the Neoplatonic hypostases emanate. Thus, to a philosophically trained mind, Ṭūsī's view of supreme happiness as found in absolute paradise would indicate that the human intellect must at least have reached a state of actualization. Ṭūsī says here that such a person "becomes content with the recognition of pure intellect, returning to his God with happiness"[92] and also that absolute paradise and hell are of such magnitude that "no one's estimation and thinking can obtain a description of them."[93]

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[88] T 55–56, P 42; B 166, BP 42. (B) This would assure a state of supreme eudamonia. See also Ibn Sīnā's view in Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, & Averröes*, 109–110. In this state, according to Ibn Sīnā, the soul "can conjoin with the active intellect in a perfect conjunction. It then experiences intellectual splendor and eternal pleasure." (*Shifāʾ:* De Anima 248) The difference is that for Ṭūsī conjunction takes place with the Command.

[89] T 25, P 21.

[90] "The thought, word and deed of the follower of truth *(muḥiqq)* is truth, veracity and good; the thought, word and deed of the follower of falsehood *(mubṭil)* is falsehood, lying and evil. ... The recompense for the follower of truth is reward and the recompense for the follower of falsehood is punishment." T 52, P 39; B 164, BP 39. (B)

[91] T 25–26, P 21.

Ṭūsī has already pointed out that the Command finds manifestation in the phenomenal world in the person of the *Imām*. Thus, it is clear that when Ṭūsī speaks about the necessity to seek and attain the *taʾwīl* or symbolic interpretation of the *tanzīl*, he means that one who wishes to enter paradise must become a follower of the truth *(mubṭil)*, that is, one who accepts the teaching of the *ḥujjats* since it originates with the *Imām*, or the Command in the *kawn-i mushābahat*. That is, striving to become one with the Command is not simply a question of training in philosophy, but also entails participation in a community that both receives instruction from, and gives allegiance and obedience to, the *Imām*. However, as will be seen in the following, Ṭūsī acknowledges that there may be intractable opposition to such a view.

Tarattub and *Taḍādd*

Ṭūsī continues in the context of his discussion on good and evil to clarify why some souls follow the path toward perfection while others lean toward opposition *(taḍādd)*. He very subtly moves the discussion from one of ontological evil—in which matter is associated with evil—to one of moral evil. He does this by changing his terminology. Instead of talking about *sharr*, evil, in human beings, he begins to frame the notion of those who fall into deficiency—*nuqṣān*, which, as we have seen, is also associated with the ontological evil that characterizes matter—as being rooted in *jahl,* ignorance. Specifically, he connects the opposition *(taḍādd)* found in individuals to the traces *(āthār)* in them of the First Ignorance *(Jahl-i Awwal).*[94] He sets this up in contrast to the individual or particular intellect *(ᶜaql-i juzwī)* that is a trace of the Universal or First Intellect *(ᶜAql-i Awwal).* A soul that allows itself to be controlled by its intellect, then, does not lean toward opposition *(taḍādd),* but toward orderliness *(tarattub).*

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[92] T 55–56, P 42; B 166, BP 42. (B)
[93] T 52, P 39; B 164, BP 39. (B)

There is an ambiguity apparent in Ṭūsī's work which is difficult to resolve. On the one hand, Ṭūsī seems to subscribe to the notion that all humans have the potential to develop toward perfection by exercising the option of allowing their souls to be controlled by the trace of the Universal Intellect inherent in them, the particular intellect. On the other hand, he indicates that some souls may have a trace in them of this first "ignorance", which is an effect of the First Ignorance, "counterpart of the First *ᶜAql.*"[95] It is only when the soul is allowed to develop that it will become clear which soul will tend toward good and which one toward evil. This statement implies a predestinarian view. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that the whole purpose of the union *(ittiṣāl)*

> of the soul with the body is that the form of good *(ṣūrat-i khayr)* which is potential in the good soul, and form of evil *(ṣūrat-i sharr)* which is potential in the wicked soul, cannot be distinguished in them without such union. (Without this) the advance of the good soul from the state of possibility to the state of actuality (cannot be attained), just as the fall of the wicked soul from the limit *(ḥadd)* of the potential evil to the pit of frustration *(imtināᶜ)* [cannot be attained]. This is because both these kinds of the souls, in so far as they are souls *(min ḥayth al-nafs)*, in respect to their mental constitution,

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[94] T 49, P 37.
[95] T 49, P 37.

> resemble each other. They cannot be distinguished until they come into actual being *(wujūd-i ᶜaynī).*[96]

Just as souls have tendencies towards orderliness or opposition, so too do material configurations *(mawādd-i ajsām)* have tendencies to rise up or to fall down or to retain a middle course. In keeping with the principle that all things return to their source, substances receive the souls that are inclined accordingly, and become controlled by these souls. Accordingly, good substances receive good souls, median substances receive souls that sometimes incline toward good and sometimes towards bad, and, by implication, substances that have a tendency toward evil receive souls that incline toward opposition.[97] Ṭūsī does not elaborate upon what he means here. This may be a reference to the notion found in al-Fārābī's reading of Aristotle that the elements combine to form the material that is capable of accepting a soul. The varying influence of the heavenly spheres in affecting this combination accounts for the differences found in such prepared materials. Hence, some materials have a preponderance of the element of fire, and are thus classified as fiery, while others have a preponderance, say, of the element of earth, and are thus classified as earthy. When a prepared material accepts a soul, that soul controls the material. Regarding those material bodies that are prepared by nature as a material or instrument for the soul, al-Fārābī says:

> That by which [this kind of natural body] is rendered substantial, after having been rendered substantial by nature, will be the soul. The natural substance that admits of soul will thus be the material of the soul; and nature will be either a preparation, a material, or an instrument to be used by the soul in its acts. Thus there will be two types of nature in animate substances: a type that is a material, and a type that is an instrument. Hence in the animate substances nature is not for its own sake but for the sake of the soul.[98]

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[96] T 32–33, P 26. (largely I)
[97] T 50, P 38.
[98] Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy*, 117.

Al-Fārābī goes on to connect the material nature controlled by the soul with the notion of health and disease. Although "the soul itself is the cause (as the end and, with the help it receives from nature, as the agent) of having this specific material present in the soul," "health and disease inhere in the animate substance because of their nature and natural powers, which pertain specifically to what is animate."[99] That is, the soul is both the cause and the agent of the type of material that it controls with respect to disease or health. Ṭūsī may have been drawing upon this notion when he proposes that bodies that have certain innate tendencies come to be controlled by certain types of souls. He takes the notion found in al-Fārābī that links health and disease to the controlling soul and develops it to include the idea that souls that are inclined toward good will accordingly choose material substances that may be utilized as instruments employed by the soul in its good actions. Similarly, souls that are inclined both toward evil and toward good will choose to control material substances that will be utilized both for the performance of good actions and evil actions. Although Ṭūsī does not specify so here, it is implied that souls that are evil will choose those material substances that will be utilized to perform evil acts.

Ṭūsī's conceptions of matter and souls in this context raises the question whether souls are predestined in the first place. As has been noted above, this is an issue that cannot be resolved without difficulty as there appears to be some ambiguity in the text regarding Ṭūsī's standpoint. To do him credit, the fact that he does not mention that evil souls will conjoin with ill-disposed material substances would appear to indicate that he views souls as being primarily of two types: those that are inclined toward good, and those that are inclined toward evil as a result of the effect of the First Ignorance. Association with the body then serves to enable the soul to play out its choices more fully, as indeed he notes in his enumeration of the advantages of the union of the soul with the body: that such a union serves to distinguish good souls from those which are evil.

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[99] Ibid., 119.

Ṭūsī simply states that the good *(nīkān)* are those who come from the authentic (or real, true) substance *(gawhar-i ḥaqq)*, and the bad *(badān)* come from the false substance *(gawhar-i bāṭil)*.[100] As such, then, he is equating the First Ignorance *(jahl-i awwal)* with the false substance *(gawhar-i bāṭil)*, and calls it the counterpart of the First *ᶜAql*. He connects the notion of ignorance—*jahl*—with that of opposition *(taḍādd)* to the religion of truth *(dīn-i ḥaqq)*. The association of *ḥaqq* (truth) with the First *ᶜAql* clearly indicates that the religion of truth *(dīn-i ḥaqq)* is from the *ᶜAql*. We know that the *ᶜAql* is manifested as the *ḥujjah* of the *Imām*, responsible for the teaching *(taᶜlīm)* that is aimed at perfecting the soul. Therefore, Ṭūsī may have meant that the souls who lean toward opposition, identified as having originated from the First Ignorance that is false *(bāṭil)* in its substance, are either those who oppose religion altogether, or oppose the *daᶜwah* specifically. He does not specify what he means by the First Ignorance, and we can only suggest that he means Iblīs, the primordial counterpart of Adam, who refused to follow the command of God. Iblīs was consequently cursed by God. Iblīs was the teacher *(muᶜallim)* of the angels before the advent of Adam, whose knowledge he did not equal. Although truth and falsehood *(ḥaqq wa bāṭil)* represented by Adam and Iblīs, respectively, appeared alike in the beginning, in the end, in paradise, only truth prevails while falsehood *(bāṭil)* has no existence there.[101] It may also be noted in passing that Ṭūsī's use of the term *"jahl"* suggests the pre-Islamic period classified by Muslim historians as the "Jāhilīyah", that is, the period before the Arabs were favoured with a revelation from God. In other words, it is a period in which there was ignorance about God and the prophetic law *(sharīᶜah)*, which is the basis for the belief in resurrection or the *Qiyāmah.* As such, then, Ṭūsī may also be addressing, in a veiled manner, Zoroastrian notions of two deities of opposing inclination, and suggesting that evil does not have the substantive basis required to merit it being raised to the level of a deity. His approach may possibly have been an attempt to create a bridging link between Zoroastrian views and Islam, undertaken with the strategy of casting an interpretation on good and evil that would be consonant with the Islamic view on monotheism.

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[100] T 50, P 38.

[101] T 69–71, P 49–51.

Ṭūsī continues that for the bad of this world, who have their origin in this First Ignorance, who by their nature become deserving of punishment, their state is such that they "will for an eternity remain in great despair and immense sorrow".[102] The good, on the other hand, while they may occasionally lapse into evil, will eventually return to their original good nature *(fiṭrat)*, and for them the *daᶜwah* is like "the nature of an elixir which acts upon the substance of every piece of copper in such a way that it becomes standard pure gold."[103] That is, it is for those who have already accepted religion, more specifically the *sharīᶜah*, for whom the *daᶜwah* is meant. The *daᶜwah* is not intended for those who have rejected Islam in the first place; indeed, the *daᶜwah's* only purpose is to return the good to their originalnature:

> The good (may) at first, in this world, fall out of their original (spiritual) constitution *(fiṭrat)*, occupying themselves with improper activities, and taking no care: "what, then, is a son?" By (accepting) that *daᶜwat*, propaganda of the (true) religion and the imposition of duties *(taklīf)*, they forget their improper activities and return to their original nature *(fiṭrat)*. The *daᶜwat* for the souls of the good is like the nature of an elixir which acts upon the substance of every piece of copper *(har mis)* in such a way that it becomes standard pure gold.[104]

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[102] P 51, T 39. (I)
[103] T 51, P 38. (I) This is a notion taken from alchemy.
[104] T 51, P 38.

As mentioned earlier, Ṭūsī connects the notion of good and evil as characteristic of ontological perfection and deficiency with the notion of moral good and evil as characteristic of the religious frame of reference. In the latter, the concern is to show that ontological perfection or deficiency combine to form the stage upon which the religious movement toward spiritual perfection or deficiency is manifested. If spiritual perfection is attained through influence from the *daᶜwah,* then the soul enters paradise; if, on the other hand, spiritual deficiency is actualized through opposition to the *daᶜwah,* then the soul enters a state of hell, which, although it has suffering attached to it, also means non-existence from the point of view of paradise. In this respect, from the foregoing discussion, Ṭūsī appears to hold a predestinarian view with respect to those who oppose the *daᶜwah,* implying that they are predestined to do so on account of the effect of the First Ignorance on their souls. This does not appear to square with his view that all souls are capable of development. Indeed, according to that view humans have the choice to aid the preparation of the soul for paradisiacal bliss by aligning themselves with the *daᶜwah* and accruing what benefits they can from it. We can only surmise from this that since the *daᶜwah* requires an acceptance of the prophetic law *(sharīᶜah)* as the basis upon which its teachings are made pertinent, that those who do not accept the prophetic law remain in a state of *jahl,* ignorance, and that the *daᶜwah,* therefore, is not meant for them. It is not clear whether Ṭūsī includes non-Muslims as well as non-Ismāᶜīlīs among those who oppose *(ahl-i taḍādd):* that is, those who oppose the prophetic law, as well as those who accept the prophetic law but oppose the *daᶜwah.* We will return to a discussion concerning the details of human choice in the chapter on salvation.

It has already been pointed out that Ṭūsī considers Universal Matter to be pure evil in that it possesses absolute deficiency *(nuqṣān).* As a result, the corporeal world *(ᶜālam-i jismānī)* is pure evil. He makes a distinction between universal evil *(sharr-i kullī)* and partial evil *(sharr-i juzwī),* and points out that universal evil really means non-existence. For example, if fire were to be taken away from the world—that is, to cease to exist—then this would be universal evil, absolute non-existence. Partial evil can be likened to fire burning a house, resulting in damage. Now, something that does not exist does not need a cause, whereas something that does exist, does need a cause. For example, being rich requires a cause, whereas remaining in poverty does not. His intent in these analogies, strange as they may be, is clear: he wants to disabuse his readers of the notion that evil has a substantial cause that is equal in power to the substantive cause of good. Having established that absolute non-existence is universal evil and does not require any cause, he then goes on to point out that partial evil, which is what we see in the world, is something that cannot attach itself to any substance: "The idea of being evil cannot stick to the substance or effect of water, or fire, in reality, and may be applied only metaphorically, relatively and by chance."[105] In other words, it would be absolutely evil if fire and water were not to exist at all—since, it is implied—they are needed to sustain us. The analogy of fire with the human soul arises if we note that if fire has the inherent capacity to burn. However, the manner in which this capacity is utilized will determine whether fire is put to good use or bad. Similarly, the soul is affiliated with matter but is capable of being ruled by the intellect and by the distinctions it may learn that obtain between good and evil through the teachings of the *sharīᶜah* and the *daᶜwah.* Depending upon how the soul is controlled, it, too, may be put to good use—in constructing a form that will make it the best of creations, thereby opening a path for it toward perfection—or it may be put to bad use, thus creating a gateway to hell for itself. In other words, the human soul needs no cause to be inclined to evil, but it does need the instruction of a teacher in order to be inclined toward good.

If one were to attempt to reconcile Ṭūsī's views here with the view above—that some souls are predestined, as it were, to incline toward evil, as a result of the effect of the First *Jahl*—

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[105] T 49, P 37. (I)

then his view that evil cannot attach itself to any substance would have to be explored further. If evil cannot be attached to a substance, then the effect of the First Jahl on the human soul cannot be said to be a lasting effect unless the soul itself, when conjoined with a body, acts in such a manner that it progresses to hell. Ṭūsī appears to indicate that in the universal sense, the presence of opposition is necessary in order for existence to continue: fire is essential in order to perpetuate human existence. Similarly, it may be argued, opposition to religion in the form of the First Ignorance, manifested in the figure of Iblīs, is essential in order that religion becomes necessary. Indeed, he remarks that religion is necessary because humanity needs to agree concerning righteousness and the laws and rules regarding such must necessarily come from someone appointed by God.[106] To push the analogy, then, ignorance *(jahl)* (regarding righteousness, or good) necessitates the laws and rules of religion *(sharīᶜah).* On an individual level, the presence of ignorance may be turned to benefit if one seeks out that which will remove it, or to harm if one opposes that which may remove it. The question is whether in Ṭūsī's view humans are predestined to act in a certain way. By and large, his text indicates that humans can choose to control their inclinations; thus, although one may be inclined toward doing evil, one may choose not to do so, and one may be inclined toward non-performance of religious duties, but may choose not to do so, and finally, one may be inclined to ignore a teacher, but may choose to listen.

As a final comment, it may be noted that the categories of "return" bear some affinity to the details Ṭūsī outlines concerning the origin *(ṣudūr)* of existents *(mawjūdāt).*[107] There were three "moments" in the *ᶜAql's* thought *(taṣawwur):* the first, a meditation on its cause, which it cognized as perfect, that is, self-sufficient; the second, a meditation on its own substance, which it cognized as having intermediary affinities, that is, that its substance was due to something else; and the third, a meditation on its own existence by possibility, which it cognized as having inferior affinities, that is, that its existence was merely a possibility, that is, it was in need of something. It will be remembered, from the previous chapter, that the significance of these "moments" lies in the entity created by the *ᶜAql* as a result: the first leads to the coming into existence of the second intellect, the intellect of the outer sphere *(falak al-aflāk;* also termed *ᶜarsh*, the Throne). The second moment causes the existence of the Soul of the outer sphere, that is, the Universal Soul or ***Nafs-i Kull***; while the third moment causes the existence of the outer sphere itself.

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[106] T 118, P 81; B 196, BP 81.
[107] Given in T 8–9, P 9–10.

Each of these moments finds its corresponding category in the "return" of human souls: those that attain the world of intelligibles, which is pure good; those that attain the world of life, which is good and evil mixed together; and those that attain the world of corporeality, which is evil. If we bear in mind the connection of evil with deficiency, and the connection of deficiency with lack of self-sufficiency or the ability to receive but not to give, then we can draw the connection between each of the meditative "moments" of the *ᶜAql-i Kull* and the three possible categories or states the human may ultimately reach. Be that as it may, the crucial element that we have explored in this section has been to point out that for Ṭūsī the possibility toward attaining human perfection lies in the connection of the human soul to the world of the intellect. In order to actualize this potential, the human being stands in need of a teacher.

By identifying the prophet as the key element or existent that enables the human soul to receive the form whereby the human will attain ultimate perfection, Ṭūsī establishes a link between philosophy and religion. That is, he contributes to the ongoing engagement between religion and philosophy by drawing upon both sources of knowledge in order to build his exposition of the origins of humanity and its teleological purpose. The critical points at which he does this are two: firstly, in explaining how things are generated, he places the primary impulse as divine, in the form of the divine command *(Amr)* or word *(Kalima)*. The mechanics of creation, or generation, are explained along the broad lines of what appears to be a synthesis of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic structures, which it is not necessary for us to explicate here. The second critical point comes into focus once the generation of the human being on the creaturely scene has been established. At this point, using a framework in which creation is seen to have reached its aim—the generation of the human being—he introduces the notion of return *(maᶜād)*. This return cannot be effectuated unless the human potential for ultimate perfection is realized. Further, this potential cannot be realized without the aid of revelation, made explicit with his marked emphasis upon the role of the prophet in preparing the soul for ultimate perfection.

Here, it may be noted that Ṭūsī argues that the end or "return" *(maᶜād)* should touch the source, and access to this source is made possible by use of the intellectual and physical tools with which humans are endowed. Just as the divine Word is able to create the universe with the objective of creating the human being through the mediation of the Intellect and the Soul, so too the *Imām* is able to effect a return with the objective of realizing the potential for perfection contained within the human being through the agency of first the *Rasūl* and then the *Ḥujjah*. This will be explored in subsequent chapters; however, it must be noted here that this is the second critical point at which Ṭūsī introduces the importance of revelation, albeit through the agency of the intellect, as occupying a key role in the human soul's attainment of perfection.

CHAPTER 3

From Illusion to Reality: The Path through Knowledge

Introductory Remarks

As discussed previously, for Ṭūsī, God cannot be the object of knowledge for a knower. To reiterate briefly the reason for this, since God is above and beyond anything that can be said of him on account of his non-relationality to the things of creation, he does not enter the sphere of knowledge from the point of view of human intelligence. Rather, the most that human beings can know is to affirm that there is an entity who willed creation into existence, an entity that is by the same token beyond both being and non-being and, in fact, beyond any of the categories admissible to human thought. Neither can the existence of God be proved, for to say so would imply that thereby one comprehends *(muḥīt ast)* the ipseity of God in its reality.[1] Since such comprehension is impossible for humans, the existence of God cannot be proven.

The Universal Intellect's Knowledge of God

When we examine the elements of an epistemology in the writings of Ṭūsī, we must necessarily depart from the usual categories employed by philosophers when asking, who is the knower, or subject of knowledge; who or what is the object of knowledge; and by what means is the thing known? We have already seen that these categories are unified by Ṭūsī in the Universal Intellect, the *ᶜAql-i Kull*, who, according to Ṭūsī's formulation, is at once the subject and the object of knowledge, since it is "one in its oneness *(wāḥid ba-waḥdat)*, and, with its knowledge and sight, has never seen or known anything except for oneness."[2] It is the subject, or knower, because anything above it cannot be characterized by the categories of thought since these pertain only to creatures. Any knowledge that God may have is of a radically different nature from the categories of knowledge admissible to creatures. This position is akin to the Muᶜtāzilite (an early group of thinkers in Islam) position that Gods knows, but not in the manner in which we know something. The *ᶜAql-i Kull* is also the object of knowledge because all existents, material or spiritual come into being through its thought *(taṣawwur)*, and, for the *ᶜAql,* "one idea in it means all ideas and all its ideas mean one."[3] The *ᶜAql's* thought, by the power of assistance *(taʾyīd)* from the divine word *(Kalima*, that is, the command, *Amr*, of God) "conceived the idea *(taṣawwur)* of all things *(ashyāʾ)*, both spiritual and material, to the utmost limits. ... Such an idea *(taṣawwur)* of the *ᶜAql* became the existentiating *(ījād)* cause *(sabab)* of the commencement *(badāyat)* of all things *(ashyāʾ)*, with all that every creation *(mawjūd)* required *(mā yaḥtaj)*.[4] Thus, all the objects of our knowledge are unified in the thought of the *ᶜAql.* The *ᶜAql* knows all that is in existence, and, by the same token, all objects of knowledge are unified in its thought.

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[1] T 6, P 7; B 157, BP 7.

[2] T 18, P 17; B 160, BP 17. (I)

How does the Universal Intellect know all things? Ṭūsī does not address this explicitly. The point of ambiguity arises from the fact that the Intellect conceives its existentiating thought through the assistance *(taʾyīd)* of the Command or Word *(Amr, Kalima)* of God. The Universal Intellect's thought is inseparable from action, that is, the action of existentiating or initiation *(ikhtirāᶜ*, bringing into being). Further, the *ᶜAql's* capacity for thought is derived from the assistance it receives from the metaphorical word of God. Indeed, as we have seen earlier, in the hierarchy of creation, all existents are in the dual position of receiving benefit from the category of existence above them, and of giving benefit to the category of existence below them. Thus, it may be said that no existent thinks—and thereby acts—without the confluence of both the assistance *(taʾyīd)* received from a higher category and its own capabilities. Indeed, in his description of the *ᶜAql-i Kull,* Ṭūsī declares that it remains "perpetually immobile because of the illuminations of the lights of the Word which are emanating upon it and it is permanently causing the Sacred Soul (= the Universal Soul) to move and to rest."[5]

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[3] T 10, P 11. (I)
[4] T 8, P 9; BP 9. (I & KH)

It necessarily follows, then, that the view the *ᶜAql* has of the *Kalima* is constrained by the limits of the *ᶜAql's* knowledge,[6] which, as we have seen, is manifested in "the idea of all things, both spiritual and material, to the utmost limits."[7] The *ᶜAql* cannot know the ipseity of God, for to do so would imply that a created entity could comprehend the nature of God.[8] Therefore, it necessarily follows that the truth concerning God lies with what is above creation, that is, with the Command or Word of God, the *Amr* or *Kalima*.[9]

Human Epistemology

Let us turn now to the human being. We have already discussed that Ṭūsī views human beings as soul-bearing entities distinguished from other animals by virtue of their capacity to reason. This capacity is directly connected to the Universal Intellect, for all individual or partial intellects are considered to be the effects or traces *(āthār)* of the *ᶜAql-i Kull.* Furthermore, the *ᶜAql-i Kull* grants its assistance *(taʾyīd)* to existents in this world so as to enable them to "become actualized from potentiality through its assistance."[10] It is important to recognize that the human being does not arrive on the scene of creation totally perfected. Although the human soul is described by Ṭūsī as "the first perfection of the material body *(jism-i ṭabīᶜī)*"[11] in its ability to move parts and effect changes in the condition of matter, its perfection, nonetheless, is only potentially contained within itself:

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[5] T 19, P 17; B 161, BP 17. (B)

[6] T 8, P 9. Implied when Ṭūsī remarks on T7 (I) that "in this world everything that speaks of God can be classed according to the position *(martaba)* which it occupies in the creation, and the extent of benefaction *(athar-i fayḍ)* from the volition *(amr)* of God the All-High which it manifests in the actions *(āthār)* of its body." If the *ᶜAql* is to be understood as the chief of the created entities, having come into existence without any intermediaries, then the phrase "in this world", that is, the world of created entities, would include it.

[7] T 8, P 9. (I)

[8] T 6, P 7; B 157, BP 7.

[9] This notion is reverberated in the short autobiography, the *Sayr va Sulūk,* which avowedly stems from Ṭūsī's Ismāᶜīlī phase. In it Ṭūsī says: "Knowledge of the First Command of the True One—praise be to Him—in so far as it is He, in other words from the aspect of absolute unity, is the knowledge of God by God *(maᶜrifat-i khudā bi khudā)* within the limits of the knowledge that God bears witness that there is no god but He. (3: 18) This is the noblest degree of certainty, the most perfect mode of knowledge, unlike that of knowledge of the cause through the effect, since such knowledge does not give certainty." See Jalal Badakhchani, unpublished edition, translation, notes and introduction, "Contemplation and Action", London, UK, 1987, 54 (author's typescript).

> Just as man as an organism *(shakṣ)* is contained in sperm potentially, so the final human perfection is potentially contained in it *(nafs* [that is, the soul]). Its [the soul's] special function consists in systematically and gradually purifying that form *(ṣūrat)*, so that its source of life *(ᶜayn-i ḥayāt)* through Him, the All-High, would come into the state of actuality.[12]

The soul *(nafs)* is central to the attainment of human perfection, posited here in terms of actualizing life; that is, while human birth is a kind of life, it is only the potential state of what actual life can be. We have had an inkling of what actual life means for Ṭūsī in his description of paradise, or the world of reality: it is the ability to perceive things clearly, to distinguish illusion from reality. Such a conception inextricably links the notion of human perfection to an alteration in the very perception of the knowing and living subject. Or, to put it in another way, although the soul is primarily considered to be the bearer of life, there is a subtle shift from this function to its concommitant function as bearer of the ability to reason, which, we may remind ourselves, is itself a trace *(athar)* of the *ᶜAql.* As we will see below, it is of key importance to Ṭūsī that the clear use of reason combined with the assistance of the *ᶜAql* is central to the attainment of human perfection or an actualized life, reminiscent of the Socratic dictum: "An unexamined life is not worth living".

As a result, normal human epistemological functioning is itself the point of departure for a fundamental paradigmatic shift resulting in a movement from the state of potential life to actual life. This is accompanied by a significant alteration of consciousness with the realization that the presentations of mundane reality are akin to mirages, illusions and dreams, that is, they are perceived without an awareness of their true import; instead, they are mistakenly interpreted at face value. This is not to say that the things of this world have no existence. Rather, it means that the things of this world are perishable and have non-substantial *(ᶜadamī)* being. Further, the world is called such because it is comprised of those things that are most readily apparent to the human senses:

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[10] T 19, P 17; B 161, BP 17. (B)
[11] T 27, P 23. (I)
[12] T 27–28, P 23. (I)

> ... the world *(dunyā)* is a realm of dissemblance[13] *(kawn-i mushābahat)*, where the follower of truth and the follower of falsehood, veracity and lies, truth and falsehood, the veracious one and the liar, good and evil, the one who is good and the one who is wicked all seem the same. In this state all distinctions become similitudes [that is, appear similar to each other], so that a man is confused [by them] and veiled from the truths, such that he cannot differentiate between one and another and is unable to discriminate between these [states] that have been mentioned here.[14]

Ākhirat, or the life hereafter, also the realm of disclosure *(mubāyanat)*, is that realm in which different entitites will appear as distinct from each other. Hence, good can be distinguished from evil, for the life hereafter will be a state in which all similitudes will be rendered distinct, such that through the recognition of the divine *(maᶜrifat-i ilāhī)* truth will become illuminated and certified as being such from falsehood.[15] Viewed from the perspective of an actualized life, the truth concerning mundane life becomes more clear:

> Everything that comes into existence, or goes into non-existence, is long-lived and has good luck, or has a short life and ill luck, in each of these states there is concealed a rare secret *(sirr)* and wondrous command *(ḥukm)*, which is not concealed to the people of understanding *(khirad)* and knowledge *(dānish)*.[16]

The ability to perceive the secret and command results in the deployment of the hermeneutical device known as *taᶜwīl*, which will be discussed below.

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[13] Badakhchani translates the term *mushābahat* as resemblance; Ivanow as illusion. I have elected here to use dissemblance in the sense that a thing may appear to be other that what it is in verity.

[14] T 90, P 62; B 177, BP 63. (KH)

[15] T 90, P 63; B 177, BP 63. (KH)

[16] T 183, P 126; (KH); Ivanow's edition has *ahl-i ᶜilm* instead of *ahl-i khirad va danish.*

Human Receptors of Knowledge

Ṭūsī considers humans to have five external senses and five internal senses, all of which are instrumental in acquiring knowledge. His description of these exposes the conception of his day regarding the elements of human perception. Accordingly, of the five external or outer senses, viz. touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight, the first three develop in the child when it is still in its mother's womb, while hearing and sight develop at the moment the child is born. The inner senses consist of the following: (1) *(ḥiss-i) mushtarik*, "the combining" (sense); (2) *muṣawwira*, conception; (3) *mufakkira*, thought; (4) *wāhima*, estimation; and (5) *ḥāfiẓa*, memory. These join the child, one at a time, while it is still in the womb.[17]

All the above-mentioned faculties or powers *(quwwathā)* are, however, instruments of the human soul *(nafs-i insānī)*. The human soul associates itself with the developing body while the latter is still in the womb, starting in the brain and spreading thence to the remaining parts of the body and its organs.[18] As mentioned in the previous chapter, the human soul is neither a body—hence divisible—nor one of the body's powers—hence destructible on the dissolution of the body. Rather, it is indestructible and thus, in a way, eternal *(abādī)*. It is in a class by itself, since its origin is from the world of the Universal Intellect *(ᶜAql)*. As a result, it "accepts the Intellect's emanation, and is the passage *(maurid)* for spiritual entities *(ruḥāniyyat)* and the treasury of intelligible forms *(khazānah-i ṣuwar-i maᶜqulāt)*."[19] Its substance, *dhāt*, is not identified with the functions of the body; rather, those functions are perceptible to it by virtue of its own substance. Indeed, the substance of the human soul is associated with the intellect *(ᶜaql)*, intelligibles *(maᶜqulāt)* and distinctions *(mufāraqāt)*. Its connection to the human body is such that the soul

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[17] T 38, P 30.

[18] T 38, P 30.

[19] T 26, P 22. Ivanow transliterates *ṣuwar* as *ṣiwar*. (KH)

"conveys to it [the body] movement *(taḥrīk)*, or introduces change to it, or controls it, or keeps it in order *(tadbīr)*."[20]

Ṭūsī points out that all human souls are initially "plain" *(sāda)* and are formed gradually through direct recognition *(maᶜrifat)*, reasoning *(raᵓy)*, thinking by analogy *(qiyās)*, ethics *(akhlāq)*, habits/customs *(ᶜādāt)* and deeds *(ᶜāmāl)*, "so that all of these each become a form *(ṣūrat)*, thus building up the substance *(jawhar)* of each soul, and this becomes its *hayūlā*."[21] Attention has been drawn in the previous chapter to the notion that the soul itself serves as material *(hayūlā)* for the intellect, by which, it may be surmised, is not meant only reasoning *(raᵓy)* but all the acts that call into play the capacities of intelligence *(ᶜaql)*. However, although the soul is from the world of the Intellect, and is associated with intelligence *(ᶜaql)*, this does not necessarily mean (1) that all humans are thus naturally propelled toward developing the full potential of the soul as "the passage for spiritual entities and the treasury of intelligible forms", or (2) that all human intellects are equal.

With respect to the first limitation—that not all humans will develop the full potential of their intelligence-bearing souls—Ṭūsī's articulation draws attention to the fact that at birth the soul does not have a clearly distinguished form, being plain, so to speak. The form that the soul will ultimately take depends to a large degree on what it does to develop itself through the aforementioned activities such as reasoning and its ethical behaviour. Already here some distinctions have crept in, for not all souls will struggle to acquire knowledge through study or apply that knowledge to act ethically.

Further, Ṭūsī is at pains to point out that although humans may begin life with a clean slate with respect to the form *(ṣūrat)* of the soul associated with each human body, there are many factors at work that will introduce diversity among humans. From the time the child is formed in the womb of its mother to the end of its life, it will experience differences from other human beings with respect to its health, climatic conditions and upbringing. As a result, the differing combinations of the spheres and the stars, ingrained cultural customs, and the level of maturity amongst parents, teachers and preceptors, will leave traces in the developing soul of the human.[22] Both the environment into which the human being is born and develops, and the initiatives taken by that human in order to acquire knowledge and act upon it in an ethical manner, will determine the form the soul will come to take.

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[20] T 25, P 21.

[21] T 28, P 23. (I & KH)

With regard to the second limitation, although the soul is plain *(sāda)* at birth, there are nonetheless predestined differences between the intellects of human beings.[23] To understand what Ṭūsī means by this, we have to refer to a discussion in which he outlines the reasons for which the soul associates with the body. Although in appearance actions are carried out by the body, in reality the body is a passive instrument of the soul. That is, the acting force is manifested through its recipient, just the Command *(Amr)* is manifested in its creation, and spirit *(rūḥ)* is manifested through the body *(jism)*.[24] That is, the soul becomes manifest in the body. Accordingly, one of the benefits *(fawāʾid)* of the association of souls with bodies is that it separates out souls, one from the other, good from evil. The evil form *(ṣūrat-i sharr)* that is potentially contained in one soul, and the good form *(ṣūrat-i khayr)* potentially contained in another resemble each other due to their constitution. However, they become distinguished from each other through the union *(ittiṣāl)* of the soul with the body. How is this so? Through union with the body, the soul is able to actualize its potential, whether it is a movement toward perfection, or from the edge, limit *(ḥadd)* of evil toward the pit of finitude (that is, hell).[25] Mention has been made in the previous chapter regarding Ṭūsī's notion that souls choose the prepared physical material they will inhabit; accordingly, souls of good attitude will choose material that can be utilized accordingly, whereas souls of medium attitude, that is, that incline toward both good and bad or evil will choose material that will be utilized for the purpose chosen.[26]

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[22] T 71–72, P 51–52.
[23] T 29, P 24.
[24] T 32, P 26.
[25] T 32–33, P 26.

In the last chapter Ṭūsī's views regarding whether human souls were predestined toward goodness or evil were explored. We came to the conclusion that although evil has no substantial basis, it nonetheless is an effect that is contained potentially in human souls in their very nature and, accordingly, they may be predisposed to actualize the evil that is potential in them. The root of this evil lies in a moral choice made by the problematic First Ignorance *(Jahl-i Awwal)*, exemplified in the act of Iblīs to disobey God's command to bow to Adam. It is not rooted in anything substantive such as an eternal power equal to that which is the source of good. The connection between the ontological evil that Ṭūsī identifies with Universal Matter *(Jism-i Kull)* and moral evil identified with the First Ignorance *(Jahl-i Awwal)* is the notion of deficiency, *nuqṣān*, that ultimately results in non-existence *(ᶜadamī)*. What, then, can be made of Ṭūsī's statements that human souls are at first "plain" *(sāda)* ? It appears that most likely he meant that upon birth, no human possesses the form *(ṣūrat)* that will constitute the abiding entity that will pass on to heaven or hell. In this respect, all humans have a choice in the construction of this form. It is necessary in this context to note a brief discussion Ṭūsī has on the "return" with respect to the flesh and the spirit. He mentions that those who oppose the true religion, that is, the "people of opposition" *(ahl-i taḍādd)* do not have an origin *(mabdaʾ)* nor a return *(maᶜād)*, neither corporeally nor spiritually.[27] As explored in the previous chapter, what he may have meant here, although he does not explicitly say so, is that he considers those souls who are inclined toward evil to be those who do not ever become Muslims. It is for this reason that such people are considered to have no return, because they never had an origin that was substantial in nature. In other words, those who fail to become Muslims deprive themselves of having an origin. An initial reading of Ṭūsī suggests that a human's origin lies in the world of the intellect, and that this is predetermined before the human soul unites with the body. However, in light of his view that the people of opposition never had an origin, it may be supposed that accepting the true religion—in his view, Islam—affirms that the soul has a substantial origin, as opposed to a soul that does not have a substantial origin and is rooted, instead, in the non-substantive First Ignorance, likened to the choice made by Iblīs. If this reading of Ṭūsī is accepted, it is clear that all Muslims fall into one of two categories: the *ahl-i tarattub* ("people of orderliness") and the *ahl-i waḥdat* ("people of unity"). The former have an origin and a return both in flesh and in spirit; that is, they both profess Islam in this world and will have a form, however weak, to carry them into the hereafter. It is these for whom the body is a means through which the soul may attain perfection *(ālat-i kamāl-i nafs):*

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[26] T 50, P 38.

[27] T 95, P 65; B 180, BP 65.

> For in the initial stages of its quest for perfection, when it (the soul) is weak, the mediation of the body is indispensible. It attains virtues and perfection by means of the body. This is the very purpose of the existence of the body. Whenever the actions of the body conform to the influences (lit. effects) of the spiritual *(āthār-i rūḥānī)*, the resurrection of the body will take place in meaning and in reality. That is, when, by means of the senses, the soul turns to absorbing the sciences *(ᶜulūm)* and accepting (intellectual) benefits, for, through the careful deliberation *(taʾammul)* of compound sensibles *(maḥsūsāt-i murakkabāt)* it acquires the ability to conceive (lit. acquires the conceptions of) the forms of intelligibles. Likewise, the body reaches its perfection through the soul, and the soul becomes perfect by the benefits its derives from the body. Both are cases of the same thing, namely, the corporeal becomes spiritual.[28]

This reward or punishment will be presented in forms that Ṭūsī has described elsewhere as mediated by the imaginative soul *(nafs-i khayālī)*, producing either happiness or remorse in the soul in the appropriate locale of paradise or hell. It is clear that for Ṭūsī the majority of Muslims fall into this category. Moreover, if our reading of Ṭūsī concerning the people of opposition is correct, then those who are non-Muslims, or those who refuse to become Muslims, are understood by him as those who have no substantial origin in any case and therefore not to be bothered with; not by Muslims in general, and not by the Ismāᶜīlī *daᶜwah* in particular. Indeed, he says, "the *daᶜwah* is not intended for the bad, so that they also should become good."[29]

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[28] T 94, P 65; B 179, BP 65. [KH & B)

As for the second category of Muslims, the *ahl-i waḥdat*, Ṭūsī identifies them as those who have already attained unity *(waḥdat)*, that is, the truth of realities or truth of truths *(ḥaqīqatu'l-ḥaqā'iq)*. Such people "cannot be said to have an origin or a return insofar as ultimate reality is concerned either in body or in spirit."[30] Although this appears to be the same as for the people of opposition, Ṭūsī means something quite different:

> for in reality they have not have not fallen from the world of Unity *(ᶜālam-i waḥdat)* that return to that place of unity should be necessary for them. But from [the perspective of] those places which are the realms of relativity—relative to these realms—all have an origin and all a return, whether corporeal or spiritual. Because even if they do not come into this realm from the point of view of reality, they come into this realm from the point of view of relativity.[31]

Ṭūsī's classification of human existence into four categories has been noted in the previous chapter, that is, individual existence; individual inclined toward the generic; generic, and that which is beyond both individual and generic existence. Those who attain generic existence are identified as belonging to the realm of "absolute self-evidence *(mubāyanat-i muṭlaq)* [and who] are free from mingling with the false *(mubṭil)* in any way."[32] Of those whose existence is beyond the individual and generic, it is only possible to say that they know what is free from or beyond the commonalities pertaining to [the realm] of dissemblance *(mushābahat)* or the specificities of [the realm] of self-evidence or disclosure *(mubāyanat)*.

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[29] T 51, P 38.
[30] T 95, P 65; B 180, BP 65. (B)
[31] T 95, P 65; B 180, BP 65. (KH)
[32] T 84, P 59; B 173, BP 59. (I)

Thus, it appears that Ṭūsī considers the *ahl-i waḥdat*, the most select of the followers of truth, to be those who have attained generic existence, that is, the *ḥujjats*. At the same time, the *Imām*, who alone has been identified by Ṭūsī as the *Muḥiqq*, that is, having the knowledge of unity,[33] must belong both to the category of those who are beyond the individual and the generic, while sharing some characterists of those who are generic in existence. To explain, Ṭūsī says that "(t)he origin of someone who has attained total [or generic] existence is an origin which is exactly the same as the return."[34] At the same time, he says regarding the followers of truth *(muḥiqqān)* that they are either strong or weak; "the strong dwell [in the realm] of unity, and have not, in reality, descended from [the realm of] necessary existence so that they should need to go back there."[35] It appears that for Ṭūsī the terms *mabdaʾ* and *maʿād* are pertinent only to souls that are generated are part of the process of creation impelled by the Universal Intellect's thought. Accordingly, those who have attained generic or total existence *(wujūd-i kullī)* are the same as the people of unity *(ahl-i waḥdat)*, who can be assumed to be the *ḥujjats*. Personages of such stature have never really left the domain of the unicity of the First Intellect; that they have suffered no separation out of that realm. On the other hand, the *imāms* belong to the realm of the divine word or *Kalima*, at which level the truth of truths is clearly known insofar as one may speak of the knowledge of the divine word, given that knowledge itself is a category that applies to created entities and not to the realm of the creator or that which is above the creative process sparked by the Universal Intellect. In that case, then, the appearance of the *imāms* in the phenomenal world is couched in the same metaphorical manner in which the Universal Intellect acknowledges the divine Word: the Intellect understands the command of God in the form of a word in order to make it intelligible for itself and to link it with the notion of omniscience and the omnipotence that is manifested in the form of a word. For humans, the *imām* appears metaphorically—and in all physical semblance—as a human who gives manifestation to the command of God. If the notion of the word is crucial in communicating both the concept of knowledge and the concept of command, the notion of the human is important in setting up a recognizable category through which instruction may be gleaned. It is in this aspect that the *imām*, belonging to the category of existence that is beyond the individual and the generic, shares a characteristic with those who belong to the category of generic existence and who are also the *ahl-i waḥdat:* he, too, appears in the world of relativity although in reality "he has never and will not ever come into the world of relativity."[36] The difference, of course, is that while others have an origin and a return, the *imām* does not, since he does not fall into the category of created existents:

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[33] T 126, P 87.
[34] T 85, P 59; B 174, BP 59. (B)
[35] T 87, P 60; B 175, BP 60. (B)

> He [the *Imām]* has neither a beginning *(badāyatī)* at inception *(dar awwal),* nor transformation and change in the middle, nor a termination *(nihāyatī)* at the end .... Although he is perpetual *(qāʾim)* and everlasting *(bāqī)* and he is the reason for the cause of all existents and he is the lord who grants being to the whole of creation and is in ultimate truth independent of [the categories of] species and individual, yet it appears in relation to the physical world that he has both individuality and a species. His individuality is his species, and his species is his individuality. His person is perpetual through his species till the end of all ends.[37]

The position of the *ahl-i taḍādd* (the people of opposition) is not the same as that of the *ahl-i waḥdat.* If we are correct in assuming that by the *ahl-i taḍādd* Ṭūsī meant those who choose not to become Muslim, then it appears that Ṭūsī regards non-Muslims almost as an ephemeral by-product of the Universal Intellect's conception, for they have no substantial origin. Akin to this is the notion that those who choose not to be Muslims are participants of the same ignorance that impelled Iblīs, despite his immense knowledge, to reject Adam as worthy of obesiance. Ṭūsī was far too learned a man not to recognize in his non-Muslim compatriots fellow human beings of noble learning, and his view that they never had any origin of substance must bear testimony to the importance he gave to the acceptance of God's revelation to humans through Muḥammad, that is, Islam.

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[36] T 140, P 95; B 209; BP 95. (KH)

[37] T 129–130, P 89; B 203, BP 89. (B)

In the following, our discussions of Ṭūsī will assume that he is talking about the *ahl-i tarattub*, the "people of orderliness", that is, Muslims. In his descriptions of the human soul, Ṭūsī makes it very clear that all the substances of the human souls are "of one and the same kind *(jins).*"[38] Further, the human soul is a simple spiritual substance *(jawhar-i rūḥānī-y-i basīṭ).*[39] It is not divisible, nor is it composed of parts. How does Ṭūsī explain the differentiation of souls, as for example, between souls that incline toward goodness and those that incline toward opposition? It appears that the distinction between souls arises as a result of the soul's acquisition of knowledge *(ᶜilm):* "The eminence *(sharaf)* of the nafs depends on its knowledge *(ᶜilm)* because ... every soul which is capable of acquiring any knowledge becomes more eminent as compared with those souls which remain ignorant."[40] However, maintains Ṭūsī, just because intellect *(ᶜaql)* is a common property of all humans, it does not mean, therefore, that there are no differences between human beings.[41] Such is clearly not the case, for not only do humans think differently, but they also disagree with another. Moreover, were all humans to be equal in their intellect, then one among them could not set a standard *(taklīf)* for the others to follow. This is clearly an allusion to the prophetic standard, or revelation, as an example of a standard to be followed. In other words, there are different types of intellect, all of which are contained in the human soul potentially, and can be actualized. These are: (1) *ᶜaql-i hayūlānī,* the intellect connected with the *hayūla.* This is the capacity to perceive an idea or form independently of the substance *(mujarrad az mawādd);* (2) *ᶜaql-i malakī,* the habituated intellect, which is the ability—no longer just the capacity—to perceive an idea or form independently of substance; (3) *ᶜaql-i*

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[38] T 28, P 23. (I)
[39] T 26, P 22.
[40] T 28, P 23. (I)
[41] T 29, P 24.

ba-fiᶜl, the active intellect. This "is the power which makes it possible to make actual the perception of abstract ideas from direct cognition *(ḍarūriyyāt)* ... into reflections *(naẓariyyāt)*, or applying intuition to direct perception"; and (4) *ᶜaql-i mustafād*, or acquired intellect, "which introduces the connection *(munāsabat)* ... between what has come from the potential into the actual" and that power which brings into actualization.[42]

To explain this, it is necessary to turn to Ṭūsī's much closer predecessor, Ibn Sīnā, who developed al-Fārābī's conception of the different kinds of intellect.

For Ibn Sīnā, the First, or Universal Intellect, the *ᶜAql-i Kull*, also termed the First Cause, emanates a series of intellects that control a corresponding sphere and soul, and originate the intellect of the next sphere. This process culminates in the tenth intellect, which is most proximate to the physical world, and constitutes the "active intellect governing our souls."[43] The active intellect is the cause of both the matter and the forms found in our world—termed the sublunar world—and its emanation is continuous, although its activity does not proceed further in creating eleventh or subsequent intellects.[44] The active intellect is the cause of human souls and intellects, which cannot be produced by the human body, since the latter is corporeal and the former are incorporeal. None of the intelligences that precede the active intellect in the hierarchy of emanated intelligences originating with the First Intellect are directly responsible for causing human souls and intellects, for although those intelligences have a multiplicity of effects, these are with respect to those celestial bodies that are not subject to division. Thus, none of them produce multiplicity of effect in any one species, which is the work of the active intellect alone, who "operates on the divisible matter of the sublunar world".[45]

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[42] T 30, P 25. (I)

[43] For this exposition of Ibn Sīnā's thought, see Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroës*, 74ff. Davidson identifies this with the active intellect implied in Aristotle's *De Anima*. See Davidson, 76.

[44] For reasons that need not detain us here but can be found in Davidson, cited above.

[45] Ibid., 81.

The human soul is conceived of as a subject that "receives" intelligible thoughts[46] and the newborn child as having a soul that has no thought but has the potential for thinking. Ibn Sīnā differentiates between three stages of the human potential for thought.[47] In drawing an analogy with the potentiality for writing, he distinguishes between unqualified potentiality, possible potentiality, and perfect potentiality. As Davidson explains, the newborn infant has unqualified potentiality in that it may eventually learn to write. Once the child knows the inkwell, pen and the letters, he can go on to master the art of writing, and he thus has the possible potentiality to write. The scribe, however, can apply his art at will, having mastered it, and thus, when he is not writing, can be described as having the perfect potentiality for writing.[48]

In the same manner, the three stages of potential theoretical[49] intellect are:

> (1) "Material" intellect is the wholly "unqualified potentiality" for thought which belongs to "every member of the species." It is a "disposition" *(isti^cdād)* inhering in the incorporeal human soul from birth.
>
> (2) "Intellect *in habitu*" *(bi'l-malaka)* is the "possible potentiality" in which the human subject possesses the "first intelligible thoughts." These are theoretical propositions of the sort man affirms without being able to "suppose that they might ever not be affirmed"; examples are the propositions that "the whole is greater than the part" ... . These examples ... are the same that Alfarabi ... gave for the principles of thought which the active intellect instills in the human material intellect at the outset.
>
> (3) "Actual intellect," despite the name, is a further stage of potentiality—the stage of fully actualized potentiality. It is the "complete *(kamāliyya)* potentiality" that is attained when both "second intelligibles" and "intelligible forms" have been added to the "first intelligibles," with the proviso that the human subject is not thinking the propositions and concepts. At the stage of

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[46] Ibid., 83, citing Ibn Sīnā's *Shifā: De anima*, 239–40.
[47] It may be mentioned here that humans have a theoretical intellect, which is the intellect of interest to us here, since it is the intellect that receives input from the Active Intellect, and a practical intellect. Al-Fārābī held that the principles of the practical intellect "come from experience and not from the active intellect", and Ibn Sīnā identified these as "commonly accepted views, traditions, opinions, and flimsy experiences." See Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroës*, 88.
[48] Ibid., 84.
[49] See above, n. 42 and 47.

> actual intellect, the human subject does not "actually ... attend to" his knowledge, yet can do so "whenever he wishes." ...
>
> (4) "Acquired *(mustafād)* intellect," which alone is an "unqualified actuality." At the level of acquired intellect, "intelligible forms" are actually "present" to the man, and he "actually attends" to them. ... The unqualified actuality of thought is "called ... acquired, because it will be shown ... that potential intellect passes to actuality" by establishing contact with the active intellect and having "forms acquired from without imprinted" in man's intellect.[50]

The first, material intellect, bears resemblance to Ṭūsī's *ᶜaql-i hayūlānī,* which is the capacity to perceive an idea or form independently of the substance *(mujarrad az mawādd);* the second, to Ṭūsī's *ᶜaql-i malakī,* the habituated intellect, which is the ability—no longer just the capacity—to perceive an idea or form independently of substance; the third, to Ṭūsī's *ᶜaql-i ba-fiᶜl,* the active intellect. This "is the power which makes it possible to make actual the perception of abstract ideas from direct cognition *(ḍarūriyyāt)* ... into reflections *(naẓariyyāt),* or applying intuition to direct perception"; and the fourth, to Ṭūsī's *ᶜaql-i mustafād,* or acquired intellect, "which introduces the connection *(munāsabat)* ... between what has come from the potential into the actual" and that power which brings into actualization.[51] If Ṭūsī means to draw any significance to the role and nature of the acquired intellect, he does not do so here. He simply draws attention to these classical types of intellect to make the point that although human beings are equally endowed with the capacity to reason, not all develop their intellect in the same manner or to the same extent. It is for this reason that it is necessary for there to be a common standard to be complied with by all, that is, the prophetic *sharīᶜah* or law, which is compulsory, and connotes the notion of *taklīf,* (religious) obligation. Further on, Ṭūsī introduces other kinds of intellect: the practical intellect *(ᶜaql-i maᶜīshatī),* which is commonly possessed,[52] and which could not be developed without the imposition of difficulties *(ranjhā);*[53] the intellect trained in the prophetic law *(ᶜaql-i sharᶜī-y-i nabawī);* and the intellect trained with respect to the resurrection *(ᶜaql-i Qiyāmatī),* which Ṭūsī identifies as the end and purpose *(ghāyat-i ghāyāt va muntahā-y-i nihāyat)* of all human means and powers.[54] Apart from a brief mention of the stages of the theoretical intellect as described above, he maintains a silence on what may be considered the preserve of philosophers. As will be seen below, he discusses a kind of knowledge that he terms *naẓarī,* that is, speculative. If the authenticity of his autobiographical work, the *Sayr va Sulūk* is to be acknowledged, then it appears that he means by *naẓarī* the kind of knowledge that is accessible to philosophers.[55] While acknowledging the many benefits of philosophy, he remarks that it is outside the scope of philosophers to discuss matters such as the "recognition of the True One, the Exalted, the Most High, and knowledge of the Origin and Return *(mabdaᵓ wa maᶜād)* ...".[56] However, the philosophers agree on two points: one, "that the instructor through whose mediation the potential perfection of the instructed soul is actualized must [himself] be in a state of actualized perfection"[57] and two, that such a person, the first of the teachers, must exist among humankind, "in order that some may gain perfection through him, and others through these ...".[58]

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[50] Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroës,* 84–5.
[51] T 30, P 25. (I)
[52] T 82, P 58; B 172, BP 58.

Humans are endowed with animal forces *(quwwathā-y-i ḥaywānī),* upon which the senses and mobility depend.[59] These animal forces are the servants and vehicle *(khādim va markūb)* for the use of the individual soul (or, partial soul, *nafs-i juzwī),* which itself is for the use of the practical intellect. The latter is for the use of the intellect trained in the prophetic law, and this is for the use of the intellect trained for the resurrection. However, although the animal powers, the individual soul and the practical intellect are a continuum in a progressive series, each composed of components of the previous element in the series,[60] the intellects trained in the prophetic law and in the resurrection cannot be said to be composed of anything else, because "both are independent foundations *(aṣl-i muᶜtabar).*"[61] Ṭūsīelaborates:

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[53] T 183, P 126.

[54] T 82–83, P 58; B 172, BP 58.

[55] Badakhchani, *Sayr va Sulūk,* 40. Those who believe in speculative knowledge *(naẓar)* are divided into many groups that include the theologians and the philosophers. Ṭūsī remarks here that his investigations into theology proved "fruitless."

[56] Badakhchani, *Sayr va Sulūk,* 40.

[57] Ibid., 46

[58] Ibid., 47.

[59] T 82, P 58; B 172, BP 58.

> ... the animal forces accept the emanation (fayḍ) of partial souls through the medium of instruction in the exact sciences[62] (taᶜlīmāt-i riyāḍī) until the partial souls through education attain totality (kull-i ān), [that is,] practical intellect (ᶜaql-i maᶜīshatī-y-i dunyawī). Hence, through the medium of the human form, they accept the emanations of the religious[63] intellect of the prophet (ᶜaql-i sharᶜī-i nabawī), and, through the medium of the latter, accept the emanation of the intellect pertaining to the Qiyāmat and the Hereafter (ākhirat), so that their progress takes place, from the animal forces [onward, in the manner stated] to the intellect pertaining to the Qiyāmat and the Hereafter.[64]

Here, it may be noted that Ṭūsī argues that the end or "return" *(maᶜād)* should touch the source, and access to this source is made possible by use of the intellectual and physical tools with which humans are endowed. Just as the divine Word was able to create the universe with the objective of creating the human being through the mediation of the Intellect and the Soul, so too the *Imām* is able to effect a return with the objective of realizing the potential for perfection contained within the human being through the agency of the *Rasūl* (prophet, that is, Muḥammad) and the *Ḥujjah.* Regarding the notion of the origin and the return—which hitherto we have viewed solely in ontological terms—Ṭūsī mentions in a discussion on the shahādah, the profession of faith ("There is no god but Allah" and "Muḥammad is the Apostle of God"), that relative self-realization *(khwīshtan*

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[60] So, for example, "the partial soul is a totality composed of the components of the animal soul. The intelligence of worldly life is a totality composed of the components of the partial soul." T 83, P 58; B 172, BP 58. (B)
[61] T 83, P 58; B 172, BP 58. (I)
[62] Badakhchani translates *riyāḍī* as mathematics; Ivanow as education.
[63] *Sharᶜī*, that is, pertaining to the religious law or *sharīᶜah.*
[64] T 83, P 58; B 172, BP 58. (KH)

shināsī-y-i iḍāfī), "which is our Origin *(mabdaʾ)* comes with the first attestation, and real *(ḥaqīqī)* self-realization, which is our Return *(maᶜād)* comes with the second attestation.[65] Real self-realization corresponds with the formula: "whoever has acquired the knowledge of self, has understood his Lord."[66] The completion of the process of creation—an outpouring from the source—marks the beginning of the process of returning to the source. Then only is the chain of existence completed, from origin, to existence, to end of existence or return. In the broader sense, if creation is construed as the process by which ultimate perfection is reached, then it could be said that creation is ongoing until the potential for perfection is realized within the human soul. However, if, as has been suggested previously, creation is viewed as the process by which that existent who is the goal and purpose of creation, that is, the human being, comes into existence, then the process of creation may be said to be complete, and the process of return may be said to be underway. However, Ṭūsī clarifies that the notions of origin and return are not unconnected to the acceptance of Islam: the origin of the human lies in making testimony to the first profession, which is the common confession, and the return lies in making testimony to the second. This consists of a specific confession, which, as has been alluded to, is the basis for the development of the resurrectional intellect. Ṭūsī draws upon the Qurʾān to illustrate: when asked who created them, they will say God (43:87), which is the first confession; while the second confession specifies Muḥammad as indicating this God: "God is the patron of those who believe and for non-believers there is no patron." (47:11)

Since the eminence of the soul depends on its knowledge, it follows that Ṭūsī gives instruction a key role in the development of the soul. For Ṭūsī, this instruction is what sets the manifestations of the *ᶜAql* and the *Nafs* apart from other humans:

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[65] T 158, P 107; B 220, BP 107. (B)
[66] Ibid.

> It is known that the soul, by acquiring knowledge, becomes stronger than other souls, so that it may ultimately acquire knowledge from the great *Ḥujjats.* Such a man, by the purity of his substance *(jawhar)*, becomes the recipient of the emanation of the lights of the Highest Divine Word *(Kalima)*, and by divine knowledge becomes distinguished from other souls. They bring salvation to the souls of those creations who sink in the sea of the *Hayūlā*, and are tied by the ties of nature *(ṭabīᶜat)*, by their teaching and learning releasing them from the darkness of error.[67]

Ṭūsī indicates here that the *Ḥujjats* bring salvation to all who will listen to their teaching and learning, and that the opportunity clearly does exist for all souls to acquire the knowledge requisite for salvation. This is contrary to his statements discussed above and in the last chapter in which he holds the position that the *daᶜwah* is not intended for the bad[68] *(badān*, that is, the people of opposition, *taḍādd)*, only to separate the good out from the bad. Earlier, it was noted that Ṭūsī means by the people of opposition those who are not Muslims. In that discussion, he does not emphasize the importance of choice when he speaks of that class of humans that corresponds to the material world *(ᶜālam-i jismānī)*, that is, the people of opposition. However, through his words here he does admit that although the natural inclination of such folk is to "sink in the sea" and be "tied by the ties of nature", the whole point of revelation—since the presence of *Ḥujjats* presupposes the messenger–prophet—is to release such humans "from the darkness of error" through teaching and learning.

It appears, then, that when he speaks of the potential for evil or the potential for good contained within the human soul in terms of predestination, that he is responding to two things. The first is that on a practical level, because human beings are so different (a condition that results from stellar and environmental factors), it is likely that some humans become so habituated to making decisions dictated by the senses that they are unable to accept revelation and may even actively oppose it. That is, even though they were not born as "people of opposition", their circumstances and their choices together rapidly collude to make them such. Ṭūsī appears to have contempt for the "common" people *(ᶜawāmm)* and tries to find all kinds of reasons to explain why they do not accept revelation, or, when they do, do not understand its real import. One among these is the notion that the commonplace are in abundance while the truly learned are few in number, in keeping with the principle that "every creation which has received more in regard of apparent force *(quwwat-i shaklī)*, received less mental force" (that is, ability to extract meaning, *quwwat-i maᶜnawī)*.[69] This may help us to understand his statements such as mentioned earlier:

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[67] T 28, P 23. (I, with slight modifications, KH)
[68] T 51, P 38.

> There are also other souls, wicked, and so extremely advanced in their wickedness that they are incapable of receiving any good, honour or perfection,—rogues and villains who will never be enlightened by the light of knowledge *(ᶜilm)* and will never be given shelter by those above them who might have been a strong refuge for them. The advantage of the union of such souls with their bodies consists in revealing the influence *(taʾthīr)* which is hidden in them, thus separating the good from the bad, and the clean from the polluted, and making that difference obvious.[70]

Second, on a philosophic level, evil has no substantial base, unlike good, which has its base in the Universal Intellect. If it did, then Ṭūsī would have to accept the Zoroastrian position of two equal and opposite, but nonetheless substantial, origins for evil and for good. Thus, he can make statements such as: "The aim of the religion of the Bearers of the Truth is not to make the bad good. They carry on the Divine command, according to which there should be good and bad in existence amongst the people of this world, so that the good may be separated from the bad."[71] That is, it is part of the nature of anything that comes into existence from the Universal Soul that good and bad will be inherent within it. The purpose of religion is directed not at the realm of pure evil, the *sharr-i maḥḍ*, that is, Universal Matter, but rather at the Universal Soul, which has a mix of good and evil within it. The mundane world is the field or the stage upon which the major players are manifested: the realm of evil takes shape as the body that is controlled by the soul and thereby enabled to move. By virtue of the soul's connection with it, the body thus has life. The soul, in turn, has the choice of being controlled by reason and thereby possessing "life". We use the metaphor of life because it is in a way real and in a way a similitude to the life we see when a child emerges from the womb into our mundane existence. Ṭūsī uses the notion of actualizing the potential for goodness to mean the same thing: that the soul has the choice to enter the realm of paradise, the realm of clear vision, the realm of the eternal bliss for the soul if only it will accept the emanation *(fayḍ)*—which is a benefit for it—offered to it by religion. If it does not accept it and live by it, then the human soul will incline toward the dictates of its vehicle, the body, and will either land in hell or be consigned to nothingness. The body, of course, does not subsist beyond its association with the soul; when the soul leaves, it disintegrates. Hence the *daᶜwah*, call or mission, cannot be directed at the bad in the sense of philosophically understood evil, because evil has no substantial point of origin to which it can return. Good, on the other hand, has a substantial point of origin, the world of the Intellect. The Intellect has done its part: to provide assistance to the Soul and to the human soul. On a secondary level, neither can the *daᶜwah* be aimed at those who refuse Islam, or who accept Islam for reasons of expedience. However, among those who accept Islam sincerely, there may be some who are beguiled by their material nature and become subservient to it. It is for these that the *daᶜwah* may act, in the terminology of alchemy, as "an elixir which acts upon the substance of every piece of copper in such a way that it becomes standard pure gold."[72] The choice to develop the good—both by developing the practical and the potential theoretical intellects inherent in the human soul and the instruction that may be gained from revelation—or to fall into hell remains with the human, even though the cards may be stacked against that human by virtue of stellar and environmental conditions.

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[69] T 79, P 56. (I)
[70] T 34, P 27. (I)
[71] T 50, P 38. (I)

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[72] T 51, P 38. (I)

The Limits of Human Reasoning

At this point it will be interesting to dovetail Ṭūsī's discussion here with his discussion regarding the kinds of knowledge: (1) direct or axiomatic *(ḍarūrī);* (2) speculative *(naẓarī);* (3) instructive *(taᶜlīmī);* and (4) divinely revealed or "assisted" *(taᵓyīdī).* Direct or axiomatic knowledge is not dependent on the teachings of others; rather, it is knowledge acquired through the medium of the imagination, senses, or instinct. It depends only upon the human reasoning faculty *(fikr)* for its use. An example of such knowledge is the immediate recognition that "the whole is bigger than the part". We may understand this kind of knowledge to be the basic preserve of every human being of sound mind, held in common by all.

The second kind of knowledge, speculative or *naẓarī* knowledge, appears to be that knowledge which results from actively using one's powers of reflection. We may understand this to mean the kind of knowledge that, for example, philosophers or people who are given to thinking about their existence have, although Ṭūsī does not specifically say so.[73] This kind of thinking or knowledge rests on the act of reflection, whereby one progresses from thinking that one was not created to the knowledge that not only is one created, but that one is the object of actions or influence originating from someone else. These actions originating from someone else must come to an end in a final person *(shakhṣ)* who is the source of the effects/influences *(athār)* upon oneself. Further reflection will reveal that this absolute source of influence or emanation of energy is the active architect *(muᵓaththir-i ṣāniᶜ)*, who is the creator of the world. Then comes the realization that indeed

> the beginning of things perceptible to the senses, as well as the highest attributes *(ṣifāt-i ᶜalā)* can only deserve of belonging to Him, the All-High. All this, with everything that is related with the signs of the might of God

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[73] Ṭūsī's description brings Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān into mind, specifically with outlining the knowledge that comes about through ever-deepening reflection. A comparison would be noteworthy. As mentioned above, in the *Sayr va Sulūk* Ṭūsī includes both philosophers and theologians in this category.

> the All-High, and every discussion of the knowledge of these matters, can be achieved by intuition, one perception after the other, and in such knowledge there is no necessity of any one's teaching *(taᶜlīm)*.[74]

Speculative or *naẓarī* knowledge takes for its starting point axiomatic knowledge *(ḍarūrī)* that is known or grasped relatively immediately by the mind *(ᶜaql)* as truth about the mundane world. From this it goes on to establish truths that are not immediately perceptible, but become perceptible to the mind upon reflection. What is interesting for us here is that he appears to include in his progression toward the intuition of these truths those things that we would expect would be known to humans only through revelation. Although does not say so explicitly here, his intention is clearly to establish what Nāṣir-i Khusraw almost two centuries before him devoted an entire book to: the attempt to reconcile reason—or philosophy—with revelation. As humans engage in deep reflection, through their heightened speculation they will come to recognize that which is revealed by the *tanzīl*, that the world of creation contains the signs of the might of God, leading humans to the first testimony of faith, the *shahāda*, asserting belief in the lordship of God.[75]

If human beings can arrive at truths revealed by the prophets, then what need is there for revelation? Ṭūsī clarifies that although speculative thought *(naẓarī)* can come to some of the same conclusions as revelation, and for which no instruction is required, there are areas for which instruction *(taᶜlīm)* is necessary. A clue to the answer to this question is to be found in Ṭūsī's statement that the prophet "in the cycle of Origin *(kawn-i mabdaʾ)* bestows on souls the aptitude to acquire that form *(ṣūrat)* which is their ultimate perfection *(kamāl-i ghāyatī)*".[76] That is, since:

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[74] T 44, P 34. (I)

[75] Ṭūsī's description of the knowledge that can be realized through deep reflection is framed in terms that are shared by religious categories: the notion that there is an absolute source of influence or emanation, that something else is responsible for being, that there is a creator, or that attributes ultimately find their point of reference in God. However, it would be too simple to say that these realizations are self-evident in the *tanzīl*, or revelation; revelation itself provides a starting point that may lead theologians to come to the same conclusions. Although the practical outcome of both philosophical and religious reflection is to assert the lordship of God, as we have suggested here, it must be clarified that reflection is an integral part of both philosophy and theology. Whether it is Qur'ānic *āyāts* (verses) that provide the basis for reflection (for the theologian) or the *āyāts* (signs) that God provides in the world for those who will see (for the philosopher), the point is that reflection is a necessary prerequisite for knowledge of ultimate reality.

> the majority of people in this world are, in the first instance, veiled from the virtue of accepting the Divine Command and can only perceive what is connected with the senses, estimation and imagination, it became necessary by the providence of the Exalted for these divine illuminations, which are the absolute intelligibles *(maᶜqūlāt-i muṭlaq)* and pure [divine] supports *(taʾyīdāt-i maḥẓ)* to become perceivable by the senses, the estimation and the imagination, through prophets and their posterity and offspring, in accordance with: "Revelation is a stage of that degree." Human beings accepted these things as a result of [mankind's] closeness to the senses, estimation and imagination, and applied themselves to them. These principles and laws [govern] the [cohesive] order of particulars, from which universals are constituted. For example, the well-being of ordinary people in this world was achieved by [their] adherence to these orders and prohibitions, and the souls of the elite of the community were prepared to accept perfection through these means and intermediaries. Consequently they progressed from [righteous] activity to matters of knowledge, and from matters of knowledge to matters of the intellect *(az ᶜilmiyyāt bar ᶜaqliyyāt)*.[77]

The assistance of the prophet enables people who cannot reflect deeply with ease to understand that indeed, all things created are "proofs of him"[78] and "are the signs *(āthār)* of his omnipotence."[79] Ṭūsī's concern is to show that whether arrived at by way of speculative knowledge *(naẓarī)* or by way of the *tanzīl* or prophetic revelation, the first acknowledgement or testament is a necessary precondition to what follows, that is, knowledge acquired by the following means.

This is the third kind of knowledge: the instructional *(taᶜlīmī)*. It requires instruction from a Universal Teacher *(Muᶜallim-i Kullī)* and concerns what we might call correct understanding of the divine *(ᶜilm-i u taᶜāla:* knowledge of him, the Most High). This is necessary when speculative knowledge proceeds from the signs of his power—that affirm his Lordship—to attempt an understanding *(maᶜrifat)* of the signs of knowledge concerning him. Questions regarding these matters can only be answered "by the explanations *(taᶜlīm)* of such an exalted teacher."[80] Questions falling under this category would be those regarding the correct understanding—to avoid *tashbīh* (anthropomorphication) or *taᶜṭīl* (agnosticism)—of the oneness of God *(tawḥīd)*, or the explanation of the origin of things from the divine command in such a way that the return of things to their origin would not affect his substance by dint of their plurality. We have already seen an example of such *taᶜlīm* in Ṭūsī's explanations regarding the attributes of God. When the responses to such questions "are concerned with the form, separate expressions and other similar matters, in a systematic and gradual sequence and inner relations",[81] then this kind of knowledge is called instructional, *taᶜlīmī*. However, when the student is able to comprehend the implications or inner meanings *(bawātin)* and abstract ideas *(maᶜānī)* immediately, then this is called "assisted" *(taʾyīdī)* knowledge, which is the fourth kind of knowledge. It may be surmised that the difference between *taᶜlīmī* and *naẓarī* knowledge lies in that the knowledge communicated by the former cannot be readily accessed by the latter. Speculative knowledge does not need to take recourse to the *tanzīl*, whereas *taᶜlīmī* knowledge does.

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[76] T 119, P 82; B 197, BP 82. (B)
[77] T 116, P 80; B 195, BP 80. (B)
[78] T 92, P 64; B 178, BP 64. (KH)
[79] T 93, P 64; B 178, BP 64. (I) B. has "the effect of His Exalted power".

Prophetic Law and the Resurrection/Hereafter

What does Ṭūsī mean by the religious intellect of the Prophet *(ᶜaql-i sharᶜī-i nabawī)* and the resurrectional intellect *(ᶜaql-i qiyāmatī va ākhiratī)*, respectively? In his discussion on prophets and *imāms*, Ṭūsī points out that the relations among human beings are governed by the law of the prophets. Human beings differ with respect to their "receptivity to the lights of the illumination of the divine Command, just as material objects are variously and differently receptive to the physical light of the sun."[82] In order to understand this, we must first understand the notion of limits *(ḥadd[83]).* In keeping with the classical conception of the kingdoms of nature, held also by Ismāᶜīlī savants prior to his day, Ṭūsī sees wisdom in the divine arrangement of these kingdoms. That is, the mineral world has as its limit the world of plants, which has as its limit the world of animals. The world of animals finds its limit in human beings, who find their limit in the prophetic force *(quwwat-inabawī).*[84]

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[80] T 45, P 34. (I)
[81] T 45, P 35. (I)

The prophet is a human being, as is confirmed in Qurᵓān 41:5: "I am a man as you are." The import of this statement lies in its assertion that the prophet shares in common with other humans all that is connected with physical actions *(aᶜmāl-ijismānī)*[85] as well as all the elements of creatureliness *(khalqī),* "such as the constitution of the body, face, form, food, drink, clothing, marriage" and so forth from the point of view of sharing the same genus as other humans.[86] The difference between prophets and other humans lies, according to Ṭūsī, in the reception of inspiration, as highlighted in Qurᵓān 53: 3–4: "And he does not speak from lust. It is but an inspiration inspired."[87] Ordinarily, human beings are unable to accept the divine will immediately, since "they can only perceive what is connected with the senses, estimation and imagination".[88] The prophet, on the other hand, "sees with the sight of the soul *(naẓar-i nafs)* and not with the sight *(baṣīrat)* of the eyes."[89] However, being mortal, the descent of revelation through *waḥy* and *ilhām* (although both terms mean inspiration, we may here distinguish them as divine inspiration and intuition of the divine, respectively) still meets the resistance of the imagination *(khayāl),* and this is revealed in its ultimately taking on a material form. Thus, Ṭūsī views the very words of revelation, that is, of the Qurʾān as being veiled by this "interference of the imagination *(khayāl)*",[90] which then allows him to posit the view that the Qurʾān itself contains statements that can be understood both at face value and as symbolic. The symbolic meaning, however, can only be understood by one "whose soul has been illuminated by the light of truths *(ḥaqāʾiq)*."[91]

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[82] T 115, P 80; B 194, BP 79.
[83] Ṭūsī generally uses the term *nihāyat,* lit. "limit".
[84] T 119, P 82; B 196–197, BP 82.
[85] T 120, P 83; B 197, BP 83.
[86] T 123, P 84; B 199, BP 84. (I)
[87] T 120, 123, P 83, 84; B 197, 199, BP 83, 84.
[88] T 116, P 80; B 195, BP 80. (B)
[89] T 121, P 83; B 198, BP 83. (B)

Before we investigate the symbolic meaning contained in the revelation, we must turn our attention to the communication of God's will. In accordance with the classical Ismāʿīlī view that five prophets preceded Muḥammad, each of whom brought a divinely-inspired law or *sharīʿah*, Ṭūsī declares that when the time comes for a new founder of the *sharīʿah* to arise, then at that time the stellar formations

> assemble in such a way that a prophetic person appears who is the manifestation of the Universal Soul *(Nafs-i Kullī)*, capable of receiving divine inspiration; he is the bearer of the trust of the Revelation *(amānat-i wahy-i ilāhī)* and because of the sensory relationship which takes place between him and the community *(ummat)*, there will necessarily be give and take between the two.[92]

We have discussed earlier that Ṭūsī's view is that the divine command *(Amr,* or divine Word, *Kalima)*, the Universal Intellect *(ʿAql-i Kull)*, and the Universal Soul *(Nafs-i Kull)* are manifested in this world in human form. Just as on the cosmic plane the Universal Soul is the architect of the mundane world and the beings in it through the assistance it receives from the Universal Intellect, so too on the mundane plane the manifestation of the Universal

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[90] Ṭūsī may be drawing upon al-Fārābī's conception of prophecy as the expression of philosophic truths through the imagination of the prophet, thereby making the former accessible to people not lettered in philosophy, that is, the "common" people. However, Ṭūsī's use of the term "resistance" is interesting here for, as we shall see presently, he needs it to buttress his argument for the necessity of *taʿwīl*, interpretation. T 121, P 83; B 197, BP 83. (B) See also Davidson's summary of Ibn Sīnā's views on prophecy, and the role of the compositive imagination in it, in Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroës*, 116 ff., especially 121, where he notes, as does Ṭūsī, that "should a man's compositive imagination be sufficiently strong, it will generate visions representing events of interest to the man, even when the body is awake. Dreams or visions may reveal things exactly as they are or recast them into images that will have to be "interpreted" and "undergo exegesis" *(taʾawwala)*."

[91] T 121, P 83; B 197, BP 83. (B)

[92] T 120, P 82; B 197, BP 82. (B)

Soul, that is, the messenger–prophet, is the architect or founder of a religion and a law-giver.[93]

The prophet's position is likened to that of a ruler or a physician, who has to impose one rule over the people or give them one potion so as to bring them all under sound rules of citizenship or make them all healthy. Thus although there may be some who are good citizens or some who are perfectly healthy, from the point of view of his prophecy, the purpose of establishing a common law is to firmly root the principles of his teaching and religion.[94] This is because humanity "needs to unite *(ijtimāᶜ)* around righteousness *(ṣalaḥ)*, which is called religion *(millat)* and religious law *(sharīᶜat)*, for the sake of two things: mutual prevention *(tamānuᶜ)* and cooperation *(taᶜāwun)*."[95]

However, instruction in these matters, and the acceptance of the prophet as the ruler of the community cannot simply be from someone who is elected by other humans. Rather, the prophet should be someone who is assisted *(muʾayyad)* and appointed *(maʾmūr)* by divine wisdom.[96] Accordingly, the prophet is one who "receives his knowledge through Revelation and inspiration *(waḥy wa ilhām)* from spiritual beings *(rūḥāniyyāt)* and angels" which knowledge "flash(es) from the Universal Soul, which is the Preserved Tablet *(lawḥ-i maḥfūẓ)*, to his purified soul."[97] That is, his reception of this knowledge is not mediated by sense perception, even though it must be expressed through the mediation of perceptible mundane reality, as when his inspiration is expressed in words such as form the text of the Qurʾān. The prophet then organizes a community of believers so as to enable the dual possibility of discharging his duty *(adā)*, on the one hand, and of acceptance *(qabūl)* of that duty, on the other.[98] In this the paradigm of teacher–pupil is re-enacted: for the prophet is both pupil (of the spiritualities or *rūḥāniyyāt)* and teacher (to his followers); he both accepts and discharges. He is a teacher in that he transmits the knowledge he has received through revelation and inspiration "to his community in proportion to that which their minds are capable of [understanding]."[99] Likewise, it may be surmised, the community too is both pupil (of the prophet), and with progress, turns teacher (to other members).

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[93] T 122, P 84; B 198, BP 84.
[94] Ibid.
[95] T 118, P 81; B 196, BP 81. (B)
[96] T 118, P 81; B 196, BP 81.
[97] T 120, P 82; B 197, BP 82–83. (B)

What is the thrust of the prophet's teaching (and pupilship)? In Ṭūsī's formulation we once again see how knowledge is inextricably associated with being and salvation: "The manifestation of the Universal Soul is the prophet, who, in the cycle of Origin *(kawn-i mabdaʾ)* bestows on souls the aptitude to acquire that form which is their ultimate perfection *(kamāl-i ghāyatī)*."[100] We have already mentioned above that perfection consists of seeing through the realm of dissemblance to the realm of disclosure, that is, seeing things as they really are. It is significant to note that for Ṭūsī, actions lay the groundwork for the soul's control over matter. In order to establish a common standard of righteousness and ethically sound action, the religious law or *sharīʿah* constitutes a unifying basis. Prophets, through their assistance *(taʾyīdāt)*, make the absolute abstractions *(maʿqūlāt-i muṭlaq)* that constitute the divine illuminations perceptible to the human senses and comprehensible to human thought as a preliminary path toward the attainment of unmediated acceptance of the divine will.[101] Through the orders and prohibitions of the religious law, "the souls of the elite of the community ... progressed from [righteous] activity to matters of knowledge, and from matters of knowledge to matters of the intellect *(az ʿilmiyyāt bar ʿaqliyyāt)*."[102] In this respect the religious law sets the stage for the transmutation of the human form *(ṣūrat-i*

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[98] T 120, P 82; B 197, BP 82. This phrase remains untranslated by B., who simply says "there will necessarily be give and take between the two."
[99] T 120, P 82; B 197, BP 82. (B)
[100] T 119, P 82; B 197, BP 82. (B) I prefer realm to cycle for *kawn.*
[101] T 116, P 80; B 195, BP 80.
[102] T 117, P 80; B 195, BP 80. (B)

insānī) into a state of perfection. That is, the prophet's key function is to give human souls "the aptitude to acquire that form *(ṣūrat)* which is their ultimate perfection *(kamāl-i ghāyatī).*"[103]

Let us, for a moment, explore this notion of initial being. In his discussion on the origin and purpose of human beings, Ṭūsī sets himself to reply to three questions having to do with ultimate matters: (1) Where do humans come from?; (2) For what reason have they come to this world?; and (3) Where are they headed? His response to the first is that humans have come from the "world of the Divine Command *(amr-i ilāhī)* to the realm of illusory existence and dissemblance *(wujūd-i majāz wa mushābahat)* ... in which all creations are proofs of him."[104] The reason for which humans have come into this world is in order that they may advance "from this dissemblance of ordinary humans (lit. common creations) to the clear vision (lit. disclosure, *mubāyanat)* of the distinguished in the [world of] Command *(khāṣṣ-i amrī).*"[105] This is a process occurring ultimately in three stages, but from the point of view of the question, "For what reason have humans come to this world", the process is two-fold. In the first realm, *(kawn-i awwal)*, ordinary humans *(ᶜāmm-i khalqī)* make testimony *(shahādat)* to the relational *(iḍāfī)*. That is, by accepting Islam, they acknowledge that they are creatures who are created. This is the foundation, the basis of bringing into existence that form which will ultimately rise to perfection. Attention has already been drawn to the notion that in so doing, the human soul acknowleges its origin *(mabdaᵓ)* and recognizes that this is the source to which it must eventually return. The realm is acknowledged in the second profession ("and that Muḥammad is His apostle"): this is a realm in which the "proofs of his might *(dalāᵓil-i quwwat)* ... which are the effects/traces *(āthār)* of His knowledge *(ᶜilm)*, will lead to Himself." Ṭūsī continues:

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[103] T 119, P 82; B 197, BP 82. (B)
[104] T 92, P 64; B 178, BP 64. (KH)
[105] T 92, P 64B 178, BP 64. (KH)

> There, through the mediation of the manifestation *(maẓhar)* of the First Intellect *(ᶜAql)* in whom all proofs become one proof *(dalīl)*, all parables [or symbols, *mathālhā)* become one parable, the perception *(naẓar)* of the common people of [the world of] dissemblance becomes unified through the instruction *(taᶜlīm)* of the distinguished *(khāṣṣ)* among [the realm of] disclosure *(mubāyanat)*.[106]

What this means is that the *Ḥujjat*, who is the manifestation of the First Intellect, will provide those proofs and that teaching which will make known the truths concerning the realm of disclosure, in which knowledge of unity *(waḥdat)* is attained, whereby human perfection is actualized. In other words, through the proofs and the teaching provided by the *Ḥujjat*, the soul will be able to return to its origin. The *Ḥujjat* is described as one "who gives form *(ṣūrat)* to perfection."[107] The *Ḥujjats* are "those who know everything" without having to take instruction *(taᶜlīm)* or explanations; they are the ones discussed earlier whose knowledge is *taʾyīdī*, assisted. The *Ḥujjat* is a person "who knows everything without learning from anyone, i.e., who does not need any physical instruction *(taᶜlīm-i jismānī)* or acquisition and convincing *(iktisāb wa talqīn)*, and does not have to be taught by anyone, i.e. that knowledge unites with his mind from the emanations of the lights *(az fayḍ-i anwār)* of [divine] assistance *(taʾyīd)*."[108] Such a *Ḥujjat* is enjoined to teach others, whom we may simply call *dāᶜīs*[109] who, in turn, will teach others.

The real teacher of the *Ḥujjat*, however, is the manifestation of the highest Word *(Kalimaʾ-i aᶜlā)*:

> There is someone who is above learning or not learning, who is the lord of all this, the bestower of that recognition *(maᶜrifat)* through which the perfection of the intellect is attained. This is the manifestation of the Highest Word *(Kalima)*. And 'he is the giver *(wāhib)* of the recognition *(maᶜrifah)*

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[106] T 93, P 64; B 178–179, BP 64. (KH)

[107] T 119, P 82; B 197, BP 82. (I)

[108] T 143, P 97; B 211, BP 97. (B & KH)

[109] Note that in Ismāᶜīlī hierarchies different ranks apply, such as as those listed by Ṭūsī: *bāb-i bāṭin* (the gateway to the esoteric, the inner), *zabān-i ᶜilm* (the tongue or language of knowledge), *dast-i qudrat* (the hand of might), and so forth; see T 143, P 96–97; B 210–211; also T 144–145, P 98; B 211–212.

> which constitutes the perfection of the *ᶜAql'*. The purpose of his activity *(kār)* is [to facilitate] all to recognize him and make him their Friend, and enter into his party, group and community. This is the *Imām*, upon whose mention be peace.[110]

Ṭūsī likens the position of the *Ḥujjat* with respect to the *Imām*—who is the person meant by "the manifestation of the highest word"—to the position of the moon with respect to the sun. The moon is by itself dark; however, it is illuminated by the sun, and in its absence acts as the sun's lieutenant. Similarly, "the soul of the supreme *Ḥujjat*, which by itself knows nothing and is nothing, [becomes] lit by the effusion of the illuminations of the *Imām's* assistance *(lamaᶜāt-i anwār-i taʾyīd)*."[111] What is the mandate of the *Ḥujjat?* To spread information concerning the *imām*, and to establish the truth of the *imāmate* by offering "arguments and proofs that no impartial and intelligent person can deny." He actualizes the potential of those souls who are prepared to accept the forms of perfection by bestowing those forms of perfection as well as by his actual assistance *(adāʾ-i fiᶜlī kih kunad)*.[112]

One example that Ṭūsī furnishes[113] of how the truth, that is, necessity, of the *imāmate* is established is through the notion of the "immoveable axis". It is an axiomatic truth that wherever there is change, there must also be a centre that does not itself move. This is illustrated in the notion of a circle: in order to draw the circle, there must be a central point which is the focal point around which the circumference is drawn. This notion also depends on the axiomatic truth that everything rotating or swaying requires a cause that rotates or sways it. This cause, in relation to that which is rotating or swaying, must itself be stable and perfect. The *imām* is such a central axis. Although prophets and *ḥujjats* move, that is, are found first in this people and then in another, the *imāms* "never change: 'We are an eternal people.'"[114] This is so because it is necessary that there should always be, amidst created beings, someone who is perfect *(kāmil).* In order to bring the deficient to perfection, he must be perfect himself, out of inner necessity, that is, he must not need any one's help in order to be perfect himself.[115] It may be noted here that the *Imām*, as the manifestation of the divine Word, stands to the *Ḥujjat* as the divine Word stands to the Universal Intellect, that is, both as the source of the latter's creative power and above its reach. Thus, we can see that the second affirmation or testimony referred by Ṭūsī is the recognition of the *imām* and the *imāmate*, bearing in mind that the acceptance of Islam must occur prior to this stage. In other words, the *ḥujjat* has to impart the knowledge of those distinguished ones in the realm of disclosure[116] to those who are able to receive this instruction, that is, those who are already Muslims and whose souls the prophet has already prepared.

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[110] T 143, P 97; B 211, BP 97. (KH)

[111] T 144, P 97; B 211, BP 97. (B)

[112] T 144, P 97; B 211, BP 97.

[113] The example is attributed to Ḥasan II, titled ᶜalā dhikrihi as-salām (1126 CE–1166 CE), Ismāᶜīlī *Imām* during the Alamūt period.

The matter, however, is not as simple as all that. For the *Imām* enlightens those souls prepared to accept the perfection of the divine Command by commanding the illuminations of the divine Command to shine upon them. These illuminations take the form of the recognition *(maᶜrifat)*, love, obedience and worship *(ᶜibādat)* of those who are distinguished in reality.[117] In his role as catalyst, he utilizes the hermeneutic of *taʾwīl,* symbolic interpretation, to turn "those ideas which are based on the perception of the senses, speculation and reflection" into intelligibles known with certitude *(ᶜayn-i maᶜqūlāt)* and unfiltrated [divine] guidance *(maḥḍ-i taʾyīdāt).*[118] Thus, the *Imām* is able through the hermeneutic of *taʾwīl* to turn what are parables in the world of illusion into the truths perceived in the world of realities. In this respect, if we may return to our earlier mention of the four kinds of intellect, that is, the intellect connected with the *hayūlā (ᶜaql-i hayūlānī);* the "angelic" intellect *(ᶜaql-i malakī);* the actual intellect *(ᶜaql-i ba-fiᶜl),* and the acquired intellect *(ᶜaql-imustafād),* then it would appear that the acquired intellect is that belonging to the *Ḥujjat,* whose ultimate source of knowledge is the *Imām.* We suggest this reading in view of the fact that the acquired intellect still falls within the realm of created entities, whereas the *Imām,* as the manifestation of the divine Word, does not. The acquired intellect is the power that "introduces the connection ... between what had come from the potential into the actual, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, that reason which does that activation."[119] The significance of this lies, as mentioned earlier, in the Aristotelian dictum that only that which is actual itself can render something from the state of potentiality into the state of actuality. This is reflected in Ṭūsī's words: "in every eventuality there must exist a perfect man among God's creatures in order to perfect those who are not perfect ... through whose instruction perfection is reached."[120] In other words, although it is the *Ḥujjat* that fulfils this function, it must be borne in mind that the *Ḥujjat's* knowledge comes from the *Imām* (as the manifestation of the divine command), who brings the souls of the *ḥujjats* into actuality. This the *Imām* does both through his teaching, that is, "interpretation" of the true import *(taʾwīl)* of the *tanzīl,* the revelation, and through his (divine) assistance *(taʾyīd).*

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[114] T 132, P 90; B 204, BP 91. (I)
[115] Ibid.
[116] T 93, P 64; B 178–179, BP 64.
[117] T 117, P 80; B 195, BP 80.
[118] T 117, P 80; B 195, BP 80. (KH)

The notions of *taʾwīl* and *taʾyīd* are thus fundamental to the understanding of the function of the *imāmate* in enabling the human soul to progress from the realm of dissemblance to the realm of disclosure, from the mundane world to the world of the hereafter and paradise; indeed, to the world of humanity's true origin. It was noted earlier that Ṭūsī clearly understands the source of prophetic inspiration to be the Universal Soul, which communicates spiritual mysteries directly to the prophet's heart: the prophet sees not with the physical sight, but with the sight *(naẓar)* of the soul *(nafs)*. However, Ṭūsī claims that being human, the prophet's reception of divine mysteries is always mediated by the "interference" of his *khayāl*, imagination, and in some instances the preponderance of this interference will require "those who know" to interprete the true import of the received message. Further, we must note that for the distinguished Muslim philosopher al-Fārābī (known in the West as Alfarabi) (d. 950 CE), the prophet's facility with the faculty of imagination *(khayāl)* was precisely what enabled the prophet to render divine truths—which could also be accessed through the rational faculty through the study and application of philosophy—into a form that the common, ordinary people, who had no such training in philosophy, could digest. That is, the prophet, through his construction of parables and sense-perceptible images through the use of his divinely-inspired imagination, played a key role in making divine truths accessible to all, trained or not. A much closer predecessor, Ibn Sīnā, may have detailed aspects of the role of the imagination in prophecy that may be more in keeping with Ṭūsī's own conceptions and have been noted in the relevant notes above.

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[119] T 30, P 25. (I)
[120] T 132, P 90; B 204-205, BP 90. (B)

Ṭūsī views the prophet's imagination as double-edged. On the one hand, it enables the crystallization of the divine truths flashed upon his soul and hence, renders these truths perceptible to the ordinary human being. At the same time, the prophet's imagination, which he sees as a form of "interference" *(muᶜāraḍa)*, acts as a veil to those very truths.[121] Ṭūsī's intent is not to cast any doubt on the veracity of the prophet's knowledge. His intent is rather to show that the crystallization of the realities that the prophet knows through his illumined soul into material form is like a dream, a spiritual dream that may need interpretation. The immediate example Ṭūsī cites is the verse "By the snorting chargers!" (Qurᵓān 100:1) that differs greatly in its literal and allegorical meanings.[122] Although he does not offer an explanation of this verse's allegorical meaning here, nonetheless, his point is clear. Commentators on the Qurʾān have long pointed out that there are verses in the Qurʾān that are clear or unambiguous; there are other verses that are both clear and ambiguous, and there are other verses that are entirely ambiguous. Indeed, says Ṭūsī, there is a *taʾwīl* for all the verses of the Qurʾān, and the Qurʾān is rendered even more miraculous in its hidden aspects—accessible through *taʾwīl*—than it already is in its formal, explicit aspects.[123] He cites the Qurʾānic verse that has long been called upon by the Shīᶜīs as legitimate proof that the *imāms* are meant in the phrase "those well-grounded in knowledge" (Qurʾān 3:5): "But none knows its [the Qurʾān's] *taʾwīl* [interpretation] save God, and those well-grounded in knowledge."[124] Further, according to Ṭūsī, the prophet's role was to firmly establish the commandments of the "external" or formal religion, and it is only after this is done that "the meaning and reality of those injunctions [of the religious law], which is are the specificities of clear disclosure *(khuṣūṣ-i mubāyanat)*, could be introduced."[125]

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[121] T 121, P 83; B 197, BP 83.
[122] T 121, P 83; B 197–198, BP 83.

In the Ismāᶜīlī concept of history as articulated by Ṭūsī, Muḥammad is viewed as the final prophet, final because he brings the establishment of the religious law begun with Adam to completion.[126] He also introduces the period *(dawr)* of the *Qiyāmah*, or resurrection. The period of *Qiyāmah* is distinguished through the reign of the *imāms.*[127] In appointing ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib as his *waṣī*, or the executor of his will, the prophet joined his law *(sharīᶜah)* with the *Qiyāmah.*[128] The *waṣī,* or executor, of the prophet's will—and there has been a *waṣī* for each of the six major prophets, from Adam to Muḥammad—is one "in whom the light of Imamat was firmly established"[129] and to whom prophetic knowledge *(ᶜilm-i*

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[123] T 169, P 115; B 228, BP 115.
[124] Qurʾān 3:7. Non-Shīᶜī compilers of the Qurʾān end the verse after the word "God".
[125] T 170, P 116; B 228, BP 116. (B)
[126] T 152, P 103; B 216, BP 102.
[127] T 154, P 104; B 218, BP 105.
[128] T 155, P 105; B 219, BP 105.
[129] T 149, P 101; B 215, BP 101. (I)

nubuwwah) was temporarily entrusted. The role of the *imāms* in general is to preserve the systems of law given by the prophets.[130] While the prophets previous to Muḥammad prophesied both the coming of another prophet and the advent of the *Qāʾim* of the Resurrection, Muḥammad was both the last prophet and the heralder of the *Qāʾim* and the Resurrection.[131]

In appearance, the aim of each succeeding prophet is to bring the religious law of previous prophets to perfection, not to abrogate it.[132] However, argues Ṭūsī, in order to bring something into the form that it is ultimately intended to be, the previous form must be abrogated. Thus, in order for a human being to emerge out of the sperm, it has to pass through the stages of clotted blood, embryo, flesh and bones, and it must annul these previous forms as it moves and develops into the ultimately intended form. Muḥammad can be understood as bringing religion from the state analogous to the spermal form—in which Adam introduced it—to the form analogous to that of a human being.[133] However, the ultimate form of the human being is that "resurrectional intellect" through which it is able to discern the realm of disclosure *(kawn-i mubāyanat)*.[134] In order to achieve this, during the period of the *Qiyāmah*, the *imāms* may manifest the truth through stages *(marātib)*, decreeing different things at different times. In each of these instances the welfare of humankind depends on what he decrees, despite appearances to the contrary.[135]

Taʾwīl

In order to understand the full import of *taʾwīl*, loosely translated as symbolic interpretation, some preliminaries must first be noted. In the Ismāʿīlī view, here articulated by Ṭūsī, although there are precedents, Adam is not considered to be the first human; rather, he is considered to be the initiator of a new phase in the history of humanity. This new phase, or *dawr* ("period") differs from the previous period in the constitution of the people: in type and form, language, ideas, powers, ways of living, actions and religion.[136] In this cyclical view of history, the Ismāᶜīlī view is that at the beginning of each new period, a new law *(sharīᶜah)* is introduced, and this is the time when the esoteric truths of the revelation or law are held in abeyance. This era, when a new law is introduced, is called the *dawr-i ṣatr*, the period of occultation or concealment. At the proper time, which is during the reign of the *Qāʾim* or "resurrector" of the period, the inner meanings or truths *(ḥaqāʾiq)* of the *sharīᶜah* are revealed, and this era within the larger period is termed the *Qiyāmah*, or resurrection. It is the *Qāʾim's* prerogative to decide the point at which the full "unveiling" *(kashf)* of divine mysteries will take place, and in the meantime, to appoint the periods during which the law will dominate. Thus, in the Ismāᶜīlī view, Adam was the initiator of a new phase or *dawr*; in his period, six prophets were to appear with laws, including Adam: Noah (Nūḥ), Abraham (Ibrāhīm), Moses (Mūsā), Jesus (ᶜĪsā) and Mohammed (Muḥammad). Muḥammad, as final prophet, was both the completer or "seal' of the periods of religious law *(adwār-i sharāʾiᶜ)* and the opener of the period *(dawr)* of Resurrection *(Qiyāmah)*.[137] Accordingly, he appointed ᶜAlī as his *waṣī* or executor, as commanded in the Qurʾān, 5:71: "O Prophet! Convey that message and if you do not convey [it] you are not a prophet."[138] In Ṭūsī's view, although ᶜAlī introduced the (inner) explanation or significance *(mubāyanat)* of the *tanzīl*, the exoteric revelation, only companions such as Salmān followed this, while most of the Muslims "consolidated in favour of the literal prescriptions of law *(aḥkām-i ẓāhir-i sharᶜ)*",[139] leaving ᶜAlī no choice but to declare that the *Qiyāmah* would be would be announced by one among his descendants.[140] The *Qiyāmah* or resurrection is said to be announced by the first "blowing of the trumpet", which, according to Ṭūsī, occurred during the *imāmate* of Mustanṣir bi'l-lāh, by someone whom Ṭūsī calls Ḥaḍrat Sayyid-nā, by whom he probably means Ḥasan bin Sabbah. At this time he (Sayyid-nā) based the *daᶜwat* on the principle that "the truth in each era is what the Bearer of the Truth *(Muḥiqq)* of the time [that is, the *Imām]*—on whose mention be peace—says, not that which has been heard from a past *Muḥiqq*."[141] The final phase, the rule of the *Qāᵓim* and its concomitant belief in *Qiyāmah,* is the one in which humans were thought to be at Ṭūsī's time. Based on the belief that this final phase would be introduced by the second "blowing of the trumpet", which was to occur forty years after the first blowing of the trumpet, it was held that the *Qāᵓim* would begin his rule. This occurred with the advent of the *Imām* (Ḥasan II) titled *ᶜalā dhikri-hi al-salām* (lit. "on whose mention be peace"), who ordered the manifestation of [the true] meaning *(ẓuhūr-i maᶜnawī)*.[142] At this time, the "*daᶜwat* of the Resurrection, which is the perfection of all religions and sects, will prevail over all religious laws."[143] Given the meaning Ṭūsī has thus far ascribed to the *Qaᵓim*, that he will make the esoteric meanings of the law freely available, that is, unveil the divine mysteries, it is likely that what Ṭūsī meant by this statement is that the esoteric meaning of the law will prevail over the outward meaning:

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[130] T 151, P 102; B 216, BP 102.
[131] T 153, P 103; B 217, BP 103.
[132] T 153, P 103; B 217, BP 103.
[133] T 152, P 103; B 217, BP 103–104.
[134] T 85, P 59; B 174, BP 59.
[135] T 138, P 94; B 208, BP 93–94.

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[136] T 67, P 49.

[137] T 152, P 102; B 216, BP 102.

[138] Qurʾān 5:70. T 155, P 105; B 219, BP 105. (B with slight modifications)

[139] T 171, P 116; B 229, BP 116. (KH)

> All the verses of the Qurᵓān—from the opening of the Book to its end—each one is significative *(taᵓwīlī)* of which these words are [but] traces *(athar)* of those explanations *(bayān)* that are commanded, by which the people of truth *(ahl-i ḥaqq)* and intelligence *(khirad)* should know that the Qurᵓān is beyond this literal revelation *(ẓāhir-i tanzīl)*, and [its] meaning and purpose is something else which it is necessary to seek. It is by dint of *taᵓwīl* that the Qurᵓān is a miracle, and not from the point of view solely of what has been brought down *(tanzīl)* (that is, the letter of the Revelation). Further, the *taᵓwīl* of the Qurᵓān is not known to anyone save God and

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[140] T 172, P 118; B 230, BP 117–118.
[141] T 174, P 118; B 231, BP 118. (KH)
[142] T 175, P 119; B 232, BP 119. B. translates this as "manifested himself spiritually", which is at odds given the occurrence of the verb: *bifarmūd* (decreed, ordered, commanded).
[143] T 172, P 119; B 230, BP 118. (KH)

> those well-versed in knowledge *(rāsikhān dar ᶜilm)*, as is said in a verse (3:5): "But none knows its interpretation except God and those well-grounded in knowledge."[144]

If the *taʾwīl* is concerned with unveiling the verities signified by the literal revelation, the issues Ṭūsī is preoccupied with give us an indication as to what some of those verities might be. These would include unveiling the truth concerning divine unity *(waḥdat);* the truth concerning the origin and the return *(mabdaᶜ wa maᶜād);* the truth concerning the *Imām* as the manifestation of the divine Word *(Kalimah)* and hence as beyond relationality, on the one hand, and as the living proof of God, on the other, and the position of the *Imām* as the prime source of *taʾwīl.* As mentioned previously, the "resurrectional reason", which is the ultimate form of the human being, is attained through the gradual manifestation of the truth and thereby, enabling entrance into the realm of disclosure *(kawn-imubāyanat)*.

The *imāms* provide assistance through symbolic interpretation *(taʾwīl)* of the law *(sharīᶜah)* brought by the prophet. This knowledge is communicated to the believers through the agency of the *ḥujjat.* As Ṭūsī notes:

> The expressions of the revelation *(ᶜibārāt-i tanzīlī)* are adjusted to the realm of dissemblance, are suited to its plurality and the nature of hell. The meaning revealed by symbolic interpretation *(maᶜnī-y-i taʾwīlī)* belongs to the realm of disclosure, and is suited to the (profession of) oneness *(waḥdat)*, and the nature of paradise. ... Whoever from the realm of dissembling arrives in the realm of disclosure, inquires into the real meaning of the expressions in the revelation *(ᶜibārāt-i tanzīlī)*, and acquires such knowledge, becomes a denizen of paradise.[145]

Through *taʾwīl,* then, the inner or real meaning of the revelation is revealed. The *taʾwīl* cannot be revealed to those who do not have a prior intellectual understanding of the *imāmate* and the function of the *imām*. This is essential to understanding why the *imām* is not bound to act according to the religious law, "for truth follows the Imam and the Imam does not follow the truth, because he is the Lord of the truth *(khudāwand-i ḥaqq)*."[146] Such persons who expect the *Imām* to act according to the dictates of the *sharīᶜah* are likely to "become mad, and may regard these [explanations] as some of the most unlawful things."[147] However, those who do have an understanding of the role and function of the *imāmate* and the *imām*, recognize that "the *Imām* acts in a way beyond the comprehension of creatures."[148] It is only the believer who:

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[144] T 169, P 115; B 228, BP 115. (KH)
[145] T 54, P 40–41; B 165, BP 40–41. (I, with minor modifications)

> will recognize him with the light of his innate nature *(nūr-i fitrat)* and will know ... that the Imam is the one who is legitimate in his own essence ... truthful people by accepting that truth, which is his emanation *(fayḍ)* and effect *(athar)*, will become the followers of truth. When he deems false something the creatures of this world consider to be true, they recognize it to be false, and, when he deems true something they consider to be false, they recognize it to be true. ... By following these principles one reaches the highest of the high *(maqām-i maqarr)* which is the dwelling place of the foremost ones *(sābiqān)*.[149]

We have illustrated examples of *ta᾿wīl*—and by extension, *taᶜlīm*—above in discussions of how the attributes of God are to be conceived and what paradise and hell really mean. As a further illustration, we may turn to some aspects of Ṭūsī's account of the story of Adam in the Qur᾿ān. Adam is fashioned by God from earth and clay; He asks the angels to bow down to him, and they initially protested, to which God replies, "I know what ye do not". They then obeyed, all save Satan or Iblīs, who claims that he is a being of fire, while Adam is merely one of clay. Iblīs then tempts the couple, Adam and Eve, to eat of the forbidden tree, and for their disobedience, they are commissioned to the earth. However, this occurs only after they have repented, and been forgiven, and God promises them that they will return to a paradise never to fall out of it again.[150]

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[146] T 141, P 96; B 210, BP 96. (B)
[147] T 141, P 95; B 209, BP 95. (I)
[148] T 141, P 95; B 209, BP 95. (I)
[149] T 141–142, P 95–96; B 209–210, B 95–96. (B)
[150] T 63–64, P 46–47.

This is a primordial myth or account that will be understood at face value by those "whose sagacity and insight does not go beyond the matters of this realm of dissemblance."[151] However, while those whose perception *(naẓar-i baṣīrat)* extends from the realm of dissemblance to the realm of disclosure *(mubāyanat)* affirm this account exoterically *(bi-ḥukm-i ẓāhir)* and according to the revelation *(tanzīl)*, they know that esoterically *(bi-ḥukm-i bāṭin)*, and according to *taʾwīl*, each of these secrets and indications establish truths and meanings.[152]

Thus, the true interpretation of the story of Adam and Iblīs according to *taʾwīl* is that just prior to Adam's advent, the *Qāʾim*—or revealer of the esoteric truths—of the previous period had shut the door of the activity revealing the necessary mysteries—the *daʿwah*—of that period's *Qiyāmah.* Adam was detailed to lay the foundation of the practice of the new *sharīʿah.* However, the disciples of the previous period, that is, the angels, found it difficult to swallow the formal prescriptions of the law after they had been exposed, for so long, to the hidden truths and divine mysteries, and protested, only to be informed that they did not know all, and so they submitted. Iblīs, a teacher in the old *daʿwah*, refused to accept the new formal prescriptions of the law. In seeing himself as "a being of fire", that is, one who had access to "assisted" *(taʾyīdī)* knowledge, and Adam as "a being of earth and water", that is one whose knowledge was speculative *(naẓarī)* and instructional *(taʿlīmī)*, he refused to submit.

The prohibition to eat of the tree in paradise was in reality a prohibition to teach the esoteric truths until the proper time. However, Iblīs approached Adam and succeeded in convincing the inexperienced Adam to reveal the inner meaning, whom Ṭūsī says is exemplified by Eve, who knew "the esoteric laws and inner meanings *(aḥkām-i bāṭin wa maʿānī)*."[153]

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[151] T 64, P 47. (I)
[152] T 64, P 47. [Paraphrased by KH]
[153] T 70, P 50–51. (I)

Having recognized their error, they repented, and were finally forgiven and enabled to return to the truth. The paradise from which they fell, then, must be understood in the context that truth has a beginning, and an end, and they fell from the paradise of the beginning of the Truth, and after their repentance, into the paradise of the end of the Truth. What this means is that initially, truth is marked by a state in which the false may resemble it, but one has not yet developed the sight to be able to distinguish the true from the false. As it grows stronger, truth ends in the ability to clearly distinguish truth from falsehood, to the extent that in the end falsehood cannot exist where there is truth.[154]

Above we have described only the bare bones of a *taʾwīlī* or symbolic exegesis. The point of engaging in this exercise was simply to show how, for Ṭūsī, knowledge plays a fundamental and cumulative role in the development of the soul. It illustrates how, for Ṭūsī, the formalistic interpretation of the scripture, in this case the Qurʾān, is not in itself a sufficient guide to understanding the mysteries of spirituality. Rather, true spirituality or perception of the truth must be based on sound intellectual development, and *taʾwīl*-type interpretations must build further on these. That is, first the initiate must be a Muslim in the outward sense. Through the development of his intellect *(naẓarī* or speculative knowledge), he may then be able to accept the proofs of the role and function of the *imāmate* and, hence, the *imām*. Only then will the *taʾwīl*-type interpretations make any sense. This investigation lays bare the key role played by the intellect, both for Ṭūsī and for the Ismāʿīlī school up to his time. The importance of the intellect lay in buttressing their ideological position. At the same time, it advanced Ṭūsī's view that the prophet was different from other humans in his capacity to be inspired by visions originating from the world of reality, which could only be truly interpreted by the *imām* as the manifestation of the source of truth *(ḥaqq)*. The objective, in both cases, is to enable the human to achieve that form *(ṣūrat)* which will persist in the hereafter, paradise, or the world of reality. Regarding the principles underlying *ta³wīl*, Ṭūsī makes the rather opaque statement that at the origination of the *Qiyāmat*:

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[154] T 70–71, P 50–51.

> all that was creaturely was made to relate to the Command, and all that was corporeal was made to relate to the spiritual, and all pertained to action was made to relate to knowledge, and all that was relational *(iḍāfī)* was made to relate to the truth, and for each of these the companions of symbolic interpretation *(aṣḥāb-i ta³wīl)* assigned a meaning and veridical account, both summarily and in detail *(ba jaml wa tafṣīl).*[155]

It must be surmised that Ṭūsī's meaning is that, for example, something that appears to relate to action must, in fact, according to *ta³wīl*, be viewed as having an inner aspect that points to a certain kind of knowledge. To illustrate, he states:

> First, *shahādat*, the profession of faith, which means to recognize God. Secondly, *ṭahārat*, ritual ablutions, means that one has to dissociate himself from established ancient customs and religious rules. The third, *namāz*, congregational prayer, means that one must always preach the recognition of God. The fourth is *rūza*, fasting, which means to converse with the followers of untruth, using precautionary dissembling *(taqiyya)*. One who always observes this rule is similar to one who is continuously fasting. The sixth, *ḥajj*, means that one has to give up (the attachment to) this perishable abode, and seek for the eternal abode. The seventh, *jihād*, waging war for a religious cause, means that one must annihilate himself (i.e., his individuality) in the substance of God.[156]

Nowhere does Ṭūsī indicate that these religious duties must not be observed. Rather, they must be observed with the clear mindfulness of their true purport; that is, their symbolic meanings must be kept to the fore. However, as will be seen below, even *ta³wīl* is to be seen as a preparatory stage in guiding the human soul to knowledge of the divine.

In his discussion on the return of the soul to the "realm of return" *(kawn-i maᶜād)*, Ṭūsī remarks that this realm is the place "where neither the perception of the generality of creatures *(naẓari ᶜāmm-i khalqī)*, nor the perception of the distinguished in [the world of] the Command will guide [one] to God, where He alone is the guide to Himself."[157] In other words, neither the deep reflections (or first profession based on the *tanzīl* alone), nor the teachings *(taʾlīm)* of the *ḥujjats* and the *dāʿīs*—leading to the second profession, that the *Imām* is the manifestation of the divine command—will be sufficient guides to God. Ṭūsī sounds perfectly Ṣūfī-like when he quotes a poet: "By Thyself have I known Thee, Thou hast led me to Thyself, and if not for Thee, I would not be able to know Thee."[158] He does not elaborate any further than to say:

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[155] T 156, P 105–106. (KH)
[156] T 156, P 106. (I)

> The fourth [kind of knowledge of the *imām]* is the recognition *(maʿrifat)* of the substance *(dhāt)* of the *Imām* through the reality of his attributes *(ḥaqīqat-i ṣifāt-i ū)*. This [kind of] recognition [may be attained] through purification and sanctification *(tanzīh wa taqdīs)*, [and is] completely independent of other [kinds of] recognition. Here, even holy souls and illuminated intellects are powerless to look directly at the face of the sun of this [kind of] recognition. "[Before Him] mature minds are perplexed, eyesight is blinded, speculation is nullified, knowledge is defeated, sacred souls have perished, and illuminated minds are brought to nought".[159]

At this juncture we may make two observations: that for Ṭūsī, human perfection is impossible without knowledge. There are many stages of knowledge, including that attained through speculative thought *(naẓarī)*, further developed through the (divine) knowledge that is taught *(taʿlīmī)* and that given through direct divine assistance *(taʾyīdī)*. Having achieved this, humans may progress from the realm of dissemblance to the realm of disclosure. Further than that, knowledge of God—or of the manifestation of his Will and Command—remains a divine mystery, to which he alone is the guide, and of which we cannot speak, and which is beyond the abilities of our knowledge to comprehend.

In his discourse on speech, audition and silence, Ṭūsī points out that since everything in this world has matter *(mādda)* and form *(ṣūrat)*, it must be recognized that the same pertains to speech. Breath is the matter for which separate letters are the form. Separate letters are the matter for which joined letters are the form. Joined letters are the matter for which words are the form, and so forth such that words are the matter for which the complete sentence is the form. In this respect, Ṭūsī remarks:

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[157] T 92, P 64; B 178, BP 64. (KH)
[158] Quoted on T 93, P 64; B 179, BP 64. (I)
[159] T 137, P 93; B 207–208, BP 93. (I, B, & KH)

> The purpose of each thing is its ultimate perfection *(kamāl-i ghāyat)*; and the ultimate perfection of sound is guidance *(hidāyat)*, and the ultimate perfection of guidance *(kamāl-i ghāyat-i hidāyat)* is the actualization of the soul from its state of potentiality through the removal of obstacles and veils. ... [Thus] the real speaker is he whose speech *(sukhan)* is universal conveyance *(adāᵓ-i kullī)*, by accepting which imperfect souls move from the domain of deficiency to the limit of perfection.[160]

Ṭūsī mentions in this regard that one's speech *(qawl)* is "the manifestation of the ideas of (one's) thought *(fikr)* *(maẓhar-i maᶜnī-y-i ū)*."[161] This calls to mind the entity whose idea—since speech is a manifestation of that idea—is a complete action, who is, as we have seen above, the Universal Intellect, brought into existence by the divine Word, and whose thought is synonymous with its action. This hypostasis is manifested on the phenomenal plane in the person of the *Ḥujjah*, who derives his knowledge from the *Imām*.

Hearing *(shinwāᶜī)*, according to Ṭūsī, finds its perfection in the person of the *Ḥujjah*, who is able to understand what he hears without exaggerating or diminshing the import intended, and who is able to communicate equally clearly according to the level of the listener. Indeed, the *Ḥujjat's* speaking, hearing and silence all have the same meaning, since he "is the absolute perfector".[162] The *Imām*, however, "is exalted above, and purified from *(munazzih)*, all these. He gave and gives speech to those who speak, hearing to those who listen, and silence to those who are silent."[163] With respect to the *Imām*, who is above speech and silence, the *Ḥujjat* is in the position of *gūyā-y-i muṭlaq* (absolute or pure speaker), out of recognition and submission to him. With respect to those who are lower in stature to the *Ḥujjat*, the *Ḥujjat* is *khāmūsh-i muṭlaq* (absolute or pure silence), since through the power of divine assistance *(ba quwwat-i ta'yīd)* he holds in his hands "the clue to relative things and to the realities behind relative things *(iḍāfāt wa ḥaqā'iq-i iḍāfāt)* through the assistance of what is above him".[164] This is similar to the position of the Universal Intellect, whose recognition of and submission to the divine Word results in its original conception, on the one hand, and who forms both the origin and return of everything in existence and in whom there is no multiplicity as all things are one thing in it. At the same time, the thought *(taṣawwur)* of the Intellect brings the human into existence and provides it the means to attain its perfection; so, too, the *Ḥujjat's* speech "guides the seekers on the way of truth along the path to perfection and the Return".[165] And the *Ḥujjat's* silence stems from his acknowledgement of his relation with what is above him, "who is purified from speaking and silence, and he [the *Ḥujjat]* has attained knowledge and has submitted through unification with what is above him by annihilation of his own essence."[166]

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[160] T 146–147, P 99; B 213, BP 99. (B) *adāᵓ-i kullī* may be rendered as "wholly fulfilled" in the sense of fulfilling a prophecy, that is, bringing something to realization.
[161] T 147, P 99; B 213, BP 99.
[162] T 147, P 99; B 214, BP 99. (B)
[163] T 147, P 99–100; B 214, BP 99–100. (B)

The point Ṭūsī is trying to make here is to attest to the exalted nature of the *Imām*, which is such that the *Ḥūjjat*, when he looks to the *Imām*, recognizes and submits *(ma'rifat wa taslīm ḥāsil)* to him out of the acknowledgement that he, the *Ḥujjat*, himself has annihilated his substance *(ba 'adam-i dhāt-i khūd)*.[167] This recognition and submission itself becomes the path through which the divine mystery can be pierced, for the mystery cannot be known (hence the silence) but can be recognized and submitted to (hence the speech aimed at those below him).

What we have seen thus far is that Ṭūsī's resolution of the question regarding how we may come to have knowledge of God hangs on his notion of the *imām* and the *imāmate*. In keeping with the strict monotheism of Islam, he must assert that God is not in any way related to creaturely existence or knowledge. Yet, in order not to render him so removed a figure from religious conception that even the notions of creatorship and might lose all its force, he advances the view that we must symbolically understand God's divine command, the *Amr*, or his word, the *Kalimah* as the locus of his manifestation for the purposes of creation and might. In our mundane world, which is the context within which revelation takes place, we must come to understand that while God is beyond both being and non-being, and knowledge, nonetheless, as the fulcrum around which the created world revolves and as the axis which gives stability to all that exists, he is manifest in the person of the *imām*, in an enduring institution, the institution of the *imāmate*. Just as in the larger scheme the divine Word or Command is that which is responsible for the being, knowledge and perfection of the Universal Intellect, whence all things come, so, too, in the mundane world, the *imām* is responsible for the being, knowledge and perfection of all of creation. Questions then necessarily arise:

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[164] T 148–149, P 100; B 214, BP 100. (B)
[165] T 149, P 100; B 214, BP 100.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.

(1) in taking on manifestation, in taking on a human form, is not the real essence of the *imām*, which Ṭūsī clearly identifies as being on the same level as the *Amr* or *Kalimah*, that is, the closest we can speak of God, thereby necessarily compromised?

(2) When the *imām's* true substance or *dhāt*, and the true nature of his attributes, are considered by Ṭūsī to be unattainable by either the senses or the intellect,[168] then is not Ṭūsī committing an act of polytheism, attributing to the *imām* what is rightly God's?

(3) At the same time, when the *imām* appears in human form, if he is truly the manifestation of the divine word, that is, manifestation of the divine-insofar-as-we-may-speak-of-him, then is that not severely limiting God's divinity and polluting him with creatureliness?

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[168] T 128, P 88; B 202, BP 88.

Ṭūsī's response to the first objection would be that since humans cannot correctly come to an understanding of God—or the *imām* in his essence—, but can come to an understanding of the *imām* as a human according to their level of capacity, then this is one of the signs of God's mercy. Since the knowledge of the *imām* as a man, in his human nature, is something that other humans can relate to, whatever the level of understanding, then they will share their understanding with others. What are these levels? Ṭūsī outlines four:[169] (1) the knowledge of the person of the *imām* in his physical nature, accessible even to animals, the *imām's* enemies, and of course, the true believers, for whom the *imām* becomes a focal point in devotion; (2) the knowledge of his ordinary name and genealogy, accessible both to the followers of truth and the followers of falsehood. The notion of genealogy is important for, as Ṭūsī points out, to some it is important to know that the *imām* is the son of the previous *imām* in a physical sense as this keeps the *imāmate's* visible formal existence intact; to others it is important that the *imām* is the son of an *imām* as it ensures the perpetuation of esoteric wisdom. In accordance with absolute truth, of course, Ṭūsī adds, the *imām* must be himself in either case, whether father or son;[170] (3) this kind of knowledge is the recognition of his *imāmate*, faith in him, and complete self-surrender. In this kind of knowledge, the follower of truth and the follower of untruth are distinguished from one another; and finally, (4) the knowledge of the substance of the *imām* through the reality of his attributes *(ṣifāt)* attainable only, as previously mentioned, through "purification and sanctification".[171] Likened to the contemplation of pure light, even holy souls and enlightened minds are powerless to gaze directly. Thus, in sum, taking on manifestation is necessary in order to enable humans to come to a correct understanding of God.

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[169] T 137, P 93; B 207–208, BP 93.
[170] T 131, P 89–90; B 204, BP 90.
[171] T 137, P 93; B 207, BP 93.

The second objection, attributing to the *imām* what is rightly God's, is answered by Ṭūsī in the following manner. God in his essence is unknowable; however, he may be worshipped through his attributes, and accordingly, these attributes must have form. Thus, the self-understanding of the *imām* is indicated by Ṭūsī: "'We are God's beautiful names and his exalted attributes' meaning that the great name and the greatest attribute of God are specified and personified [in] me *(muᶜayyan wa mushakhkhaṣ).*"[172] Rather than attributing polytheism by elevating the *imām* to such a position, it removes disbelief, for it grants personhood to the notion of God that is otherwise devoid of any religious meaning whatsoever. The essence, however, remains unknowable, for as Ṭūsī has clarified above, only he himself can guide the believer to Himself. In this respect, since God and the *imām* are not talked of as two distinct realities, since the *imām* is the manifestation of the Command *(Amr)* of God, but as the same reality, that is, above any connection with creaturely world, there is no question of polytheism or dualism in Ṭūsī's view.

Finally, to the third objection regarding the *imām's* appearance in human form, Ṭūsī's argument is as follows:

> As for their saying: 'The Imam has never come and will never come to these relative realms', the meaning of 'coming into this world of [relative] realms' is so that each of these realms may acquire a perfection which it does not have. The Imam does not need any perfection outside his essence, not only in these realms, but in the whole universe. Does he not in reality bestow existence and perfection on these relative realms and all creation? Therefore in terms of the reality of realities, he has never come and will never come to these relative realms. But relatively, and because of 'manifesting in relation to the inhabitants of [these realms] and not manifesting in his essence, he manifests himself *(taẓāhurī dārad)* actually in each of these realms, for the sake of existence. For if he did not make an appearance and manifest *(naẓarī wa ẓuhūrī)* himself in each of these realms, and if each of these realms did not have some relation to, and connection with *(iḍāfa wa ittiṣāl)* him, they would have no existence. Thus, in this respect, in terms of relativity, he has been, and always will be, manifest in this world.[173]

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[172] T 129, P 88; B 203, BP 88. (B)

[173] T 140, P 95; B 209, BP 95. (B, with minor modifications by KH]

The implications to be drawn out from this passage are that every category of existence necessarily depends on him, as the axis mentioned above, to sustain its existence, and therefore, the *imām* is manifested not only on the human level but at all levels of existence. This is in keeping with the idea of *ḥudūd* or limits explored by the earlier Ismāᶜīlī savant Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who presents the notion that the outer limit with respect to every category represents the ultimate resort for it: thus water forms the outer limit or *ḥadd* of earth, and the ultimate resort of earth is water. In this way, all the elements are inseparable from each other, from the tiniest particle of earth to the outer celestial sphere, and all are governed by the *Nafs-i Kull*, that receives assistance *(ta᾿yīd)* from the *ᶜAql-i Kull.* In a similar way, the initiate—in religious terms—is like the particle of earth, whose resort is the *imām*, through a hierarchy of individuals that include the *ḥujjat* and the *bāb.* Concerning the ranking of components in the physical world and in the religious world, Nāṣir-i Khusraw advances the notion that "Every rank mentioned above occupies the position of the Imam in relation to those ranks which are below him, in the order mentioned."[174] Ṭūsī does not explore the notion in this way; rather, he draws upon the idea of stabilizing axis or pole; nonetheless, the intent of both thinkers is clear: that the *imām* is necessary to every level of existence. Further, this citation draws attention to the notion that the *imām* enters the realm of relationality, and insofar as the realm of relationality is concerned, his appearance is real, but from the point of view of true realities, *ḥaqā᾿iq*, the *imām* has never entered this realm, that is, is totally untouched by it. However, since all existence depends on his manifestation of himself, he must be manifested eternally, and thus, although the forms of the *imām* may change from father to son, appearing as a youth or as an old man, the "Imams are in reality all one, where their persons *(shakhṣ)* are not separate from each other nor their essences *(maᶜnawiyyat)*".[175]

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[174] W. Ivanow, ed. and trans., *Six Chapters or Shish Fasl also called Rawshana'i-nama by Nasir-i Khusraw* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1949), 76.

[175] T 138, P 94; B 208, BP 94. (B)

Ṭūsī also draws another subtle distinction between the *imāms* and ordinary human beings. Because the *imāms* are among the people of unity *(ahl-i waḥdat)*, that is, they are those who have attained the knowledge of oneness and are from the world of unity *(ᶜālam-i waḥdat)*, they cannot be said to have an origin or a return *(mabdaʾ wa maᶜād)*, either in flesh or in spirit. In reality, having not fallen from the world of unity there is no need for them to rejoin it.[176] However, because "the realms *(akwān)* are relative, [they too] in relation to these realms, have both an Origin and a Return, both in body and in spirit, for although in reality they have not come to this world, in relative existence they have."[177]

Further, although the *imāms* are sometimes called the descendants of Adam, or of Noah, or of Abraham, in reality, they are "neither of the lineage of the prophets, the progeny of philosophers, the progeny of kings, nor of any other except their own blessed and sacred progeny."[178] They are, therefore, not human in the way in which these others are. Here, Ṭūsī clearly is not referring to their bodies. Rather, the reference appears to be to the status of their souls and intellects; that is, that their knowledge is far exalted above the knowledge of prophets, philosophers, kings or any others.

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[176] T 95, P 65; B 180, BP 65.
[177] T 95, P 65; B 180, BP 65.
[178] T 152, P 102; B 216, BP 102.

CHAPTER 4

Knowledge, Refinement of Character and Self-Surrender: The Salvific Triad

Knowledge

In the preceding discussion the importance Ṭūsī attaches to practical, theoretical and instructed knowledge has been been outlined. In keeping with his sensitivities regarding the fundamental Islamic notion of the strict monotheism of God or Allāh, Ṭūsī is careful to point out that the correct understanding of God is a key element in his interpretation of the Islamic revelation. Although he is keenly aware that his interpretation, and indeed that of the Ismāᶜīlīs, and by extension, that of the Shīᶜīs generally, departs from the so-called "orthodox" view, he considers himself nonetheless to be a legitimate Muslim. Why so? For him, as for Shīᶜīs generally, the correct understanding of God is the fundamental issue pertinent to the wider Muslim *ummah* (or community) and is encoded in the revelation. In his view, the revelation, that is, the Qur⁾ān, establishes both the *imāmate* and points to the necessity for an *imām* to interpret that revelation. Hence, the correct understanding of God—as well as matters pertaining to the origin and return of humankind—is accessible through the *imām's* guidance on the matter.

In articulating his argument, Ṭūsī takes recourse to the leading scientific knowledge of his day. At that time, this took the form of the study of translations of many Greek works including those of Aristotle along with Neoplatonic works wrongly ascribed to him. We cannot, in this study, investigate his sources; however, it is clear that he utilized the structures developed by the Greeks, perhaps giving more weight to the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic structures, although Plato was not unknown to the Muslims.[1] Ṭūsī's strategy is to align himself with the philosophical tradition in Islam rather than with the theological or *kalām* tradition, even though the view may be advanced that his utilization of philosophical methods was to bulwark his own view. He thus attempts to arrive at a correct understanding of God through the use of rational principles, with recourse also to revelation, continually keeping his reader aware that the development and utilization of rational principles are preparatory for understanding revelation. Revelation is not necessarily subsumed to rational thought, but acts as a corrective to it, or as imparting information that cannot be easily accessed through rational means. We have already seen that the medium of *taᶜlīm* or instruction is key in imparting a sound interpretation of revelation, and that such instruction is best understood by the mind trained in philosophy.

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[1] See the informative article by Paul E. Walker in this regard: Paul E. Walker, "Platonisms in Islamic Philosophy", *Stvdia Islamica* 1994, 79:5–25.

Thus, as we have seen in our discussion regarding Ṭūsī's conception of God, revelation declares that Allāh is far removed from anything that creatures may say of Him. Ṭūsī explores this notion through the modality of positing an ontological system and declaring that God is above it; that is, God is in no way related to existents or creaturely categories. At the same time, revelation speaks of God as a Person. In order not to make God so devoid of relationality to creatures that the very concept of God becomes meaningless, Ṭūsī utilizes axiomatic principles to establish, on the one hand, that humans speak of the divine creative command or word only in a metaphorical manner in order to facilitate understanding of the notion of God's will and creatorship. On the other hand, such a divine command or word must not be seen as without any substantial reality, although that reality is beyond the ken of human understanding. Therefore, drawing upon the axiomatic principle of the stable centre or the axis, and further, upon the notion that all the elements of the spiritual world (the divine Word/Command or *Kalimah/Amr*, the Universal Intellect or *ᶜAql-i Kull*, the Universal Soul or *Nafs-i Kull)* must be manifested in the material world on the human plane, he establishes the necessity of the figures of the *imām*, the *ḥujjah* and the *nabī* or *rasūl*, that is, the prophet. Manifested on the human plane, the *ḥujjah* and the *nabī* both belong to the realm of existents, as do the Universal Intellect and Soul on the non-corporeal plane. The *imām*, however, belongs to the realm—if we may use such a term—beyond existents, that is, the realm of the divine Word, the *Kalimah.* Just as the notion of God's will and creatorship, in keeping with revelation, is to be understood as a word or command in order to make the notion of God accessible to human minds, so, too, the physical form of the *imām* as a human being is to be understood as enabling the human being to recognize the manifestation of the divine on earth. Neither the *Kalimah/Amr* nor the *Imām* in themselves can be containers that God can be reduced to: for God is at one and the same time both above what the *Kalimah/Amr* and the *Imām* can indicate of Him, and yet they are given reality and substantiality by what they do in fact indicate of Him. If the *Kalimah* is the metaphor by which humans can understand His creatorship and will, then the *Kalimah/Amr*-in-human-form is the metaphor by which humans can understand and recognize the attributes pertaining to God in the revelation.

For Ṭūsī, the correct understanding of God is not a light matter, nor is it one that can be reduced glibly to notions such as the *Kalimah/Amr* and the *Imām.* Were it to be so, then he would not have stressed the importance of knowledge in order to gain salvation. True, as a religious thinker, he is all too ready to admit that there are different capacities in human beings with respect to knowledge, and he asserts that divine wisdom has laid many signs *(āyāts)* into the mundane world so that Muslims can apprehend His might according to their own understanding. He also acknowledged that not all faculties of human reason are the same; they may be similar in their capacities but they are not similar in the manner in which they are developed and applied. An undercurrent throughout his exposition in the *Taṣawwurāt* is the notion that the kind of teaching *(taᶜlīm)* and guidance *(taʾyīd)* and interpretation *(taʾwīl)* that originates with the *imām* through his *ḥujjat* is not something meant for the common people *(awāmm)* but for a special class of people *(khawāṣṣ)*, that is, for those who have reflected deeply both on the nature of existence and on the meaning of revelation. It is only these who have begun the journey towards sculpting that form *(ṣūrat)* of the soul which will enable them to gain access to the world of the hereafter in an abiding manner, thereby achieving salvation. The knowledge that is even beyond this, that is, the knowledge by which God guides a human to Himself by Himself, is knowledge beyond the capacity of one such as himself, as a mere human, to articulate. He draws attention to this in another way: that none may look directly upon the substance *(dhāt)* of the *Imām* without suffering annihilation:[2] that this journey, too, must be something which is initiated by the *Imām*: he is the "bestower *(bakhshandah)* of that recognition *(maᶜrifat)* through which the *ᶜAql's* perfection is produced *(ḥāṣil āyad)*."[3] Nonetheless, it is implicit in his writings that one must have at least reached the level of understanding that affords the continual perception pertaining to the realm of disclosure *(mubāyanat)* at all times before one can hope that He will indeed guide one to Himself. And it is only towards attaining this stage of clear vision that Ṭūsī can address himself.

Refinement of Character

In this regard, knowledge is of the utmost importance in preparing the soul to journey to the realm of disclosure. However, while knowledge is the compass for the way, it is not in itself sufficient. It must be accompanied by actions *(ᶜamāl)*, under which we may distinguish those that are connected to the refinement of character or ethics *(ākhlāq)*, and those that pertain to devout self-surrender *(taslīm)*. Indeed, refinement of character is identified by Ṭūsī as necessary "for the acceptance of intellectual substances *(mawādd-i ᶜaqlānī)*. Through them one may gradually attain the recognition of the *imām (imām-shināsī)* which is the same as knowing God *(khudā-shināsī)*."[4] The purpose of developing an ethical frame of mind, and acting in accordance with it, is to free the soul from the tyranny of the natural forces such as the sensory *(ḥissī)*, the imaginative *(khayālī)* and the estimative *(wahmī)* so that it may engage in its true occupation, "which is the comprehension of knowables *(maᶜlūmāt)*" and "unrestricted movement among the intelligibles *(maᶜqūlāt)*."[5]

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[2] T 137, P 93; B 208, BP 93.
[3] T 143, P 97; B 211, BP 97. (KH)
[4] T 96, P 66; B 181, BP 66. (I, KH)

Ṭūsī then introduces the notion that the basis of refinement of character consists of obedience to the command of the "bearer of truth of the time" *(muḥiqq-i waqt)*, that is, the *Imām* of the time, and submission to him.[6] Each succeeding *muḥiqq* or *imām* may add to or depart from the ethics and behaviour permitted and sanctioned by the previous *imām*. Ṭūsī must have been aware that such a relativity of ethical standards and acceptable behaviour could likely cause much alarm, leaving the followers of the *imām* vulnerable to the whims and fancies of the *imām*.[7] To dispose of such doubts, Ṭūsī reminds his readers that the reason this is so is because it is impossible to tell in advance what the *imām* will regard as necessary for his followers' betterment *(maṣlaḥat)*, a term that contains within it the notion of goodness. He furnishes the example that just as humans are distinguished from other animals by their upright stature, so, too, the followers of the true religion are distinguished from those who believe in falsehood by the uprightness of their soul, which they receive from the *imām*. This uprightness[8] consists of true thoughts, honest words and good actions:

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[5] T 96, P 66; B 181, BP 66.

[6] Ibid. See also Wilferd Madelung, "Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī's Ethics Between Philosophy, Shiᶜism and Sufism" in Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *Ethics in Islam* (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1985), 85–101. Here Madelung draws attention to Ṭūsī's views in *The Nasirean Ethics* regarding the distinction between ethics as "a rational science based on universal human nature and is therefore not subject to change" and the divine law as "posited ... not entirely on abstract rational grounds, and thus is changeable with changing ages and circumstances." (91) (Madelung's paraphrase of Ṭ, in G.M. Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics* (London, 1964), 28–29) No such distinction is found in the *Taṣawwurāt*, in which Ṭūsī appears to collapse the distinction between ethics as a branch of practical philosophy and divine law under the *Imām*, who is the manifestation of the divine Command and hence the source of both philosophy (rational science) and revelation.

[7] No doubt such a stance was in part a response to the declaration of the *Qiyāmah* by Ḥasan II, the Ismāᶜīlī *Imām* in Alamūt, in 1164 CE and the subsequent strict imposition of the *sharīᶜah* by his successor, Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan. See Madelung, "Naṣīr ad-Dīn's Ethics", 93.

[8] It should not escape notice that in *The Nasirean Ethics*, Ṭūsī lists the same three, following Miskawayh. However, while Miskawayh's text is: "Worship of God *(ᶜibādah)* consists in

> All three must be linked to the command of the Imam of the time ... . No one can by himself produce uprightness *(istiqāmat)* in himself, think truthfully, speak truthfully, or do good deeds except through his command ... which command *(farmān)* by his assistance *(taʾyīd)* is conjoined to *(paiwandad)* a person, or by the instructions of a teacher *(muᶜallimi,* that is, the *ḥujjah)* who, by his assistance, has been singled out by him, may greetings be upon mention of him.[9]

As an example of what he means when he says that ethical standards are set by the *imām* of the time, he discusses the notion that all the undesirable qualities in humans arise from lust and anger. In order to control these, the philosophers have sought to address their impact by the use of their counterpart; so lust should be brought into balance by abstemiousness, and anger by complacence, and so forth with respect to all undesirable qualities such as greed, vehemence, frivolity and avarice. Other Muslims, such as some ascetics, thought the best form of action would be to suppress these entirely. They sought to do this by teaching about the endeavour to nullify the senses, for which reason they retired into dark cells and ate only small amounts of foods that were not tasty. Further, through continually repeating, "Allāh, Allāh" until they fell into a stupor, they claimed that they had thereby effected the opening of a door between themselves and God.[10]

The *ahl-i ḥaqq* or *imāms* on the other hand, assert that such a course of action is ultimately detrimental to the soul. The soul needs the body and the senses in order to open the eye of the intellect. He draws an analogy between the soul and a horserider who is unable to walk, who sets out on a journey only to abandon the horse before reaching the destination, thereby inviting destruction by wild animals or other causes. Similarly, if the soul dispenses with the senses, it will be rendered unable to reach its destination. Rather, the body and the animal senses must be strong in order to enable the soul to ride it like a

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true belief, sound utterance and upright action", Ṭūsī uses the term *istiqāmat* instead of *ᶜibādah.* See Madelung, "Naṣīr ad-Dīn's Ethics", 94.

[9] T 97, P 67; B 181–182, BP 67. (KH)

[10] T 103, P 71; B 186, BP 71.

(dependable) horse (to the destination sought). A person who is incapable of anger is incapable of possessing the faculty of self-control, and one who is incapable of lust, will be incapable of procreation and the resulting preservation of the human race. With regard to both anger and lust, excess in either direction, that is, the seizure of the soul by anger or lust, or the suppression of these, are not good. Rather, both these forces must be overpowered by taking them under the control of the intellect so that they become allies of the soul where they were once its tyrants. Once the passions have been brought under the control of the intellect, that is, a perfected *(ikmāl)* condition or state

> angels will bind them, i.e., anger and lust—anger symbolizing the male, and lust the female—with a contract of marriage and that marriage will give birth to offspring which are in accord with [the state of] existence: knowledge, wisdom, remembrance *(taḏhakkur)*, modesty, generosity, courage, truth, veracity, righteousness, sound action, rectitude, good conduct, love, friendship, concordance, brotherliness, trustworthiness, chastity, patience, tranquillity, modesty, contentment, humility, reliance, satisfaction, sincerity and all that follows from these.[11]

Of course, if these passions are not brought under the control of the intellect, then the ceremony of marriage will be conducted by the devil, and the issue will be those things that are the perversion of the conditions of existence:

> ignorance, folly, forgetfulness, hypocrisy, debauchery, miserliness, suspicion, falsity, lying, evil, corruption, error, blundering, enmity, hatred, disagreement, treason, impatience, disgracefulness, shamelessness ... and all that follows from these.[12]

Thus, Ṭūsī's stance on the human senses is that they are necessary in the struggle toward attaining perfection. It is not by nullifying the senses that the soul attains perfection; rather, it is by bringing the senses under the control of the intellect that the soul attains perfection. Unlike Ibn Sīnā, Ṭūsī does not draw attention to the need to discard the mount once the destination has been reached, although he does draw attention to the need for the mount to arrive at the proposed destination. In bringing the senses under the control of the intellect, the human being is able to display those virtues that are proper to existence: knowledge, righteousness, trustworthiness, humility, sincerity and the like.

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[11] T 105, P 73; B 187, BP 73. (B)
[12] T 105, P 73; B 187–188, BP 73. (B)

Ṭūsī further cautions that "as long as man does not see his own errors, sins and deficiencies, his soul cannot recall its own world nor pass through the degrees of good deeds and the steps of perfection. Because of his self-love, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for him to recognize his faults and deficiencies, and they will remain concealed from him."[13] Indeed, when praising goodness in someone, it is necessary to first know what goodness is in order to recognize one who is good. With respect to this, since "goodness, by necessity, is perfection it should be understood that only he who is complete and perfect in goodness *(khayrī)* can be absolutely good .... And it is obvious which of the followers of the *daᶜwat* is of this rank."[14] What is not obvious here is whether this last statement is to be taken as an assertion or a question. Ivanow interprets this as a question, whereas Badakhchani takes it to be an assertion. If taken as a question, then the reference here to the one who is absolutely good can only be to the *imām*, who, as source of the *daᶜwah*, is not, therefore, one of its followers, with the implication that none of the followers of the *daᶜwah* are of that rank. If taken as an assertion, then such a person can only be the *ḥujjat*, based on Ṭūsī's emphasis on the *ḥujjah* as one whose soul is lit "by the illuminations of the *Imām's* assistance *(taʾyīd)*" which thereby enables him to bestow the forms of perfection on those who are prepared to accept them.[15] The status of the *ḥujjah*, however, is such that it derives its substantiality from the *Imām*. This would be in keeping with Ṭūsī's assertion in *The Nasirean Ethics* that the *imāms* "have sovereignty over the divine law to apply its particulars in accordance with the circumstances."[16] As such, then, if it is in the *Imām*—and by extension, in the *ḥujjah*—that absolute goodness is manifested, then the standard for each human to follow would be to recognize that all praise for goodness accorded to any human is not in accordance with every human's faults and shortcomings. In short, it is false praise. Since badness is nothing but deficiency, then a person who reproaches one for one's wickedness is, in fact, a friend, for that person points out one's shortcomings and alerts one to redress the deficiencies that are in one's essence.

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[13] T 106, P 73; B 188, BP 73. (B)
[14] T 106, P 74; B 188, BP 74. (KH, following B)
[15] T 144, P 97, B 211, BP 97. (KH)
[16] Madelung, "Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī's Ethics", 96.

The implication of identifying the *imām*, and/or *ḥujjat*, as the case may be, as the manifestation of goodness is that true hate and true love for others should really be based on whether these others hate or love the *imām*. That is, if someone is a friend, but hates the *imām*, then that someone should be hated for doing so. Conversely, if someone is an enemy, but loves the *imām*, then that person should be loved for their love for the *imām*. Thus, not only are the ethical standards one should follow set by the *imām*; in addition, relations with others are decreed by whether they, too, love and obey the *imām*.

Self-Surrender

Ṭūsī therefore implies that the *muḥiqq* sets the standards by which ethical conduct should follow, for if left to their own devices, humans may not come upon the correct approach to the refinement of character. Since the *imāms* are "the cause and the reason for the existence of all creation and of all existing things, and who are free from body and soul yet encompass both",[17] it is clear that the foundation for refinement of character lies in obeying the commands and orders of the *imām*.

Love for the *imām* is essential on several counts. First, it enables followers to learn how "they might avoid falling into error, how they should fear God, how they should submit to

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[17] T 98, P 67; B 182, BP 67. (B)

Him, how they should know themselves and what they should ask for".[18] For example, in reminding the believer to constantly fear God, when such fear *(khudā-tarsī)* becomes customary in thought, then thought—which is an emanation *(inbiʿāth)* of the rays of the intellect (lit. "intellectual rays") which [emanation] arises out of the human "speaking" soul *(nafs-i nāṭiqa)*—becomes "the cause of the connection with truth *(sabab-i munāsabat-i ḥaqq)*:

> That connection with truth becomes the cause of the conjunction *(ittiṣāl)* of his soul with the light of the summons of the truth *(daʿwat-i ḥaqq)* and from the spiritual power *(quwwat-i rūḥāniyyat)* of that [conjunction], an angel will be appointed in charge of his thought, always to keep it adorned with truth.[19]

Similarly, out of fear of God, people's words, which are the manifestation of their thoughts, gain the spiritual force of the Qurʾānic injunction (33:70): "... and speak a straightforward speech", thereby leading to the appointment of an angel who will keep the person's speech "adorned with veracity".[20] Just as words are the manifestation of thoughts, actions too are the manifestation of thoughts and words, and in this realm too, fear of God will ultimately lead to the appointment of an angel who will keep a person's actions "adorned with righteousness".[21] In this manner uprightness is achieved.

It is clear that love for the *imām*, which is "the basis and the substance of all good moral qualities *(akhlāq-i nīk)*"[22] must clearly result in obedience to the *imām* in matters of ethics and ethical behaviour. Although this is not explicitly stated as such, it is apparent that for Ṭūsī ethical behaviour according to the guidance of the *imāms* constitutes worship *(ʿibādah)*.[23] Evidence for this is provided in the examples Ṭūsī furnishes with respect to the ethical standard. Our author chooses selections from the *Al-Ṣaḥīfat al-Kāmilat al-Sajjādiyya,* attributed to the Prophet's great-grandson, the *imām* ᶜAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, better known as Zayn al-ᶜĀbidīn (d. ca. 713 CE). As an example of the manner in which friends and enemies are to be treated:

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[18] T 98, P 67; B 182, BP 67. (B)
[19] T 101, P 70; B 185, BP 70. (KH)
[20] T 101–102, P 70; B 185, BP 70. (I, B)
[21] T 102, P 70; B 185, BP 70. (B)
[22] T 97–98, P 67; B 182, BP 67. (KH)
[23] Such has already been noted in Ṭūsī's use of the term uprightness *(istiqāmat)* for worship *(ʿibādah)*. See note 7 above.

> God, bless Muḥammad and his family. Grant me that I may guard myself against sin and stay clear of error in this world and in the Hereafter, whether content or angry, so that whenever either of these, or any other [emotion], rises up in me towards my enemies and my friends, I may be in the right position, acting obediently to You and seeking Your pleasure, in order that my enemy may feel secure from my injustice and wrong doing, and my friend may despair of my favour and the weakening of my association [with him].[24]

Thinking, speaking and behaving righteously are considered religious acts by Ṭūsī, who calls upon Qurᵓānic verses to applaud human efforts towards righteousness. True thought *(fikr-i ḥaqq),* veracious speech *(qawl-i ṣidq)* and good deeds *(amal-i khayr)* "are the rungs by which ascension to the world of the Hereafter *(miᶜrāj-i ᶜālam-i ākhirat)* is effected. [Such a person's] thought will be an intellect made from the command, and speech a soul made from the intellect, and deeds a body made from the soul."[25]

Taking the notion that obedience to the *imām* constitutes a kind of worship a little further, it will be of interest to us to note Ṭūsī's discussion on self-surrender *(taslīm).* This term, which may also be translated as submission, comes from the Arabic root *s-l-m,* to submit, to surrender, from which the word *Islām* (submission) originates. A Muslim, therefore, is one who submits or surrenders. In his discussion on the different forms of self-surrender, Ṭūsī offers the view that every element in the chain of being, from the Universal Intellect to human beings, who are the aim and the end of the chain, surrenders itself to that which is above it in the chain. This is done in acknowledgement of the perfection it has gained, for in so doing, it places itself at the disposal of that which is above it in the chain of being. Thus the earth surrenders itself to the plant, which then spreads its roots into the earth and nourishes itself on the best nutrients that the earth has to offer. The plant, likewise, surrenders to the animal, who surrenders to humans, and so forth. The Universal Intellect, who is the most noble and perfect of all existents by virtue of its having come into existence from the word of God without any intermediary, also surrenders itself to the divine Command or Word *(Amr* or *Kalimah).*

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[24] T 100–101, P 69; B 184, BP 69. For the prayers penned by Zayn al-ᶜAbidīn, see Imām Zayn al-ᶜAbidīn ᶜAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, *The Psalms of Islam: Al-Ṣaḥīfat al-Kāmilat al-Sajjādiyya,* translated with an introduction and annotation by William C. Chittick (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1988) (distributed by Oxford UP).
[25] T 102, P 70; B 185, BP 70. (KH)

Ṭūsī implies that this act of self-surrender enables the benefits of the emanation *(ifāḍat)* of the Kalimah to reach the Universal Intellect. This benefit consists in the granting to it of "eternal stability *(sukūn sarmadī),* absolute perfection *(kamāl-i muṭlaq),* and recognition in reality *(maᶜrifat bi-ḥaqīqat).*"[26] Elsewhere, Ṭūsī mentions that the Universal Intellect is enabled by the divine Word's assistance *(taʾyīd)* to conceive "the idea *(taṣawwur)* of all things *(ashyā),* both spiritual and material, to the utmost limits".[27] It remains at rest (or passive) with respect to the *Kalimah,* from which it receives the latter's emanation *(ifāḍat),* while it moves with respect to the Universal Soul, to whom it grants assistance *(taʾyīd)* so that the latter could govern and regulate of matter[28] in its struggle to achieve perfection.[29] We must bear in mind that we may only logically separate the coming-into-existence of the Universal Intellect from its recognition of the divine creative Word that made its existence possible. This recognition is the basis for its self-surrender, despite its exalted position, to the divine creative Word, and it is this self-surrender that enables it to benefit from the emanation of the divine creative Word, which then ultimately results in the existence of human beings. However, within this primordial scene, so to speak, although we maintain a logical separation between the act of coming into existence and the reception of divine emanation *(ifāḍat)*, all of this occurs outside of time, or instantaneously. We may speak of logical priority but not of temporal priority. Temporal considerations only enter after the creation of the *Nafs-i Kull* and its subsequent action. Thus, when the Universal Soul surrenders itself to the Universal Intellect, it attains perfection.[30]

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[26] T 111, P 77; B 191, BP 77. (KH)
[27] T 8, P 9. (I)
[28] T 18–19, P 17; B 160, BP 17.
[29] T 21, P 19.

Ṭūsī's intent is to show that the act of self-surrender *(taslīm)* is a necessary prerequisite for the reception of that assistance *(taʾyīd)* which will result in the attainment of perfection. Although there are elements within the chain of existence that must accept this assistance mechanically, as for example, when matter *(mādda)* accepts the forms *(ṣuwār)* imposed upon it by the Universal Soul, with human beings, this self-surrender must of necessity not be imitation of others *(taqlīd)*.[31] The term *taqlīd* comes from Muslim legal parlance meaning that no independent reasoning or effort *(ijtihād)* should be expended in determining the legal status of an action. Rather, actions were to be understood as previous juriconsults had declared them to be. Ṭūsī understands this term with the connotation of "blind following or imitation" and does not approve of its use. Rather, he insists that any act of self-surrender on the part of the human must be undertaken consciously, with an awareness that it implies, then, the placing of one's self at the disposal of another's authority and greater nobility. This conscious consideration (lit. perception, awareness: *baṣīrat)* forms the basis of any act of self-surrender *(taslīm)*. An act of submission that is not preceded by awareness will procure no advantages to the person, and neither knowledge *(ʿilm)*, nor righteous action *(ʿamal)*, nor effort *(jahd)*, nor reliance on God *(tawakkul)* will provide any benefits or produce any effects.[32] Rather, all these actions *(ḥarakāt*, lit.

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[30] T 110, P 77; B 191, BP 76.
[31] T 111, P 77; B 191, BP 77.
[32] T 111, P 77; B 191, BP 77.

movements) will only become steps along the path to hell.[33] The intellect must be party to these actions in order for them to have any benefit to the person.

What does conscious consideration *(baṣīrat)* consist of? For Ṭūsī, this occurs in stages. First, "with the choice of one's own deficient self, a person becomes aware of [or gains information about] *(wāqif shavad)* a completer and perfector who may bring one to perfection". Second, when this awareness is effected, "one's *baṣīrat* becomes complete. One knows that that one must offer submission to someone." Third, "when the commands and prohibitions of that perfector who bestows perfection reach him, in those cases where he is able to perceive them, he becomes one who consciously considers *(mustabṣar)*, while wherever he is unable to perceive them, he becomes one who [simply] submits *(muslim)*."[34] This passage is multi-layered in meaning. On the one hand, the prophet Muḥammad is one such perfector through whom God completes and perfects religion. This is the first act of self-surrender, that is, when one becomes a Muslim. On the other hand, when a person is able to understand the commands and prohibitions encoded in the revelation according to the level of his or her preparedness, that person becomes one who is consciously considerate *(mustabṣar)*. Here—from what we have seen earlier when he talks of the first and the second profession (of faith) in his discussion on the purpose for which humans have come into being[35]—Ṭūsī clearly refers to the *imāms* (and by extension, their *ḥujjats)* as the completers and perfectors:

> That wise and perfect [thing] to which this ignorant and imperfect person should submit is the teaching of the teacher of the divinely guided summons (taᶜlīm-i muᶜallim-i daᶜwat-i hādiya), may God make it firm, whose knowledge and opinion (ᶜilm wa raʾy) are bound together with the truth and the bearer of truth (ḥaqq va muḥiqq), not [just] any wise or learned person who does not acknowledge the muḥiqq of the time ... .[36]

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[33] T 112, P 77; B 191, BP 77.
[34] T 112, P 78; B 192, BP 78. (KH)
[35] T 92, P 64; B 178, BP 64.
[36] T 110, P 76; B 190–191, BP 76. (B)

Ṭūsī suggests that without this instruction *(taᶜlīm)*, a person cannot "surpass the limits of wisdom and knowledge which he himself assumes to be wisdom and knowledge",[37] that is, knowledge attained through reflection unaided by revelation. Conscious self-surrender is therefore essential to the acceptance of this instruction *(taᶜlīm)*, the fruits of which are to move gradually from a perception of the realm of dissemblance to the perception of the realm of disclosure. As the person moves from a sensory to a spiritual to an intellectual mode of existence, accordingly, that person's perceptions and modes of self-surrender change. Persons given to sensory existence are controlled by the passions and their mode of self-surrender is artificial and insincere, motivated by self-interest. Spiritually inclined persons sometimes desire material things, and sometimes pay attention to matters pertaining to the hereafter *(ākhirat)* and their mode of self-surrender is freely chosen *(ikhtiyārī)*. Such people may initially protest at the command of their teacher to abandon the things of this world, but then they recognize that unless they act voluntarily, they will "be deprived from [their] goal in both worlds."[38] Those who belong to an intellectual mode of existence will recognize things as they really are, that is, they are no strangers to the realm of disclosure, and their self-surrender is natural *(ṭabīᶜī)*. Such a class of people are confined to the *ḥujjats* of the *imām*, and is not something for ordinary disciples. The *ḥujjats'* vision *(naẓar-i fiṭrat)* of the light of the *Imām* is from the summit of divine assistance *(taʾyīd):* it is precisely the assistance they have received from the *Imām* that enables them, in turn, to gaze upon his essence or light[39] insofar as they are able to do so.[40]

Is Ṭūsī's intention here to convince the ordinary Muslim to acknowledge the legitimacy of the *imāmate* through joining the ranks of the Ismāᶜīlī *daᶜwah*, that is, to assert a political and, in the eyes of the so-called "orthodox", a sectarian position? This may very well have been one of Ṭūsī's unstated aims. However, his emphasis on considered reflection *(baṣīrat)* as a prerequisite to any act of self-surrender, combined with his insistence that therein lies the path to certified knowledge of reality seems to point to his sincere belief that human spiritual advancement lies in gaining access to the privileged teaching of the *imāms* and their *ḥujjats.* He seems to indicate that the force of this teaching is to direct the activity of the human towards eschatological ends: self-surrender, when based on considered reflection *(baṣīrat)* leads to the refinement of character, discussed above, and to struggle in the path of God *(jahd),* based on fear *(taqwā)* and reliance on Him *(tawakkul).*[41] Further, from the examples Ṭūsī offers of *taʾwīl,*[42] it is clear that the interpretation offered by the *muḥiqq* pertains to the understanding of the Qurʾān, most radically perhaps in identifying the object and mode of worship.

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[37] T 110, P 76; B 191, BP 76. (B)
[38] T 114, P 79; B 193, BP 79. (B)
[39] T 114, P 79; B 193, BP 79.
[40] T 137, P 93; B 208, BP 93: since the substance *(dhāt)* of the *Imām* is so effulgent that "the sacred souls and the illuminated intellects lack the power to look directly at the sun of this recognition." (B)

Thus, in his exposition of the *taʾwīl* offered regarding the object of worship, Ṭūsī clarifies what the correct understanding of God should be, a matter we have already addressed earlier. As an example of how much of the material of *taʾwīl* deals with matters of worship and how this is to be understood, we can briefly turn to his explanations of the congregational prayer, the *namāz:*

> The aim of prayer *(namāz)* is to weaken the power of anger *(quwwat-i ghaḍabī),* in the following way. At first, man's soul is in a state of potentiality, veiled by the shadow of the senses from its particular function *(fiʿl-i khāṣṣ-i khwīsh)* and dominated by the self-aggrandisment, rebelliousness, pride and injustice which appear therein. But if he assiduously spends his time in *namāz,* five times each day and night, fulfilling the requirements of bending *(rukūʿ)* and prostration *(sujūd),* and lowering the face of modesty to the dust of humility, [his soul will develop] a form of modesty and humility which will be the beginning of preparedness for awe and fear of God and will lead to: "Fear God, and be with the sincere" (Qurʾān 9:19).

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[41] T 112, P 77; B 191, BP 77.
[42] T 156ff, P 106ff; B 219ff.

> Bending *(rukū)* is equal to a half of the prostration *(sujūd);* similar to voluntary submission to His Exalted Command. And of two prostrations one ... is submission to the indications of His physical and verbal Creation, ... and the other is ... to the proofs of his Word and Command ... .[43]

If the above citation gives an example of *taʾwīl,* the reader will be aware that each statement merits and receives further interpretation. Thus *taʾwīl* functions as layered meaning, each layer opening up and pointing to further layers as the disciple understands and asks questions that will reveal the receptivity to yet another layer of meaning. Thus, although Ṭūsī does not explicitly mention worship or *ʿibādah* in this connection, it is clear that for him the act of formal worship is meaningless unless it is accompanied by considered reflection at every stage. The very act of reflecting and learning through instruction *(taʿlīm)* is a kind of worship, and finds expression both in the refinement of character and in self-surrender.

The term *ʿibādah,* worship, is mentioned in two contexts that may be worthy of investigation. In his discussion of prophethood and *imāmate,* Ṭūsī mentions that the messenger–prophet *(rasūl)* brings a new *sharīʿah* or law. The purpose of enforcing the principles and laws contained within this revelation *(tanzīl)* was to prepare people to accept perfection, by enabling their progress "from [righteous] activity to matters of knowledge, and from matters of knowledge to matters of the intellect *(az ʿilmiyyāt bar ʿaqliyyāt).*"[44] Prayer, of course, is one of the duties enjoined in the revelation. Further, it is the special duty of the prophet to preach religious actions connected with the body, and prayer is stipulated for specific times.[45] During the period of the resurrection, *Qiyāmah* (when the rule of the *Imāms* prevails), however, preaching is related to matters regarding God and that which is godly, and all times are stipulated for prayer. This is known as the period of unveiling *(dawr-i kashf)*.[46] Clearly, the purpose is not to cancel worship, but no longer to restrict it to the specified times of formal prayer.

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[43] T 162–163, P 110–111; B 223, BP 110–111. (B)
[44] T 117, P 80; B 195, BP 80. (B)
[45] T 116, P 80; B 194, BP 80. (KH)

If prayer—and by extension, worship—is not to be conducted at specific times, then when, and how, is it to be conducted? In the same discussion, by the *Imām's* order, "the illuminations *(anwār)* of the Command of Primary Origination *(amr-i ibdāᶜī)* in the form of gnosis *(maᶜrifah)*, love, obedience and the real worship of the elite, shine *(mītābad)* upon [those] souls which are prepared for the perfection of the Command *(mustaᶜidd-i kamāl-i amr)*."[47] That is, the *imāms* enlighten those followers who are capable of attaining the perfection that comes with the divine volition, that is, those who, as explained elsewhere, live in the world of intelligibles *(maᶜqūlāt* or *ᶜaqliyyāt)*, that is, the *ḥujjats*. These followers are enlightened with the recognition, love, obedience and worship that is characteristic of the distinguished *(khāṣṣ)*. Through the *imāms*, who have thus enlightened them, the *ḥujjats* will become capable of seeing realities even in the realm of dissemblance. Since it is the *imām* who is responsible for their recognition, love, obedience and worship, it is he too who is responsible for their ability to see the realm of disclosure even when existing within the realm of dissemblance, which is what is presented to them through the senses, intuition and imagination. However, they now have the ability to engage in *taʾwīl,* that is, to reveal the real import of things that are bound within the realm of the senses, intuition and imagination. Their ability to engage in *taʾwīl* is, of course, sourced back to the *imām*; however, as his *ḥujjats*, they are now capable of transmitting these interpretations to those who fall under them in the chain of existence, that is, to the *dāᶜīs* and their pupils, the initiates into the *daᶜwah.*

Thus, we understand Ṭūsī to indicate here that engaging in *taʾwīl* constitutes in itself a kind a worship, the worship of the true chosen ones *(ᶜibādat-i khāṣṣ-i ḥaqīqī)*. This form of worship is accompanied by recognition *(maᶜrifah)* and love of, and obedience to, the *imām*. This notion is supported by Ṭūsī's all too opaque explanation of Abraham's worship or *ᶜibādah: ᶜibādah* here constitutes the assertion *(iqrār*, establishment) of the divinity of God and the act of devoting one's life in both worlds (the mundane and the world of the hereafter) to him, who is both the manifest *(ẓāhir)* and the hidden *(bāṭin)*.[48]

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[46] Ibid.

[47] T 117, P 80; B 195, BP 80. (B)

In sum, then, we see that for Ṭūsī, salvation, that is, the ability to perceive the realm of disclosure, is predicated on knowledge acquired through *taᶜlīm*, the refinement of character *(akhlāq)* and self-surrender *(taslīm)*. Upon examining each of these, we find that therein are contained elements of knowledge, action *(ᶜamal)* and worship *(ᶜibādah)*, although action and worship are themselves premised on correct knowledge, that can be acquired only through *taᶜlīm* (instruction). From the reception of *taᶜlīm*, with the accompaniment of ethical behaviour and self-surrender, the initiate may reach that point at which the divine guides the seeker to itself. We have seen that the figure of the *ḥujjah* exemplifies this, since the *ḥujjah* is both assisted by, that is, receives the *taʾyīd* of the *imām*, and in turn assists others, through *taʾwīl*, or enlightened interpretation. Ṭūsī, however, alludes to notion that the world of intelligibles inhabited by the *ḥujjat* is by no means the final stage. For although here the "observer sees all dissemblances *(mushābahāt)* as distinctions *(mubāyanāt)*" there are, nonetheless, "endless other stages"[49] of which he does not speak.

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[48] T 133–134, P 91; B 205, BP 91.
[49] T 113, P 78.

SECTION III

CHAPTER 1

Viśiṣṭādvaita: Rāmānuja's Conception of God, the Supreme Person

For Ṭūsī, the understanding of God as a Person can be arrived at only after it is clearly understood that God is far above anything that can be said of Him. For Rāmānuja the opposite holds true: that God who is incognizant[1] can only be understood within the context of the true understanding of God as Supreme Person. In this section we will explore Rāmānuja's conception of Brahman[2] and the latter's relation with the world. This will enable us to pinpoint the ontological position of the *avatāra*, both with respect to Brahman and the world.

The Prābhākara Mīmāṃsā View of the Authority of Scripture

In keeping with the tradition of Indian philosophy, we must first identify the *pramāṇas*, or valid means of knowledge accepted by Rāmānuja. Any investigation of reality must be preceded by a clear identification of the parameters of what is accessible to human knowledge. Further, the means by which knowledge of reality may be gained must be specified. The first thinkers to draw these parameters, which have been subsequently accepted as fundamental to all later Hindu *darśanas*, or schools, were those who adhered to Mīmāṃsā, a term that means "systematic investigation."[3] The Mīmāṃsaka school comprises two streams: one that upholds the authority and teaching of the earlier portions of the Veda, especially the Brāhmaṇas,[4] and the other that stresses the later portions of the Veda, the Upaniṣads. The first is, accordingly, termed Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā (the "Prior" Mīmāṃsā), or simply Mīmāṃsā, and is thought to have originated in the Brāhmaṇa period, while the latter is known as the Uttara–Mīmāṃsā (the "Posterior" Mīmāṃsā). Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā split into two schools soon after the seventh century (CE) as a result of the differing commentaries of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Prabhākara on the commentary of Śabara Svāmin (circa 400 CE), itself a commentary on the primary source of Mīmāṃsaka doctrine, the Sūtra of Jaimini (ca 300–200 BCE).

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[1] *Gītābhāṣya*, Proem by Rāmānuja, in A. Govindāchārya, trans., *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā with Śrī Rāmānujāchārya's Viśiṣṭādvaita-Commentary* (Madras: Vaijayanti Press, 1898), 8.

[2] Because Rāmānuja conceives of Brahman as the Supreme Person, Brahman is referred to by the personal pronoun "He" rather than "It". I have retained the use of the capital letter in Brahman, but have used lower case "h" when referring to Brahman as "he, him" and so forth, except in rare cases where the use of the pronoun may be ambiguous.

[3] M. Hiriyanna, *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956 [1949]), 129.

The primary interest of all Mīmāṃsakas lay in outlining the principles governing the proper enactment of rituals through which fruits *(phala)* such as prosperity or heaven could be attained, or specific evils avoided. The correct enactment of the rite and its results could not be established by humanly originated *pramāṇas*, which perforce relied on sense-perception and inference to establish the object of desire. Mīmāṃsā therefore, identified sacred, revealed knowledge, known as *śabda* or verbal testimony, as the source of valid knowledge about things that are outside the purview of sense-perception and inference. Such an identification rested on the assumption that *śabda* was not human in origin, but supra-human or, as van Buitenen suggests, "preterhuman" *(apauruṣeya)* and, as a result, authoritative. That is, the very language employed in scripture must be of non-human origin. Language and its significative power arose not from human convention or, indeed, from any process that involved human agency. Rather, the meaning contained within words was established eternally outside of human agency, and language, in its entirety, was given to humans at the beginning of creation or, more precisely, manifestation.

One of the differences between the two schools of the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā lay in the differing emphasis laid upon the meaning or purport of scripture. The Prābhākara school held that the entire purport of the scripture lay in the injunction *(vidhi* or *codanā)*. That is, the primary function of the Vedas—known as the *karmakāṇḍa*—was to enjoin the believer to perform an act *(kārya)*. The notion that scriptural injunction was the central element upon which the *arthavāda*[5] and the *mantras* depend—which detail the injunctions and provide the formulae to be used in the rite, respectively—led the Prābhākaras to view the *jñānakāṇḍa*, that is, the Vedānta—the Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads—as relevant only insofar as it was injunctive. The Bhāṭṭa school argued that the Vedānta, which focusses not on acts or ritual performance but on imparting knowledge, is relevant in establishing the eternity of the soul, upon which the validity of Vedic injunctions lay. Thus, the *jñānakāṇḍa* was to be viewed as playing an accessory role to the injunctions outlined in the *karmakāṇḍa*, that is, it is to function as *arthavāda*, explanations for the injunctions. The Prābhākara school also held that Vedānta is relevant insofar as it enjoins action *(kārya);* however, since the Supreme Being is not a *kārya*, an action to be enjoined, the Vedānta must be seen as providing the injunction to meditate upon or know Brahman *(dhyānaniyogavāda)*. Further, the Vedānta is relevant also in light of the injunction that "one is to render Brahman—which because of beginningless ignorance, is conceived as phenomenal—devoid of phenomenality, without second and essentially knowledge" *(niṣprapañcīkaraṇaniyogavāda)*.[6]

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[4] Hiriyanna identifies these texts as "the repositories of [the] utterances" or considered opinions of *brāhmaṇas* or priests of recognized authority. See ibid., 14, 129.

Rāmānuja agreed with the broad parameters of this view insofar as accepting that *śabda* was authoritative, eternal and of preterhuman origin and, as such, non-contradictory in its primary meaning. However, he did not perceive the purport of *śabda* to be limited to injunctions or prohibitions to act. Rather, he viewed *śabda* as furnishing knowledge of Brahman, the highest object of human pursuit. In fact, the injunction to act or not to act was not the primary purpose or utility of scripture, or indeed, of any other means of knowledge, viz. sense-perception or inference. For Rāmānuja, the knowledge that was to be gained through any of the three *pramāṇas* or means of knowledge determined the purpose, not that the purpose determined the operation of the means of knowledge. If a scriptural passage did not directly contain an injunction or prohibition to act, then that did not therefore, mean that it had no utility, for, in the case of the *jñānakāṇḍa*, the utility lay in the denotative power of the words to impart knowledge of "the Brahman who is the cause of the creation, preservation and destruction of all the worlds, who is hostile to all that is evil, and who is an ocean of innumerable noble qualities, and has the nature of unsurpassed bliss".[7] Rāmānuja's quarrel with the Mīmāṃsaka view was not with the notion that scripture is injunctive. All ritual is propitiatory, ultimately, of Brahman. Indeed, since Brahman is the final goal of human pursuit, it is imperative to serve him. As van Buitenen reminds us, "to know Brahman ... that is to ascend to knowing the personal God through constant loving adoration, is the final stage of one road to perfection, leading from the conscientious performance of ritual acts to the self-recognition of the individual soul and from there to the love-attainment of the Supreme God, whom to serve is the soul's sole purpose and essence."[8] Hence all scripture enjoins serving him, and in this respect, all scripture is injunctive.[9] Rāmānuja's quarrel is not with whether or not scripture is injunctive but with the notion that only *vidhi* or scriptural injunction is significative. In other words, because *arthavāda* is not injunctive, it is therefore, not significative in the Prābhākara view. That is:

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[5] The Mīmāṃsā divided the Veda into two parts, "one of which *(vidhi)* refers to supra-mundane affairs and has to be understood literally, and the other *(artha-vāda)* which, roughly speaking, relates to matters of ordinary experience." See Hiriyanna, ibid., 139. van Buitenen reports that Rāmānuja's classification of the *śruti* comprised three categories: *vidhi* or *codanā*, injunction, comprising *niṣedha*, prohibition; *arthavāda* or portions that explain, describe or add to the injunctions; and Vedic mantras that are used in the rite. van Buitenen adds in his note that the Mīmāṃsakas "often make *niṣedha* into a separate category and add *nāmadheya* "proper name". See J.A.B. van Buitenen (ed.), *Rāmānuja's Vedārthasaṃgraha* (Pune: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, 1956), Introduction, 51, also n. 145. This work gives the Sanskrit text with an English translation with notes, and a useful introduction.

[6] van Buitenen, ibid., 53; see also 50–56.

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[7] *Śrībhāṣya,* 4.4 in M. Rangacharya and M.B. Vardaraja Aiyangar, trans., *The Vedāntasūtras with the Śrībhāṣya of Rāmānujācārya,* v. 1 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988 [first published 1899]), 216–217.

[8] van Buitenen, *Vedārthasaṃgraha,* 53.

[9] van Buitenen points out that the possibility Rāmānuja offers of construing the *jñānakāṇḍa* as injunctive appears to be "peculiar to the *Vedārthasaṃgraha* and has been abandoned in the *Śrībhāṣya.*" See van Buitenen, Intro., 55.

> As we cannot understand what is the power of signification of language unless by the purposeful action taken upon it, and as this purposeful action has its origin in a purposive idea of a thing to do, it follows that the Veda can only bear upon things to do, and language can be no source of knowledge about a thing that is completed.[10]

As van Buitenen points out, what this summary of the Prābhākara view means is that scripture does not provide "significant information about Brahman" since "Brahman is by definition and of necessity a perfectly complete entity which is in no state of becoming itself by outside action taken upon it ...".[11] According to the Prābhākara view, if a scriptural verse says that a person must perform a certain sacrifice in order to attain heaven, then through the performance of the sacrifice that person will attain heaven. Any description of heaven that might follow the scriptural injunction to perform the sacrifice is seen as subsidiary to the injunction, according to the Prābhākara view. Rāmānuja argues that such is not the case, for knowledge of the reward of the action is what impels the person to undertake the effort required to achieve that reward. As such, then, scriptural language does have denotative power about things other than the injunctive act itself. Since we cannot have knowledge of heaven from a source other than scripture, it follows that scriptural descriptions such as those found in the *arthavādas* may not always necessitate an action. Rather, they give information about things that are established by the particular *pramāṇa* of *śabda*, as for example, that the fruit or reward of any prescribed action is a praiseworthy goal. Further, the *arthavādas* give rise to the knowledge that those things known through the mantras and the *arthavādas* do in fact exist.[12] Even if one were to concede that the Vedānta—or *jñānakāṇḍa*—calls for action, that is not its sole purpose, for the Vedānta provides information about the final goal of human pursuit, Brahman, that is equally relevant in its own right. Further, according to Rāmānuja, the knowledge imparted by the Vedānta calls into question the Mīmāṃsaka view that the *karmakāṇḍa* or earlier portions of the Veda are privileged texts because they specify the ritual action to be performed in order to gain specific results. Anyone studying the Vedānta would know that "the sovereign Lord, the venerable Nārāyaṇa, grants any desired result when He is propitiated with any ritual act".[13]

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[10] This is Rāmānuja's summary of the Prābhākara view, translated by van Buitenen, *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, 267.

[11] *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, in van Buitenen, 267, n. 609.

[12] See Rāmānuja's discussion of this in *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, ibid., 267 ff.

The issue here regards the authority of the scripture. The Mīmāṃsā emphasized the earlier portions of the Veda, including the Brāhmaṇas as being significative because they were injunctive. The later portions of the Veda, the Vedānta, were considered by the Bhaṭṭa school as subordinate to the earlier portions, while the Prābhākara school considered the Vedānta relevant only insofar as they were injunctive. Because Rāmānuja held that both portions of the Veda were authoritative, it was important to him to argue that all of the Veda was significative. Rāmānuja's purpose in addressing the Prābhākara view was twofold: first, he wanted to establish that all scripture is a valid means of knowledge, not simply the portion of scripture that is injunctive in nature. That is, (i) both the *pūrvabhāga*—the Veda—and the *uttarabhāga*—the Vedānta—must be viewed as forming one continuous scripture and as non-contradictory; and (ii) that their relevance was not restricted purely to the enjoining of action. Second, he wanted to establish that the value of scripture as a *pramāṇa* lies not only in imparting knowledge with regard to injunctions, but also with respect to establishing the real existence of things that cannot be known by the other two pramāṇas, viz., *pratyakṣa* (sense-perception) and *anumāna* (inference). Since the origin of scripture is preterhuman *(apauruṣeya)*, and based upon scripture itself, Rāmānuja argued that the significative power of scriptural—and all other—language lies in establishing Brahman as real and existent, something that cannot be established by any other *pramāṇa:*

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[13] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #124, in van Buitenen, 277.

> And these Vedas, in the form of *vidhi, arthavāda* and *mantra*, denote the proper form of Nārāyaṇa, who is the Supreme Brahman, and the manner in which He is to be propitiated, and finally the particular results that follow when He is propitiated. The entire body of language called Veda, which gives rise to the knowledge of the Supreme Person, of His proper form, of the propitiation of Him, and of the fruit thereof, is eternal.[14]

Having established that all *śruti* is a valid *pramāṇa*, whose purport is to give information about Brahman, the supreme being, the stage is now set for Rāmānuja to proceed one step further. This lies in his careful construction of the argument that all language denotes Brahman as the ultimate referent of all words and sentences. The manner in which he does this is to examine how things acquire the character of being things *(vastu)*. This reveals that things become things in the process of manifestation. A more detailed discussion of creation will follow under in the sub-section dealing with Brahman as Creator. In brief, Rāmānuja's view is that Brahman willed, of his own accord, that he be modified by the many. He therefore, divided *prakṛti* (matter) in its subtle *(sūkṣma)* state from *puruṣa* (spirit, or the totality of experiencing entities[15]), which were both dissolved in himself.[16] He then created the primaeval elements out of *prakṛti*, and introduced the experiencing entities into these elements as their souls. He created the entire universe out of these elements controlled by the souls, "and then of His own accord enters into them as their immanent soul and exists on as the Supreme Spirit whose body is formed by all, and is thus modified by the many."[17] Drawing upon the authority of the scriptural verse *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.3.2, in which the entrance of Brahman into the individual self is made *before* the evolution of differentiation into name and form: "Entering in along with this individual self which [also] is the same as Myself, I evolve the differentiations of name and form", Rāmānuja makes the argument that "all things acquire the character of being things, and of being expressible by means of words, only by reason of their having been entered into by the individual selves which [in their turn] have the Brahman for their Self."[18] This being the case, then, it must be noted that all words denoting material embodiments include in their meaning that which they embody, that is, that of which they are a mode. Words such as ox, horse, man, for example, denote particular genera and are the modes of particular masses of matter. At the same time, any such mass of matter forms the body of an intelligent individual soul, and, therefore, forms that soul's mode of existence.[19] Hence, the words ox, horse, man—words denoting material embodiments—are not only modes of particular masses of matter, but are also modes of the intelligent soul that has that particular mass of matter as its embodiment. However, the intelligent soul is itself the mode of the Highest Self. Therefore, the words ox, horse, man must finally include in their import the Highest Self himself.[20]

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[14] Ibid., #139, 294.

[15] Ibid., #140, 296.

[16] *svasaṃkalpānuvidhāyisvarūpasthiti;* ibid., #140, 169.

[17] Ibid., #140, 295–296. The problem raised by such a formulation, originating in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.2.3 is that it implies a time when Brahman has not yet entered into the individual souls. At the same time, Brahman is considered to be the eternal supporter *(ādhāra)* of his body, that is, of the universe, comprised of matter and souls in conjunction. If the body of Brahman—the universe—is in an *apṛthaksiddhi* (incapable of being realized apart from him [Lipner, 124]) relationship with Brahman, then does not the notion of there being a time when Brahman has not yet entered into the individual souls alter this relationship? *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.3.2 has a somewhat different version, suggesting that Brahman enters into the individual self before name and form come into being.

> Hence, it is concluded that the whole totality of beings which is made up of the intelligent and non-intelligent things is identical with the Brahman, only because of the relation of the body and the soul [existing between them]. Hence, all that is different from the Brahman becomes an entity only through constituting His body; and accordingly, the word also which denotes that [entity or thing] imports its [full] meaning only when it includes that [Brahman].[21]

In his *Śrībhāṣya*,[22] Rāmānuja takes exception to two other Prābhākara Mīmāṃsaka views favoured by the Advaitin thinker Śaṅkara. These are the *niṣprapañcīkaraṇaniyogavāda* view that the *jñānakāṇḍa* enjoins the establishment of Brahman devoid of phenomenality, and the related *dhyānaniyogavāda* view that the *jñānakāṇḍa* enjoins meditation on such a Brahman. Rāmānuja understands the first view to mean "that the Brahman should be realised as pure and simple experience which is devoid of the distinction of the knower and the known"[23] while the second view is understood by its proponent to indicate that "freedom results wholly from the knowledge derived from scriptural passages, but not from any commandment".[24] The first view suggests that all distinctions are based on ignorance alone, and, therefore, when removal of the obstruction to that final release "is accomplished by means of the knowledge of the syntactical meaning of scriptural sentences", then "final release follows immediately after the knowledge [of Brahman], and [so] (scriptural statements) oppose the interposition of any injunction [bearing upon meditation]."[25] That is, when all distinctions are removed, then the knower and the known are identical, and hence, there is no need for attributes or other differentiation. Not so, argues Rāmānuja, for the purpose of the syntactical meaning of scripture is to declare that "that Brahman—who is the only cause of all the worlds, who is devoid of even the smallest taint of all that is evil, who is the abode of innumerable auspicious qualities, such as omniscience, the quality of willing the truth, etc., and who is bliss unsurpassed in excellence, is really existent."[26] That is, Rāmānuja calls into question the view of the *niṣprapañcīkaraṇaniyogavādin* that the *jñānakāṇḍa* enjoins the establishment of Brahman devoid of phenomenality. Rather, the *jñānakāṇḍa* must be understood as imparting real knowledge of its ultimate referent, that is, Brahman. Moreover, the information gleaned of Brahman from the scripture indicates that Brahman is not without attributes; indeed, he is the host of all auspicious attributes. Related to this, Rāmānuja also refutes the *dhyānaniyogavādin's* view that scripture enjoins meditation, but does not establish Brahman, again based on the notion that *jñānakāṇḍa* is relevant only insofar as it is injunctive, not significative in that it establishes something. To this Rāmānuja replies that "If, in the case of the Upanishadic passages also, it be determined that they do not denote the real existence of the Brahamn, then, although they give rise to the [conceptual] knowledge of the Brahman, there would be [to those passages] no finality in utility."[27] In other words, the *dhyānaniyogavādin's* insistence that the primary purport of the *jñānakāṇḍa* lies in the injunction to meditate leads Rāmānuja to question the value of this meditation and its consequent knowledge if it is not related to that which is its object, that is, Brahman. Rāmānuja argues that in addition to its injunctive value, and in many instances, even when there is no injunctive value, scripture must be viewed as a means of knowledge that terminates referentially in Brahman and provides valuable information about him. In sum, then, if the *jñānakāṇḍa* is viewed as relevant only because of its injunctive value, then this is not so, because it must also be recognized as establishing that which cannot be established by any other *pramāṇa.* If the *jñānakāṇḍa* is to be viewed as relevant only because it exhorts knowing Brahman in order to remove the ignorance that leads to viewing Brahman as a phenomenal entity, then this too is not correct, because the very nature of scriptural language attests to the establishment of a Brahman who is characterized by attributes. In either case, the stress on the injunctive purport of scripture does not do justice to the totality of scripture, which is both informative or significative, and injunctive. van Buitenen points out that while Rāmānuja in his *Vedārthasaṃgraha*—an early work which establishes him as a mature and serious thinker—is still willing to concede the injunctive significance of the *jñānakāṇḍa*, in his major work, the *Śrībhāṣya*, he is no longer willing to give the injunctive significance much importance.[28]

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[18] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 165.
[19] Ibid., 288.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 165.
[22] Ibid., 219 ff.

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[23] Ibid., 219.
[24] Ibid., 225.
[25] Ibid., 228.
[26] Ibid., 249.

The Valid Means to Knowledge, or the *Pramāṇas*

The three sources or means of knowledge commonly accepted by schools of Indian philosophy are *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference) and *śabda* (verbal testimony).

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[27] Ibid., 249.

[28] van Buitenen, *Vedārthasaṃgraha,* Introduction, 56.

Rāmānuja assesses the *pramāṇas* by asking implicitly how things can be known. According to him, no thing can be the object of knowledge unless it has attributes,[29] and such attributes fall into two categories: those that are additional to the essence of a thing, and those that are in invariable accompaniment of that thing *(apṛthaksiddhi* or *pṛthak-siddhy-anarha,* that is, 'incapable of being realised apart from'[30]). An example of the first would be, "The man with the staff", where the staff is not essential to our understanding of the man and is something additional to the man. The staff itself has substantive existence—as wood—apart from the man, but is still a mode of the man in that it has no purposive existence independent of the staff-bearer.[31] The second is illustrated in, "The fragrance of the jasmine", in which the fragrance of the jasmine flower is not something that can be found apart from the jasmine itself, although it is distinguishable from it. It is with respect to the latter category of distinguishing—and distinguishable—attributes *(viśeṣana)* that Rāmānuja states that no thing can be known unless it has attributes, indicating, for one, that the *pramāṇas* are prescribed in that manner, and for another, that were a thing to have no distinguishing attributes, then a person would be equally satisfied with a horse if he were looking for a cow. There cannot be, according to Rāmānuja, any thing that is devoid of attributes *(nirviśeṣa):*

> Those, who maintain the view that there is a thing which is devoid of attributes, cannot say what criterion there is to prove that thing which is so devoid of attributes; because, all the criteria of truth [that form the means of logical proof] deal [only] with such objects as possess attributes. And the convention that obtains in their own school that it [viz., the thing devoid of attributes] is established by one's own experience, is counteracted by the fact of such experience having [nevertheless] the qualification of being witnessed by the *Ātman* [or the self]; because, all experience relates to

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[29] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #30, in van Buitenen, 202–203. Also # 29, 202: "When there is one differentiation denoted by a word for that entity of pure knowledge, that dfferentiation must be a distinguishing feature of Brahman." See also n. 141 and 142. For a summary of *pramāṇas,* see M. Yamunacharya, *Ramanuja's Teachings in His Own Words* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1970), Chapter 1.

[30] Julius Lipner, *The Face of Truth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 124.

[31] Ibid., 126.

> objects which are qualified by some attribute or other, as for instance in the specific cognition, 'I saw this'.[32]

Pratyakṣa, or perception, is dependent on the external and internal senses.[33] However, it, too, cannot know anything that is devoid of attributes. Although we may differentiate between indeterminate *(nirvikalpaka)* and determinate *(savikalpaka)* perception, we must remain clear that this does not mean that perception may prove [the existence of] that thing which is without attributes. Indeterminate perception simply means that it is "the first outline-perception in relation to things which are of the same kind; and it is said that the second and the following outline-perceptions are definite (perceptions)".[34] In contrast to the view of the Naiyāyikas,[35] according to whom indeterminate perception is the knowledge that there is something, without any knowledge of its specific attributes, Rāmānuja holds that indeterminate perception is simply the first perception of the first object in its class and not the perception of that which is devoid of all attributes.[36] Further, *pratyakṣa* is not capable of investigating the nature of Brahman, since the supreme self is beyond the reach of the senses, according to *Kathopaniṣad* II.6.9: "His form is not to be seen, no one beholds Him with the eye."[37] All forms of perception, whether external, internal or *yogic*, are dependent on things perceived by the external senses, and, therefore, perception cannot produce "the knowledge which relates to that particular Person who is capable of directly perceiving all things, and is (also) capable of bringing them into existence",[38] for "Brahman is altogether beyond the senses."[39]

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[32] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 41. See also Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, Chapter Two: Predication and Meaning, and n. 4, 152–153, where he cites Rāmānuja as stating that language is incapable of making known a non-differentiated thing *(nirviśeṣa-vastu)*.

[33] van Buitenen, 223, n. 247.

[34] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 42–43.

[35] See van Buitenen, 203, n. 146. These are: the five sensorial senses *(buddhīndriya)*, the five motorial senses *(karmendriya)* and the mind *(manas*, "the co-ordinating organ of sensorial impressions").

[36] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 43.

[37] Cited in Yamunacharya, *Ramanuja's Teachings*, 60. I have not been able to locate this citation in the *Śrībhāṣya*. Rāmānuja simply says: "The Brahman is altogether beyond the senses, and so does not form the object of any means of proof, such as preception (sic) etc., and the *Śāstra* alone forms the means to prove Him." *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.3, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 202.

Anumāna, or inference, is similarly not considered to be a valid means for giving rise to knowledge of Brahman. This is so because inference, if deductive, depends on sense-based information supplied by *pratyakṣa* or perception for its operations. If inductive, it cannot give rise to a generalization that "is invariably associated with that particular Person who is capable of directly perceiving all things and of actually bringing those (things) into existence."[40] It may be argued that the idea of the producing agent may be invariably associated with the effect, that is, one may posit the creator from his creation. However, there are many attributes applicable to the creator that cannot be proved to exist in the creator because they do not directly form the cause of producing the effect. Thus, inference depends on what we perceive and is limited by having to conform to what we actually see. Hence, it is clear that the supreme being, who is beyond sense-perception, cannot be adequately inferred by the processes of inference, which must necessarily depend on what is already known in order to operate. Therefore, the supreme being can only be proved by the *pramāṇa* of *śabda*, that is, the *śāstras*, or scripture.[41]

The following points regarding Rāmānuja's understanding of *śabda* as a *pramāṇa* have been discussed above in our exposition of his treatment of Mimāṃsaka views: that *śabda* is preterhuman *(apauruṣeya);* it establishes things, including Brahman, that cannot be known by any other *pramāṇa;* its language is eternal and it forms the basis of human language. Rāmānuja also uses scripture to establish that all words have their ultimate referent in Brahman, the Supreme Being, due to the modal relationship between things and the

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[38] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.3, 202–203.
[39] Ibid., 202.
[40] Ibid., 203.
[41] Ibid, 203–215.

Supreme Self. What follow, then, are some additional remarks concerning Rāmānuja's view of scripture.

Śabda-pramāṇa refers to the two kinds of scripture, *śruti* or revealed scripture, and *smṛti* or remembered scripture. The former comprises the Vedas and their subsiduaries, such as the Brāhmanas and the Upaniṣads, and is considered authoritative scripture. Rāmānuja, however, attempts to create an authoritative space for *smṛti*, traditionally not included within the purview of authoritative scriptural texts. There were likely two reasons for his stance: firstly, as a Vaiṣṇava, texts such as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* were crucial to his sectarian affiliation. Secondly, the popular appeal of a text such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* made it imperative for a systematic philosopher/theologian such as himself to include it in order to make his *saṃpradāya* or school of teaching relevant to his following. Indeed, Rāmānuja wrote four commentaries, three on the *Vedāntasūtras*—the *Śrībhāṣya*, which is his magnum opus, and the *Vedāntasāra* and *Vedāntadīpa*, which are abridgements of the first. His fourth commentary was on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, thus drawing attention to its importance as a scriptural text, although strictly speaking it belongs to the classification of *smṛti* literature. It will not escape notice that the renowned Śaṅkara also wrote a *Gītābhāṣya*, indicating that Rāmānuja was not alone in his attempt to give authoritative status in learned circles to the popular *smṛti* text. Rāmānuja elucidates the importance of *smṛti* texts in the following manner: "Since the Vedas are endless and difficult to understand, the great *ṛṣis* have been ordered by the Supreme Person to transmit the sense of the Veda in every age in order to help all the worlds, and they have composed the *dharmaśāstras*, epics and *purāṇas* which are founded on *vidhi*, *arthavāda* and *mantra*."[42] That is, the *smṛti* texts are authoritative insofar as (i) they do not contradict *śruti*, and (ii) they corroborate it.[43] The *Bhagavad Gītā* is one such text, found in the larger heroic epic, the *Mahābhārata*. *Śabda*—which includes both *śruti* and *smṛti* qualified as above—refers to that veridical knowledge of Brahman revealed to seers or *ṛṣis* who are well-developed in their intuitive powers. According to Rāmānuja in his commentary on *Vedāntasūtra* I.1.4, *"tattu samanvayāt"*,[44] the purpose of scripture is as follows:

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[42] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #139, in van Buitenen, 294.

[43] van Buitenen, Introduction, 33. While Jaimimi ruled that *smṛti* was to be disregarded wherever it contradicted *śruti*, Rāmānuja added that *smṛti* played the role of corroborating the *śruti* for those "whose knowledge of scriptural revelation falls short" insofar as *smṛti* did

> The word *samanvaya* means the proper purport, that is, such a purport as constitutes an object of human pursuit. The meaning is that, owing to the fact that the Brahman, who is the highest object of human pursuit, and whose very nature is unsurpassed bliss, forms the purport [of the scriptures] by constituting the thing that is to be denoted [by them],—that, namely, the fact that the scripture forms the means of proving [the Brahman] is undoubtedly established.[45]

That is to say, scripture terminates "referentially in Brahman, the very ground of being".[46]

Further,

> In cases where, on account of the association of a small modicum of that quality, other things than He are meant (by the word Brahman), it must be used in a secondary sense; because it is improper to postulate a variety of meanings (for it), as (it is improper) in the case also of the word *Bhagavat*. For the sake of attaining immortality. (sic—no period required) He alone has to be desired and to be known by (all) those who are afflicted with the three miseries. Hence, the Lord of All is indeed the Brahman who forms the object of (our present) enquiry.[47]

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not contradict *śruti* in its primary meaning. *Śrībhāṣya*, 2,1,1, quoted in van Buitenen as noted.

[44] The translators of both the *Śrībhāṣya* and the *Vedāntasāra* render *"tattu samavayāt"* thus: "That [viz. the fact that the scriptures form altogether the source of the knowledge relating to the Brahman] results, however, from [His constituting] the true purport [of the scriptures]." See *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.4, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 246, and M.B. Narasiṃha Ayyangar, trans., *Vedāntasāra of Bhagavad Rāmānuja* (Madras: The Adyar Library, 1953), 23.

[45] *Śribhāṣya* 1.1.4, 246–247.

[46] Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 21. For a discussion on the veracity of scripture as a *pramāṇa* and its relation to language, see Chapter 1: Language and Meaning.

[47] *Śrībhāsya* 1.1.1, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 3–4.

Brahman Is Not Without Attributes

The purpose of scripture to impart knowledge about Brahman, in which all language terminates. In addition, for Rāmānuja, scripture cannot and does not denote Brahman as being without attributes *(nirviśeṣa):*

> Verbal testimony *(śabda)* also possesses the power of denoting only such objects as are qualified by attributes, because it is extant in the form of words and sentences. A word is, in fact, the result of the combination of roots and terminations. There is difference between the meaning of the root and that of the termination, and it is therefore, unavoidable that words denote only such things as are qualified (by attributes). And the difference between words binds us to a difference in (their) meaning. A sentence, which is a collection of words, gives expression to the peculiar relations existing between the meanings of several words (therein), and is hence, incapable of denoting any object which is devoid of attributes. Verbal testimony is, therefore, no authoritative means of proving the thing which is devoid of attributes.[48]

However, an Advaitin opponent questions Rāmānuja's assertion that Brahman is differentiated by qualities *(viśeṣana)* by pointing out that a scriptural verse such as *"athāta ādeśo neti neti"*[49] clearly indicates "a negation all around". That is, Brahman is without attributes. Not so, declares Rāmānuja, because it would be futile for the Upaniṣad in question first to teach concerning Brahman's form, and then to invalidate it. Rather, what is meant here is to clarify that Brahman is not limited only to what has been taught, but is "much more than has been stated before". Evidence of this is provided when the same Upaniṣad declares in 4,3,6: "so, the name of the real is real: thus the real is verily the vital airs and the possessor of them is the real."[50]

To Rāmānuja, qualifying Brahman with attributes does not impose any limitations upon Brahman. Indeed, those scriptures that speak of Brahman as without qualities are understood by Rāmānuja to indicate that there are certain qualities which are to be denied of Brahman, while there are still others which must be affirmed. The negation is made in order to acknowledge that Brahman is without any imperfections, while the affirmation of attributes serves to glorify Brahman, acknowledging that the supreme being is unsurpassable.[51] The latter would include, for example, the attributes concerning the proper form *(svarūpa)* of Brahman, such as *sat* (true being), *cit* (consciousness) and *ananta* (infinitude).[52] These are attributes which stand in an *apṛthaksiddhi* relationship with Brahman, that is to say, in an inseparable relationship with the supreme being. For even though these attributes are distinguishable, they are not found except in relation with Brahman. As such, the rule of *sāmānādhikaraṇya* (correlative predication) applies, which "has to be understood to mean the denotation of some one thing which is characterised by more than one attribute."[53] Rāmānuja continually emphasizes that Brahman is free from any imperfection arising out of attachment with the world of created things by stressing that he is the antithesis to all evil, "whose essential nature is opposed to everything defiling" *(nikhila-heya-pratyanīka)*, "free from all trace—literally, scent—of evil or imperfection" *(nirasta-nikhila-doṣa-gandham)*.[54] Indeed, Rāmānuja asserts: "He is opposed to all evil whatsoever, and His essential nature *(svarūpa)*, consists solely of what is auspicious *(kalyāṇa)*."[55] If the purpose of denying all attributes to Brahman was to safeguard the divine essence from any imperfection arising from association with attributes, then the Advaitin position is vindicated. Rāmānuja shared this concern but was unwilling to address it in quite the same way as the Advaitin as this would have required an admission that Brahman is unknowable. Indeed, in his interpretation of the term *nirguṇa*, Rāmānuja provides an alternative, as pointed out by Carman, to the Advaitin conceptualization by locating the source of Brahman's impermeability to evil in his stainlessness *(amalatva)*. Carman makes the case that Rāmānuja's emphasis on the doctrine of Brahman's stainlessness *(amalatva)* was in part "his desire to provide an alternative interpretation of [the Advaitin] term... *nirguṇa*..."[56] as can be seen in Rāmānuja's statement:

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[48] Ibid., 42.

[49] *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2,3,6: "so now the teaching 'it is not such nor such'". See van Buitenen, *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, 211, n. 175.

[50] Ibid., n. 179: *atha nāmadheyaṃ satyasya satyam iti prāṇā vai satyaṃ teṣāṃ eṣa satyam.*

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[51] Or, as Lipner states more succinctly, "The point of Brahman's having the *ubhayaliṅga*, i.e. the twofold (positive and negative) mark is to emphasise (not only against non-dualist views of the Absolute but as the focus of true theistic devotion) Brahman's variegated perfection and its transcendent purity." See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 82.

[52] Ibid., 29, where Lipner refers to *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* II.1.1: "Brahman is reality, knowledge, infinite" and 80, where he points out that Rāmānuja in *Śrībhāṣya* 3.3.13 extends the definitional characteristics to five: reality *(satya)*, knowledge *(jñāna)*, bliss *(ānanda)*, purity *(amalatva)* and infinitude *(anantatva)*. Lipner's translation of this passage is: "Those qualities adequating to an object in that they are tied to the apprehension of the object itself in so far as their characteristic is to describe the proper form of the object, are always present in the manner of the object's proper form. And these qualities are reality *[satya]*, knowledge *[jñāna]*, bliss *[ānanda]* and purity *[amalatva]*. Now, by such texts as 'Whence these beings are born ...' *[Taittirīya Upaniṣad* III.1.1], Brahman is described through secondary characteristics *[upalakṣitaṃ brahma]*, as cause of the world and so on; but by 'Brahman is reality, knowledge, infinite' and 'Brahman is bliss' *[Taittirīya Upaniṣad* III.6.1] etc., Brahman is described essentially *[svarūpato]* through the words 'bliss' and so on." Lipner adds: "The first-order [essence-] defining quality of our *Taittirīya* text is not really impaired by the addition of 'bliss' and 'purity' in the extract above, for, as we shall see later, Rāmānuja makes 'bliss' the obverse of 'knowledge', while 'purity' as a negative, is functionally and semantically interdependent with 'infinitude'. See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, Ch. Two, n. 19, 154–155.

[53] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 84–85. Rāmānuja quotes grammarians—by whom he means Pāṇini—as declaring that "a grammatical equation *[sāmānādhikaraṇya]* [between words] means that words having a variety of significations are used so as to import only one thing." The translator supplies the definition as given by Kaiyyaṭa in his commentary on Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, under Pāṇini as follows: *bhinnabravṛttinimittayuktasya anekasya śabdasya ekasmin arthe vṛttis sāmānādhikaraṇyam.* See n. 1. In the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, van Buitenen points to Rāmānuja's definition of the term in #26: *bhinnapravṛttinimittānāṃ śabdānām ekasminn arthe vṛttiḥ* "the bearing on one sense

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of more words with different reasons for their application", citing the *mahāvākya tattvamasi* as the stock example. See van Buitenen, 187, n. 55, and *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #26, 200, "the application to one object of several words in different functions". Lipner translates the citation in #26 thus: "The experts say that correlative predication *[sāmānādhikaraṇya]* is the application to one object of more than one word having different grounds for their occurrence." Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 29.

[54] Quoted in John Braisted Carman, *The Theology of Rāmānuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), 101, 104; see also the discussion on the fifth defining attribute of Brahman, viz. *amalatva* (purity; literally, stainlessness), 103–108. Carman here explores the idea that Brahman is free from all imperfections or defilement arising out of his connection to the realm of creation. Nancy Ann Nayar in "The Devotional Mood of Rāmānuja's Bhāgavadgītā-bhāṣya and Āḻvār Spirituality" in Katherine K. Young, ed., *Hermeneutical Paths to the Sacred Worlds of India* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994), 186–221, distinguishes between the differing purposes of Rāmānuja's use of the notion of stainlessness or untaintedness in the *Śrībhāṣya* and the *Gītābhāṣya*. She notes that while Carman's thesis is upheld in both works, the *Gītābhāṣya* references occur "most often in a devotional context" and are linked "with a more sectarian agenda", which was "to break with or pose a sharp contrast to the archaic Tamil view of deity." That is, it "may indicate the desire to differentiate Viṣṇu from other 'tainted' gods of the Southern milieu."

[55] *Gītābhāṣya* 18.73, quoted in Carman, *The Theology*, 69.

[56] Ibid, 105.

> Those texts stating that He is without qualities are also well established, since they pertain to the negation of the defiling qualities of material nature *[prākṛta-heya-guṇa]*.[57]

Brahman's Attributes

All descriptions of Brahman must be seen within the context of Rāmānuja's school of thought or *saṃpradāya*, Viśiṣṭādvaita.[58] As noted above, Rāmānuja does not accept the Advaitin position of Brahman as devoid of all attributes. While Brahman is the sole Reality, nonetheless this reality is not without attributes. Thus, the thrust of Rāmānuja's cogitations on Brahman lies in his attempts to elucidate Brahman as "the being inside the sole Reservoir of all illustrious Attributes, the Antithesis to all evil".[59]

In his commentary on the *Vedāntasūtras*, Rāmānuja derives the etymology of the word Brahman thus:

> For, everywhere [i.e., in all contexts] the word Brahman is seen to derive its meaning from the association of *bṛhattva*, i.e., greatness [with the thing

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[57] Ibid, where Carman quotes Rāmānuja's *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #83.

[58] Monier-Williams translates it as "'qualified non-duality,' the doctrine that the spirits of men have a qualified identity with the one Spirit"; see Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970 [1899]), 992. However, in the introduction to his condensed rendering of the *Gītābhāṣya*, van Buitenen points out that the term Viśiṣṭādvaita is "often incorrectly interpreted as a *karmadhāraya* comp. "qualified, modified non-dualism"; but it is a *tatpuruṣa: viśiṣṭasyādvaitam*, or, as Veṇkaṭanātha (Nyāyasiddhājñana, quoted by Kuppuswami in Srinivasachari, Finite Self) puts it, *viśiṣṭasya viśiṣṭarūpam advaitam*, "monism of the differenced, unity of the universe's spiritual and non-spiritual substances with and in God whom they modify by constituting His body." See Introduction, n. 1 in J.A.B. van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968). Lipner adds that here we should read, 'but it is a *ṣaṣṭhī tatpuruṣa*' and directs us to V. Varadachari's article, "Antiquity of the Term Visishtadvaita" in Vishistadvaita: Philosophy and Religion, 109ff. See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 174, n.34; also 142, 46–47. P.B. Vidyarthi offers a slightly differently nuanced view from that of van Buitenen: "Rāmānuja, like Śaṅkara, believes in only One ultimate Reality but he differs from him in holding that this Reality must be determinate, *viśiṣṭa*, in character. *Viśiṣṭādvaita* is thus defined as the 'non-duality of the qualified, that is to say, the teaching of Rāmānuja is designated as *Viśiṣṭādvaita* for the reason that it propounds the view that there is only one Reality, Brahman who is qualified by the entire conscious and unconscious entities which are different from Him." He adds: "Reality is one, *advaita*, but it is not indeterminate or *Nirviśeṣa* but qualified or *Viśiṣṭa*—qualified by the conscious souls and non-intelligent matter." See P.B. Vidyarthi, *Knowledge, Self and God in Ramanuja* (New Delhi: Oriental Publishers and Distributors, 1978), 182–184.

[59] *Gītābhāṣya*, Proem, in Govindāchārya, 6.

> denoted by it]; and whatever greatness is, by nature as well as by qualities, unsurpassed in excellence, that is its primary and natural meaning. And He [who possesses such greatness] is alone the Lord of All. Hence the word Brahman is primarily used to signify Him alone.[60]

We have already seen that Rāmānuja interprets the phrase *neti neti* ("not this, nor this") to mean that Brahman is not limited only to what has been said of him in scripture, but is, in fact, much more. That is, Brahman is *para*, the Supreme. Does this quality of greatness signify also that Brahman is Supreme in that He is "Other", as indicated, for example, by Śaṅkara? Śaṅkara views Brahman as entirely other,[61] that is, not only is there no ontological relationship between Brahman and the world, but also only Brahman can be construed as being real, for the world is ultimately unreal. Rāmānuja maintains that Brahman is different from either *cit* or *acit*,[62] and this would prima facie indicate otherness, which is key to Śaṅkara's understanding of Brahman. However, for Rāmānuja, it is not otherness in the manner that Śaṅkara understands it. Śaṅkara stresses otherness to deny ontological continuity between Brahman and the world, with the consequence that the world is not posited as something ultimately real. Rāmānuja cannot understand otherness in this manner. For him, Brahman is other because, due to his inherent greatness *(bṛhattva)*, he is the "Lord of all" as expressed in the quote above. This greatness "consists in possessing omniscience, the quality of willing the truth, and [being] the instrumental and the material cause of the world".[63] The attendant consequence of this stance is that therefore, the reality of the world cannot be denied. Rāmānuja stresses that this ontological continuity must be understood in a modal manner in order to prevent the imperfections of the world from reflecting upon Brahman. That is, Brahman is the substance *(dravya)* for which the world is the attribute *(guṇa)* in, among other modal relationships, the body–possessor of body *(śarīra–śarīrin)* relationship:

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[60] Ibid., 3–4.

[61] An interesting perspective on this notion is provided by Leslie C. Orr's study of Śaṅkara's concept of time. See Leslie C. Orr, "The Concept of Time in Śaṅkara's *Brahmasūtra-Bhāṣya*" in Young, ed., *Hermeneutical Paths*, 88ff.

[62] van Buitenen, 183, n.1 defines *cit* as the "'spiritual order of the Universe, sum-total of individual *ātmans*,' generally said of the evolved product of individualized souls, as against *puruṣa*—'the spiritual order' in its subtle, i.e., causal state ...'." In n.2 he defines *acit* as "'non-spiritual order, material or physical component of the Universe,' constituting the corporeal counterpart of *cit* to which it is subservient." van Buitenen understands *cit* and *acit* as the spiritual and material entities in their evolved state, drawing attention to *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #140, 296, wherein Rāmānuja identifies *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* as denoting those same entities in their subtle, or yet unevolved state: "This subtle matter of the primeval elements is called by the name of *prakṛti*, and all the experiencing entities are in their totality denoted by the name *puruṣa*."

> His mode of being is that He is modified by all creatures, for his body is constituted by all entities because he is the inner Ruler of all entities: firstly the non-spiritual entities which enable the spiritual entities to attain the supreme salutary Goal, which are liable to evolutions of infinite variety and which are the objects of experiences for the spiritual entities,—and secondly, the spiritual entities themselves which are of an infinite variety, either bond or released: the sum-total of these entities constitutes a particle of Brahman and forms the material for his sport.[64]

In one stroke, then, Rāmānuja affirms the ontological connection between Brahman and the world by establishing a modal relationship between Brahman, *cit* and *acit*, who together comprise the three eternals. The relationship among these three entities is one of *apṛthaksiddhi*[65] in that they cannot be found apart from each other. This is characterized, for instance, by the *śarīra–śarīrin* (body–possessor of body) relationship, in which *acit* and *cit* form the body of Brahman. Brahman's body may exist in a subtle or in a gross state, and creation is considered to be the divinely willed desire to be modified by the many, implemented by the divinely-caused movement of the body from the subtle state to the gross state. Further, the fact that the entire world constitutes only a particle of Brahman attests to his inherent greatness. Thus, he is "other" in that he is supreme or inherently great, not "other" in that the world is ontologically unconnected with him. Rather, for Rāmānuja, the world is always connected to Brahman as his body.

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[63] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.2, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 199. Vedānta Deśika in his *Śatadūṣaṇī* suggests that the Advaitin would hold that the etymology of the word Brahman, that is, 'growing' and 'causing to grow' cannot apply to Brahman proper as the impersonal Supreme Brahman is "believed to be eternal and devoid of attributes" and proceeds to argue against the Advaitin position. See S.M. Srinivasa Chari, *Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita: A Study based on Vedānta Deśika's Śatadūṣaṇī* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976 [1961]), 93.

[64] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #42, in van Buitenen, 213.

[65] Or *pṛthak-siddhy-anarha*, "incapable of being realized apart from." See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 123–127.

How does Rāmānuja describe Brahman? The central issue regarding any discussion of divine attributes is whether attributes imply a modification of the immutability and perfection of the divine essence. Rāmānuja asserts vehemently that the divine essence of Brahman is not subject to modification or defilement. He states:

> The scriptural texts that deal with the immutability of Brahman have their most significant meaning *[mukhyārtha]* by the very denial of modification in His essential nature *[svarūpa]*. Those stating that He is attributeless are also well established since they pertain to the negation of the defiling qualities of material nature. These that deny plurality are well ensured by the affirmation that all entitites, both spiritual and material, are the modes of Brahman by virtue of consitituting His body, and that Brahman having everything as His modes exists as the sole reality, because He is the Self of all. The passages speaking of Brahman as different from all modes, as Master *[Pati]*, as Lord *[Īśvara]*, as the abode of all auspicious qualities, as the One whose desires are eternally realized and whose will is ever accomplished, etc., are justly retained by accepting just that. Statements that He is sheer knowledge and bliss are maintained because they express the defining property of the essential nature *[svarūpa-nirūpaka-dharma]* of the Supreme Brahman, who is different from all, the support of all, the cause of the origination, subsistence, and dissolution of all, faultless, immutable, the Self of all. This defining property is sheer knowledge in the form of bliss opposed to any impurity. Therefore His essential nature, being self-illuminating, is also completely knowledge or consciousness *[jñānam eva]*. The declarations of unity are well founded, since by virtue of the body–soul relationship, the identification of the two realities in coordinate predication *[sāmānādhikaraṇya]* is seen to be the most significant meaning of these texts.[66]

The above passage yields some clues with regard to how we may approach the delineation of attributes in Rāmānuja's works. There is clearly an indication here that there are some attributes that "express the defining property of the essential nature *(svarūpa-nirūpaka-dharma)* of the Supreme Brahman" (from above quote). Lipner has identified these as primarily five, viz., *satya, jñāna, anantatva, ānanda* and *amalatva*, although strictly speaking, Rāmānuja at times adds "and so on" *(ādi)*, and often prefaces his list with "such as".[67] In speculating on these five attributes that define Brahman's proper form *(svarūpanirūpaṇadharma)*, Carman makes the signficant point that the attributes defining His essential nature are those by which "His essential nature can be defined without reference to His relation to any other entity".[68] That is, although Rāmānuja does not conceive of Brahman as without attributes *(nirguṇa)*, that does not mean that Brahman is not one who is unique, distinct from all other entities, and essentially free from and opposed to all impurity or evil. It must also be noted that Rāmānuja seems to imply the entire set of five when he mentions one or two of these attributes. Accordingly, in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, he says: "... the Supreme Brahman ... is antagonistic to all evil and esentially different from everything else. His proper form is purely boundless knowledge and bliss"[69] and also "... this Supreme Brahman Nārāyaṇa has a proper form of undefinable knowledge and beatitude in the purest form."[70] In other words, sometimes the attribute of *jñāna* alone, sometimes mentioned in connection with *ānanda*, sometimes including *ananta*, are all indicative of all five (since it is not explicit what may have been included in the *ādi)*. The device of mentioning one or two items of the list seems to have been sufficiently in use among his audience to ensure that the entire list of five attributes, etc. was meant.

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[66] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #84, quoted in Carman, *The Theology*, 71–72. We know from above, n. 53, that the unity of Brahman is maintained by the rule of *sāmānādhikaraṇya*, according to which two realities (knowledge and bliss) indicate the same One Being, and not a division in his unity. Lipner points out that for Rāmānuja "'Bliss is said to be the agreeable [aspect] of knowledge': *jñānam eva hy anukūlam ānanda ity ucyate*; 'For to be a knower is to be one who experiences bliss': *jñātṛtvam eva hy ānanditvam*." See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 161, n. 35, where he cites texts from *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1.

Satya describes Brahman "as possessing unconditioned being"; *jñāna*, "the state of permanently uncontracted knowledge"; *ananta*, his "essential nature as free from all limitations of place, time, or particular substantial nature"; *ānanda*, "that bliss which is the very summit of an unsurpassable excellence". *Amalatva*, is his being "free from evil", which means to "have the character which is the opposite of grossness and all similar qualities that belong to the empirical world, in both its material and its intelligent aspects" as well as "to be free from *karma [apahata-karmatvam].*"[71] Rāmānuja refutes the objection that each of these attributes could indicate different beings by pointing out in a discussion countering the Advaitin view of Brahman as devoid of attributes that:

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[67] Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 149, n. 18. See also *Śrībhāṣya* 3.3.13, quoted in Carman, *The Theology*, 88.
[68] Carman, *The Theology*, 97. See Chs. 4–7 for a discussion of Brahman's attributes.
[69] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #140, in van Buitenen, 294–295.
[70] Ibid., #127, 282.

> the fact of their [i.e., of Brahman, Existence, Knowledge, and Infinity] being grammatically equated has to be understood to mean the denotation of some one thing which is characterised by more than one attribute . . . because an equation between words is, indeed, intended to establish that one and the same thing is characterised by more than one attribute.[72]

In addition to the "defining" attributes detailed above, Rāmānuja also images Brahman as the ocean of all auspicious attributes. These, known as *kalyāṇaguṇas* (auspicious attributes), which Carman identifies as secondary attributes, are detailed thus by Rāmānuja in the *Gītābhāṣya*, commentary on 6:47:

> I am a treasure store of a host of countless auspicious qualities, which are untouched by any evil whatsoever and which are of matchless excellence, the first six of which are knowledge *[jñāna]*, untiring strength *[bala]*, sovereignty *[aiśvarya]*, immutability *[vīrya]*, creative power *[śakti]*, and splendor *[tejas]*.[73]

Carman suggests that the *kalyāṇaguṇas* are those that express Brahman's relation to other entities, or, to be more precise, his "supremacy over all other entities".[74] In his view, clarification between both sets of attributes may be sought in Rāmānuja's discussion in his *Śrībhāṣya* of the different forms of meditation in the Upaniṣads. Here he indicates that "one and the same Brahman is the object of all these various meditations, but the meditations themselves are distinct, since different qualities of Brahman are mentioned in each."[75] In all meditations on Brahman the five defining attributes must be present, while "additional qualities . . . (such as) compassion, which indeed cannot exist apart from the subject to which they belong but are not necessary elements of the idea of Brahman, are to be included in those meditations only where they are specifically mentioned."[76] In other words, mention of the additional qualities is context-specific, while mention of the defining attributes must be made regardless of context: "As truth, knowledge, bliss, infinity, and purity . . . are characteristics that determine the essential nature of Brahman, meditation upon the essential nature of Brahman is impossible without them."[77] At the same time, meditation on all the attributes of Brahman, both defining and auspicious, is impossible, "as those qualities are infinite in number."[78]

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[71] For *satya*, *jñāna* and *ananta*, *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.2, quoted in Carman, *The Theology*, 102; for *ānanda*, *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.13, quoted in Carman, ibid, 103; and for *amalatva*, see Carman's discussion on 104–108.

[72] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1 in Rangacharya, 84–85.

[73] Quoted in Carman, *The Theology*, 73, from the *Gītābhāṣya*. These are also known as the *ṣaḍguṇas*, the "six perfections".

[74] Ibid., 98.

Carman's thesis is helpful in identifying the difference, in practical terms, between the defining attributes and the auspicious, secondary attributes. However, the notion of *ṣaḍguṇas* appears to be quite dear to Rāmānuja's heart—perhaps because they are central to defining, as Carman points out, "the nature of Bhagavān [in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa]* ... [and] play an important role in the doctrine of the Vyūhas in the Pāñcarātra Āgamas."[79] We find the *kalyānaguṇas* mentioned in almost every description of Brahman, and Rāmānuja's audience would have known that the first six of these were the *ṣaḍguṇas.* Indeed, in a passage that Carman identifies as being among those yielding a definition of the Supreme Being, Carman reports Rāmānuja as saying, in his commentary on *Gītā* 18:73, that the Supreme Being:

> . . . is opposed to all evil whatsoever, and His essential nature *[svarūpa],* consists solely of what is auspicious *[kalyāṇa].* He is a great ocean

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[75] Ibid., 93.
[76] *Śrībhāṣya* 3.3.13, quoted in Carman, *The Theology,* 88.
[77] *Vedānta Dīpa* 3.3.11, quoted in Carman, *The Theology,* 88.
[78] *Śrībhāṣya,* 3.3.12, quoted in Carman, *The Theology,* 89.
[79] Carman, *The Theology*, 92.

> containing a host of auspicious qualities, the first six of which are knowledge *[jñāna]*, untiring strength *[bala]*, sovereignty *[aiśvarya]*, immutability *[vīrya]*, creative power *[śakti]*, and splendor *[tejas]*, qualities which are natural to Him *[svābhāvika]* and of matchless excellence.[80]

It is very difficult to ascertain whether Rāmānuja himself made the distinction between the "defining" qualities and the "auspicious" qualities, or whether this distinction was one introduced by his commentators and heirs in his *saṃpradāya* or religious community.[81] There are passages that clearly assume the five defining attributes simply through the use of the descriptive phrase *jñānānandaikasvarūpa*, that is, "whose essential nature is wholly knowledge and bliss" in, for example, Rāmānuja's proem to his commentary on the *Gītā*. At the same time, his continual mention of the auspicious qualities of Brahman in almost every account of Brahman bears testimony to his desire to prevent any misunderstanding that the auspicious attributes were not part of the essential nature of Brahman. That he did want to make a distinction between the two is pointed out by Carman, who argues that

> the differentiation between *jñānānandaikasvarūpa* (whose essential nature is solely, or wholly, knowledge and bliss) and *kalyānaguṇagaṇaḥ* (who has a host of auspicious qualities) occurs too frequently for us to conclude that the clear distinction drawn at one point in the *Śrībhāṣya* (and the *Vedāntadīpa)* is only a necessary concession to the text of the *Vedānta Sūtras* or to the tradition of Vedic interpretation, which is then tacitly ignored elsewhere.[82]

Certainly by the time of the *Yatīndramatadīpikā*, a seventeenth-century tract or manual written by the teacher Śrīnivāsa to introduce the salient elements of Viśiṣṭādvaita to students, the discussion of Brahman's attributes had grown sufficiently formalized for a five-part distinction to be made:

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[80] Ibid., 69. The translation is Carman's.

[81] Lipner does not doubt, as S.R. Bhatt appears to do, that Rāmānuja was of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community, by which tradition Rāmānuja is considered to be the sixth *guru* (spiritual preceptor). Lipner also points to Carman's assertion that both splits in the community regard Rāmānuja as the third *ācārya* (teacher), and notes that the confusion may lie in the different roles—*ācārya* and *guru*—which were often merged in the same person, but sometimes not. See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 3, 148, n. 14 & 15.

[82] Carman, *The Theology*, 95.

(a) attributes that determine the essential nature *(svarūpa-nirūpaka-dharmāḥ):* truth, consciousness, bliss, purity, etc.;

(b) attributes of the essential nature so determined *(nirūpita-svarūpa-dharmāḥ):* knowledge, power, etc.;

(c) attributes useful for creation *(sṛṣṭa-upayuktāḥ-dharmāḥ):* omniscience, omnipotence,etc.;

(d) attributes useful for providing refuge *(āśrayaṇa-upayuktāḥ-dharmāḥ):* love, excellence of disposition, easiness of attainment; and

(e) attributes for protection *(rakṣaṇa-upayuktāḥ-dharmāḥ):* compassion and others.[83]

This schema belies the division of Brahman's attributes into those that are necessary, as Carman points out, for meditation on Brahman at all times, and those that must be invoked during specific meditations. Further, it underscores Lipner's assertion that Rāmānuja holds together any theological tensions that might arise through utilizing the hermeneutical method of shifting points of view.[84] In this respect, Rāmānuja's assertion that different attributes are brought into focus depending on the particular meditation holds together the tension between the self-sufficient Brahman and the Brahman who is linked to other entities.

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[83] Ādidevānanda, Swāmī, trans, *Yatīndramatadīpikā: Sanskrit Text, English Translation and Notes*, 2nd ed. (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1967), listed under IX:15. See also my article under Zayn Kassam-Hann, "The Viśiṣṭādvaita Idea of Pervasion *(vibhu)* According to Yatīndramatadīpikā" in Young, ed., *Hermeneutical Paths*, 123–136. Here I argue that the distinction between attributes (defining and auspicious) serves to highlight the twofold conception of Brahman, viz. Brahman-in-himself and Brahman-in-relation, while maintaining simultaneously the ontological unity of Brahman. That is, the Brahman of essential "defining" nature is the same as the relational Brahman of "auspicious" mention, in reality, without being defiled by his relationality.

[84] Lipner notes that from the viewpoint of the divine, ontological continuity between the divine and the world could be maintained by positing the world as "effected Brahman". However, since this then creates the problem of denying the substantial reality of the world by implying that therefore, the world dissolves in Brahman, Rāmānuja used the method of viewing the same issue from the point of view of the world. Looked at in this manner, the world and Brahman are posited as non-identical, through the use of the body-ensouler relationship. See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 38. This shift in point of view in order to elucidate a point, as well as to address the different facets of the philosophical problem, is a method used by Rāmānuja that could well be extended to other discussions, such as Rāmānuja's conception of Brahman's attributes.

Brahman As Cause and Effect: Creation

Rāmānuja describes thus the Brahman that was before the instantiation of name and form:

> ... the One whose proper form is purely knowledge, bliss and perfection, whose greatness is immeasurable, who possesses boundless, unequalled and countless perfections, e.g. the power of having his every will realized, and who essentially is not subject to transformations *[vikāra]:* that is, the Supreme Brahman Himself, whose body is constituted by spiritual and non-spiritual entities in subtle state, i.e. not individualized by names and forms. This is the One who, by his own free will and for the sake of his own sport *[līlā]*, constitutes with a portion *[aṃśa]* of Himself the peculiar structure of the world with all its infinite variety of animate and inanimate beings in which it consists.[85]

This primordial being, also known as *sat* or real being,[86] is further identified as the material cause of the world,[87] and that within this primordial state of being, the world too was in the state of *sat.*[88] Now this does not mean that the world in this primordial form was considered by Rāmānuja to be identical with Brahman, for such is not the case. Rather, the world, in its essential, primordial form, existed in a subtle *(sūkṣma)* state as *puruṣa*, or spirit,[89] and *prakṛti,* matter, which was as yet undifferentiated into names and forms. Already, even in its subtle state, the world constituted Brahman's body.[90] *Sat,* by all accounts, is one *(ekam eva)*[91] and since it appears to include both Brahman and the world—in its subtle state as Brahman's body—it is considered the material cause.

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[85] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #14, in van Buitenen, 192.

[86] van Buitenen argues that it is too simple to understand sat as being in the sense of *esse.* In his introductory essay, he traces the notions connected to sat "in its presystematic usage" and comes to the conclusion that along with the connotations of causality, "*Sat,* originally determined neither as an impersonal law nor as a personal demiurge, took in the course of history either form without excluding the other completely. ... And *sat* preserves its ancient meaning throughout the fluctuations between an eminently transcendent, disembodied and unqualified Brahman and an eminently immanent, embodied and qualified Deity: the *sat* is the one that is *present*, the transcendant that is immanent." See van Buitenen, *Vedārtha-saṃgraha,* Introduction, 3ff, and 18.

[87] Ibid., #33, 207.

[88] Ibid., #16, 192.

[89] in which, according to van Buitenen, the *ātmans* or individual souls are "still mutually distinguishable, not merged in a primeval spirit". See Ibid., 191, n. 80.

[90] Ibid., #14, 191.

[91] Ibid., #16, 192.

However, the use of the term *advitīyam* in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.2.1[92] denies that there is a different operative cause, for this would then mean that *sat* was not a unity.

Several issues need to be addressed here. Rāmānuja's causal theory is based in large part upon Īśvarakṛṣṇa's Sāṃkhyan model, which proposed the theory of *satkāryavāda*. That is, the effect pre-exists in its cause, just as curds (the effect) pre-exist in milk (the cause). The cause becomes the effect through a transformation, and this theory is hence, called *pariṇāmavāda*. In order for the effect to pre-exist in the cause, there must be pre-existing conditions, and the Sāṃkhyan model identifies two pre-existent entities. These are *prakṛti*, or primordial matter, which in its subtle state is unevolved *(avyakta)*, and the selves or *puruṣas* that confuse themselves with matter and impel the primordial matter to evolve into names and forms. The cause of this confusion, however, is beginningless, and we see echoes of this notion in Rāmānuja's view of beginningless *karman*. Through this confusion of selves with matter arises bondage, and release from bondage is made possible through discrimination *(viveka)*, which is the key to salvation.[93]

In Rāmānuja's causal theory, we find that *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* are retained as pre-existent (that is, unborn[94]) primordial entities. However, although they are different from Brahman, nonetheless they are unified with Brahman as evidenced by Rāmānuja's insistence that in the beginning *sat* is one. Rāmānuja conceives of the triad Brahman, *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* as one through the notion that the latter two pre-existent entities form, in their subtle state, the body of Brahman. Creation, then, is the transformation of the subtle body into the gross body wherein name and form are assumed:

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[92] *sad eva somyedam agra āsīd ekam evādvitīyam*; see ibid., #33, 206.

[93] See Karl H. Potter, *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies* (New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India (Private) Ltd., 1965), 106–111. He notes: "... thinking about the causal relation along the lines of the *satkāryavāda* model, at least in its pariṇāma or transformation variety, leads Sāṃkhya toward epistemology ... as constituting the avoidable necessary condition for the bondage of the Self. The correlative concept is that right knowledge ... constitutes a sufficient condition for freedom." However, the movement toward epistemology may lead, as in the case of Advaita, to the metaphysical theory of ignorance *(ajñāna* or *avidyā)*, or to the position held by Rāmānuja, who resisted making the inherent bias towards epistemology in Sāṃkhya metaphysical in nature.

[94] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #72, in van Buitenen, 233.

> The non-sentient beings, at the time of the deluge, give up name and form and remain as the body of the Brahman. They are called unborn in that stage. At the time of creation they take name and form and hence, they are caused by the Brahman.[95]

We may thus advance the notion that when Rāmānuja speaks of Brahman as the material cause, he means that it is this "unborn" body of Brahman—different from Brahman but not distinct from him—that forms the material out of which the world is caused. Indeed, the question is asked, that since the material cause is the substratum of evolution, then if the Supreme Person is the material cause of the world, must he not be the substratum of evolution?[96] Such a view is, of course, not tenable, as it would indicate modification within Brahman and thereby compromise his perfection.[97] Rāmānuja responds: "It has been said that the phenomenal world animated by souls does equally constitute the material cause",[98] adding that although Brahman is "the soul of the transformations of both *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*", he is so because he is modified by them in that they comprise his body. However, the transformations that do occur do so only in "that part in the Supreme Spirit—modified by *prakṛti*—that is constituted by *prakṛti*", while that "part in Him that is the substratum of this modification is not subject to them."[99] This clearly indicates that although Rāmānuja views *sat*—the cause in which the effect is pre-existent—as one, at the same time he refuses to lose sight of the difference among the three entitites, viz. Brahman, *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. He locates the unity in suggesting that although *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* are unborn and eternal, they exist, nonetheless, as a mode of Brahman, as his body, in their subtle state. While the body is in its subtle aspect, the three entitites are not distinct, and, therefore, it is possible to speak of Brahman as the material cause. This reading is further corroborated by his statement: "He then, of His own accord, divides the subtle elemental matter in the form of the totality of non-spiritual entities from the multitudinous hosts of experiencing entities, which were both dissolved in himself hitherto."[100] Rāmānuja is thus able to locate the substrate of evolution *(vikāra)* in *prakṛti* in its proper form *(svarūpa)*[101] for, as van Buitenen points out, the souls do not undergo evolution in their proper form *(svarūpa)*, but only in their knowledge.[102] In all of this, although Brahman is the cause, he is so not as substrate of evolution. Sharma sums up Rāmānuja's view on this:

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[95] *Vedāntasāra* 1.4.10, in Ayyangar, 123.

[96] Ibid., 232, #70.

[97] By making him amenable, as van Buitenen points out, to "the conditions and limitations of the transformed effect." See ibid., 232, n. 298.

[98] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #71, in van Buitenen, 232.

[99] Ibid., #73, 233–234.

> ... in R.'s [Rāmānuja's] philosophy B. [Brahman] pure and simple is never the material cause of the world. It is only B. qualified by *Acit* in its subtle state *[sūkṣma-acid-viśiṣṭa]* that is the cause.[103]

Brahman as the controlling entity in the unified *sat* is the operative cause in that he is responsible for willing the instatiation of the world of names and forms from its previously subtle *(sukṣma)* state. In this respect, Rāmānuja declares:

> That Supreme Brahman ... who is omnipotent and has his every will realized and all his desires materialized, decided nonetheless, for the sake of his own sport: "I be many in the form of a world composed of an infinite variety of spiritual and non-spiritual beings; to that purpose I will multiply." He then created the primordial elements—ether etc.—out of a single portion of Himself.[104]

How does Brahman then enter into a relationship with the world? The simile given by Yamunacharya for this latter relationship is that of a spider who weaves its web out of fluids secreted from its body, and once woven, enters it. Yamunacharya isolates seven modes *(bhāva)* of the relationship between the three real entities or *tattvas*, Brahman, *cit* and *acit*,[105] that is, between Brahman and his body: *śarīra–śarīrin* (body–soul); *viśeṣaṇa–viśeṣya* (substance–attribute); *śeṣa–śeṣin* (dependent–depended upon or accessory–principal); *amśa–amśin* (part–part-possessor); *adhāra–ādheya* (support–thing supported); *niyantṛ–niyāmya* (controller–thing controlled); and *rakṣaka–rakṣya* (redeemer–redeemed).[106] An investigation into Brahman's relationship with the world and the selves is necessary in order to gain an understanding of the context within which Brahman manifests himself, body and all.

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[100] Ibid., #140, 295. In this respect, see also van Buitenen's discussion in *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā*, 34–35, where he argues that Rāmānuja's reading of the word Brahman to connote also *ātman* and *prakṛti* in the *Gītā* stresses that as modes of Brahman, *ātman* is "utterly dependent on and internally ruled by the Supreme Brahman" and *prakṛti* is pervaded, directed and animated by Brahman.
[101] Ibid., #72, 233.
[102] van Buitenen, 233, n. 307. See also *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #5, 186.
[103] B.N.K. Sharma, *The Brahmasūtras and Their Principal Commentaries* (A Critical Exposition) (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1971), 1:397–398.
[104] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #17a, in van Buitenen, 193.

In the dedicatory verse or *maṅgala-śloka* to his *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, Rāmānuja encapsulates his views on Brahman's relation to the world and the selves thus: "Homage to the Principle *(śeṣin)* to whom all spiritual *(cit)* and non-spiritual *(acit)* entities are accessory".[107] The proper form of Brahman is distinct from all entities other than himself, including all spiritual and non-spiritual entities, which together constitute the phenomenal world, "since He is absolutely opposed to all evil and comprises solely infinite perfection".[108] Out of sport *(līlā)*[109] he decided: "I [will] be many in the form of a world composed of an infinite variety of spiritual and non-spiritual beings; to that purpose I will multiply."[110] He

> creates out of the subtle elemental matter the primeval elements, introduces into them as their souls the experiencing entities, creates the entire Universe out of the primeval elements controlled by spiritual souls in mutual conjunction, and then of His own accord enters into them as their immanent

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[105] See n. 62 above, on cit and acit.
[106] Yamunacharya, *Ramanuja's Teachings*, 73 ff. See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, Ch. 7 for a discussion of some of these.
[107] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #1, in van Buitenen, 183.
[108] Ibid., #6, 187.
[109] Which van Buitenen explains as "best understood by its opposite *karman*" and as containing "a free action . . . performed to no purpose at all: no purpose that of necessity would result in new *phalas* for the agent to enjoy or to suffer . . . . In creating, sustaining and resorbing the world God has no cause to effectuate and no end to achieve." See van Buitenen, 192, n. 83.
[110] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #17-a, in van Buitenen, 193.

> soul and exists on as the Supreme Spirit whose body is formed by all, and is thus modified by the many.[111]

This account poses the kind of problems identified above, n. 17: The problem raised by such a formulation is that it implies a time when Brahman has not yet entered into the individual souls. At the same time, Brahman is considered to be the eternal supporter *(ādhāra)* of his body, that is, of the universe, comprised of matter and souls in conjunction. If the body of Brahman—the universe—is in an *apṛthaksiddhi* (incapable of being realized apart from him) relationship with Brahman, then does not the notion of there being a time when Brahman has not yet entered into the individual souls alter this relationship? In a slightly different account[112], it is only after he has entered with the embodied soul *(jīvātman)* into the primaeval elements created out of *prakṛti* that all non-spiritual matter becomes *padārtha* (that is, "the object denoted by the name") or able to sustain the names and forms of the empirical world.[113] Sharma offers his view of what Rāmānuja probably meant:

> For, in texts like 'Having created it, He entered into it [Taittirīya Upaniṣad II.6] reference is made to the creation of certain principles by B. [Brahman] and Its entering into them, afterwards. This presupposes that these created principles are not conceived in the Upaniṣad, as being already "viśiṣṭa" in R.'s [Rāmānuja's] sense. If they are, there is no point in B.'s entering again into that which is already qualified by Its own presence therein.[114]

This account is plausible, as can be seen in Rāmānuja's argument against *pradhāna* (that is, *prakṛti* in its subtle state) as the creator of the world, as opposed to Brahman. Here Rāmānuja argues that indeed Brahman is the cause, for *pradhāna* is *avyakta*, that which is not modified, that is, that which is unmanifest. Since there is no division into name and form at that time, Brahman is meant in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.7: "That, verily, this was therefore, unmodified *[avyākṛta]*", wherein *avyākṛta* denotes "Brahman alone with the unmodifed form". This is further corroborated by *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.19.1: "Non-existence *[asat],* alone, this was in the beginning." *Asat* here denotes Brahman, "owing to the absence of the division into name and form ... there being the absence of existence as being associated with it." In order to manifest himself with name and form, Brahman proceeds to create ether and so forth. Rāmānuja cites "Having created that, he entered into that same" *(Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.6), followed by "Having subsequently entered into, by this Living Self, may I manifest name and form" *(Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.3.2).[115] It is not possible for *pradhāna*, which is non-sentient, to enter into anything.

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[111] Ibid., #140, 295–296. In *Vedāntasāra*, 1.4.27 the term given for "entered" is *anuprāviśat*, following *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* I.2.6: *tat sṛṣṭā tat eva anuprāviśat.* See *Vedāntasāra* 1.4.27, in Ayyangar, 137.

[112] Different in that in the process just quoted, the logical progression is such that he enters the spiritual souls after he has introduced them into the elements. In the account following, he first ensouls the spiritual souls and then enters into matter.

[113] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #17a, in van Buitenen, 193–4; see also n. 92.

[114] Sharma, *The Brahmasūtras*, 1:378.

The modal relationship between Brahman and his subtle body is one of *apṛthaksiddhi* in that although all three entities are distinct, they cannot be found apart from each other. Further, in their subtle state, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* are unmanifest and unmodified, "dissolved" in Brahman. That is, "The Highest Person in the causal state has as His body the sentient and non-sentient beings in a subtle state, that cannot be distinguished with distinct name and form."[116] This capacity to be distinguished arises once Brahman enters into "that" with "the purpose of controlling" it becomes clear,

> Therefore, Brahman—unmodified, with the unmodified body—in "That became modifed in name and form" *(Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.7) is stated that the same Brahman with name and form not separated, omniscient, with thoughts fulfilled, with the name and form separated by itself, is modified of its own accord."[117]

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[115] *Śrībhāṣya* 2.4.14–15, in R.B. Karmarkar, *Śrībhāṣya of Rāmānuja*, University of Poona Sanskrit and Prakrit Series, Vol. 1 (Poona: University of Poona, 1959 [Part I]; 1962 [Part II]; 1964 [Part III], 506–511.

[116] *Vedāntasāra* 1.4.27, in Ayyangar, 136.

[117] *Śrībhāṣya* 2.4.15, in Karmarkar, 511.

It is in this respect that Sharma makes his observation that the whole point of entering—despite the *apṛthaksiddhi* relationship between the three entities—becomes significant only when it is recognized that it is matter in its gross state *(sthūla-acit-viśiṣṭa-Brahman)* that is considered *viśiṣṭa*, or modified, that is modifed by Brahman in order to be ready to accept ensoulment.

Certainly, the difficulty arises when it is pointed out that whether we speak of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* in their manifest *(sthūla)* or unmanifest *(sūkṣma)* state, the operative relationship between them and Brahman is still one of body–possessor of body. At the same time, it can be admitted, and indeed, from the foregoing it is clear that Rāmānuja himself draws the distinction that the difference between the two states is that one is capable of bearing name and form, while the other is not. Crucial to this is the notion that the One decided to be Many. That is, in their unmanifest state, since there is no name and form, it is indeed difficult to speak of three entities given that neither *prakṛti* nor *puruṣa* can be distinguished, even though they exist in a subtle state. Perhaps a more significant difference can be seen in the relationship of Brahman to *puruṣa* in the unmanifest state. Since he enters the individual selves as their inner controller, for the purpose of controlling, it can be said that in the unmanifest state the notion of *antaryāmin* is likely quite different. Although the inseparable nature of the *apṛthaksiddhi* relationship remains a constant whether the body of Brahman is in a subtle or a gross state, the specific modalities of the relationship differ from one state to the next. In this respect, the notion that Brahman enters the universe as its inner ruler or controller may be construed of as a reverberation of the *apṛthaksiddhi* relationship already in place. The difference is that when the body is in a subtle state, the three eternal *tattvas* are distinct but nonetheless unified, as discussed above. However, when the body is in its gross or manifest phase, then, accordingly, that aspect of Brahman that enters the world as its inner controller or *antaryāmin* is likewise modulated so as to be controller of what is now differentiated into name and form. Perhaps the closest modern analogy that can be offered is that the *antaryāmin* is like natural law, to which both matter and life-bearing entities are subject.

The soul is a modification of Brahman because it constitutes his body[118] and "the non-spiritual entities in the generic structures[119] of a god, a man etc. are modifications of this same individual soul—which is a modification of Brahman himself—because they constitute the soul's body."[120] As a consequence, all words that have a fixed denotative value[121] "actually denote the entire composite entity: the body, the individual soul represented by it, and finally the Inner Ruler of that Soul, the Supreme Person in whom that entity terminates."[122] Since Brahman, who is true being *(sat)*, stands in a cause–effect, soul–body relationship with the phenomenal world, "the entire Universe being ensouled by Brahman is real".[123] Brahman is thus now both cause and effect: he is cause when he transforms *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* from their subtle state, and effect when he enters the universe as its inner ruler. Rāmānuja identifies both cause and effect as modes of Brahman: and in this we may read the implication that in essence Brahman remains unchanged, for the changes that occur do so in his modes.

This, however, must not be taken to mean that essentially Brahman is identical with the world, for if he were, then his perfections such as his being *satyasaṃkalpa*, that is, that "quality of having His every will realized" would be destroyed.[124] So in a *sāmānādhikaraṇya*[125] construction such as *tat tvam asi*, while the word *tat* refers to

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[118] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #17-b, in van Buitenen, 194.
[119] *saṁsthāna*, lit. configuration, form, figure, appearance, shape, from *sam+stha*, staying, abiding, lasting. See Vaman Shrivram Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit–English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978 [1965]), 943.
[120] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #17-b, in van Buitenen, 194.
[121] See ibid., where fixed denotative value is understood to be "the combination of the radical element with a suffix"; see also van Buitenen, ns. 94–96.
[122] Ibid., 194.
[123] Ibid. See below, n. 128.
[124] Ibid., #19, 195; see also n. 127 below.
[125] Which van Buitenen explains is a grammatical term denoting the "community of case relation of two or more words". As a logical term, it co-ordinates "two terms in a

Brahman "as the One who is the cause of the world, the abode of all perfections, the immaculate and untransmutable One", the word *tvam* refers "to that same Brahman under the aspect of inner Ruler of the individual soul as being modified by the embodied soul. The words *tat* and *tvam* both apply to the same Brahman but under different aspects."[126] Although things may have their referential basis in him, they do so as a bodily modification of Him, and not because they are identical in essence.[127] The body, that is the universe, has reality only insofar as it is ensouled by Brahman[128] and it is non-different from Him in that it is a modification of him and he is its inner ruler. Yet it is not identical with him precisely because the universe stands in a dependent relationship with regard to him and he is its master and lord.[129] This difference is important, for it is *prakṛti* that is subject to all transformations, rendering the part of Brahman that is the substratum of this modification untransmutable. Similarly, it is the *puruṣa* to which are attached "all the obstacles of

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judgement: the lotus is blue." Rāmānuja defines it as "the application to one object of several words in different functions" in #26, the stock example for which van Buitenen identifies the *mahāvākya "tat tvam asi".*

[126] Ibid., #20, 196.

[127] What Rāmānuja means is that the word *tvam* refers to Brahman as He is modified by the phenomenal world and not to the individual *jīva* which modifies Brahman; in this respect, although the term *tvam* may be said to refer both to the *jīva* and to Brahman whom the *jīva* modifies ("inasmuch as this soul constitutes his body"—#19, 195), the *jīva* is subject to imperfection, whereas the Supreme Brahman is not. Thus they are not essentially identical, although the ultimate referent of *jīva* is Brahman, who ensouls it and thereby gives it reality. See #18, 194: "Thereafter the father proceeds to declare that becuase of the relation cause–effect, etc., the entire Universe being ensouled by Brahman is real." See also #58, 225, where Rāmānuja refutes the *bhedābheda* doctrine propounded by Bhāskara, in which he argues that if God is in essence identical with the various creatures in essence, then all the defects which go with the soul would also apply to Him.

[128] Ibid., #22, 197. This may imply that were Brahman not to ensoul the world, it would vanish, like a mirage and may lead the reader into believing that Rāmānuja was not that far from the Advaitin position after all. Such is not what is intended, however. Rāmānuja explains the reality of the phenomenal world thus: because the effect is contained in the cause, *sat,* which is real, the universe, as effect, must also be real. Now we must bear in mind that *sat* is composed of three entities: Brahman, and the two unborn, eternal entities *prakṛti* and *puruṣa,* who are real and who form Brahman's body in their subtle state. Therefore it follows that when they form Brahman's body in their gross *(sthūla)* state as cit and acit, they continue to have reality. However, whether in their subtle or in their gross state, in both cases they are accessory to Him, who is both their substratum and their controller. See #18, 194. Note also that they are always in an inseparable *(apṛthaksiddhi)* relation with Brahman, and thus cannot be separated from him; hence the notion that Brahman would no longer ensoul them is not conceivable. See also #62, 227.

[129] Ibid., #84, 243.

spiritual life", not to the Brahman who is the ensouler of the *puruṣa*, thus rendering him "irreproachable, possessed of all perfections and the power of having his every will realized."[130]

Brahman as Viṣṇu–Nārāyaṇa

> Homage to the Principal to whom all spiritual and non-spiritual entities are accessory; Who reposes on Śeṣa, and Who is the treasury of immaculate and infinite beautiful qualities: Viṣṇu.[131]
>
> Now, the Consort of Śrī, whose proper form, antagonistic to all that is evil and solely comprising all that is good, is nothing but knowledge and bliss ... who is the Supreme Brahman; the Supreme Person, Nārāyaṇa.[132]
>
> May my understanding assume the form of loving devotion to that Highest Brahman who is the Home of Lakṣmī, and to whom the creation, preservation, destruction, etc., of all the worlds is (mere) play, whose main resolve consists in the protection of hosts of multiform subordinate beings, and who is specially seen to shine forth in what constitutes the head of the Vedas.[133]

In the three citations above, we see that Rāmānuja describes or equates Brahman with Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa. Earlier we have already alluded to the question of the fusion of Viṣṇu, a Vedic deity, with the cults of Nārāyaṇa and Kṛṣṇa. Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu appear to have been coalesced into one deity in the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad.* There are three aspects of this identification that we must consider:

(A) He who resides in the supreme heaven, has a consort named Śrī, has a person-like form, has marvelous and innumerable adornments, is gazed upon by celestial beings, and so forth.

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[130] Ibid., #73, 234.
[131] Ibid., #1, 183. This is the *maṅgalaśloka*, or dedicatory verse.
[132] *Gītābhāṣya,* in van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā,* 45–46.
[133] *Srībhāṣya, maṅgalaśloka,* 1.

(B) He who, on the one hand, is Brahman, "to whom the creation, preservation, destruction, etc., of all the worlds is (mere) play" (quoted above) and, on the other hand, is Viṣṇu, who along with Brahmā the creator and Śiva the destroyer, is the sustainer of the world.

(C) He who has descended *(avatīriya)* repeatedly to various worlds.

A. Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa in *Paramavyoman* (or Vaikuṇṭha)

In the preceding discussions we have already pointed to the importance that Rāmānuja places on *śabda* as a *pramāṇa*. Scripture, for him, is a valid source of knowledge about things that cannot be known through sense perception *(pratyakśa)* and inference *(anumāna)*. Therefore, it is reasonable, he argues, that all the things mentioned in scripture be understood as really existing, implying that no matter how far-fetched they may seem. This has earned Rāmānuja the label of being a scriptural literalist. In all fairness to Rāmānuja, although he gives credence to scripture, it does not mean that he takes scriptural testimony at face value. Rather, he attempts to be as systematic as possible in viewing scripture as valid within the context of a systematic philosophic view. The *śrutis (śrutayaḥ)*, for Rāmānuja,

> are meant to set forth his [Nārāyaṇa's, that is, Brahman's[134]] manifestation *[vaibhava]*[135], so they expound the universal dominion of the Supreme

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[134] The scriptural authority Rāmānuja furnishes for equating Brahman with Nārāyaṇa is found in *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* 1, cited by van Buitenen, *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, 254, n. 495. Rāmānuja bases his argument on the notion that in the beginning, sat was alone and without a second *(Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.2.1). Since the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* asserts the same of Nārāyaṇa, then it follows that Nārāyaṇa = *sat* = Brahman.

[135] van Buitenen calls this "the totality of God's *vibhūtis*, his divine manifestation in the phenomenal world of matter and spirit", van Buitenen, *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, 187, n. 48, and later, "the phenomenal manifestations *(vibhūti)* of the divine Personality"; see ibid., 229, n. 287. This reading is supported by the context which talks about Brahman as inner ruler of *cit* and *acit* in the first case, and Brahman as modified by *cit* and *acit* in the second case. This is corroborated by *Gītābhāṣya*, 10:19, in Govindāchārya, 333. However, I would like to argue that when Rāmānuja speaks of manifestation *(vaibhāva)*, he includes the inner ruler among Brahman's *vibhūtis* (manifestations) but does not do so exclusive of other types of manifestations. The reason for my reading is that were Brahman's manifestation *(vaibhava* or *vibhūti)* to be limited to the realm of *cit* and *acit*—or the phenomenal world, as van Buitenen suggests—then Rāmānuja's understanding of the manifestation of Viṣṇu in the supreme heaven will not be tenable, since, as we will see, he relies on non-*guṇa*-bound

> Spirit as the inner Soul of the totality of spiritual and non-spiritual entities by expressions like His power *[śakti]*, His portion *[aṃśa]*, His manifestation *[vibhūti]*, His form *[śarīra]*, His shape *[tanu]*, etc., and by *sāmānādhikaraṇya* constructions.[136]

Therefore, if one were to read into scripture a particular view of Brahman, for example, the Advaitin view that Brahman is "nothing but non-differentiated knowledge",[137] then this would imply that all *śāstra* is therefore, false, for it yields us far more knowledge about Brahman then the Advaitin reading would concede. This is clearly not a tenable position. All descriptions of Brahman given in the scripture must be given validity and viewed as part of a unified view of Brahman, viz., that he is a differentiated being, differentiated by his various modes that are accessory to him and in relation to which he is the controller.[138]

The diversity of Brahman's form is evident to Rāmānuja and key to his understanding of Brahman. Brahman is able to maintain—and explain— "the diversity of the forms of His sovereignty by His omnipotence."[139] For Brahman is at once he who enters the world with an infinitesimal particle *(ayutāṃśena)* of himself; the abode of boundless perfect qualities, the Sovereign lord of lords, the Supreme Brahman; the Supreme Person, Nārāyaṇa

> whose hosts of perfections are boundless, unsurpassed and innumerable—who is the perfectly miraculous One—who appears like a blue cloud—who has long eyes so spotless as a lotus leaf—who is radiant with the splendour of thousands of suns—, the One in the Supreme Heaven revealed by *śrutis*

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matter for this manifestation. Why then, we may ask, does Rāmānuja in these two instances limit the notion of *vaibhava* to *cit* and *acit?* We suggest that he does so because, from the context of these two discussions, his intent is to show, as against the views of his opponents, primarily the Advaitavādins and the Bhedābhedavādins, that the world of phenomenal reality is not an illusion, and also that Brahman is not obscured by nescience or amenable to limiting adjuncts. See #s7,8,9, in van Buitenen, 188, for Rāmānuja's summary of these views.

[136] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #5, in van Buitenen, 187.

[137] Ibid., #7, 188.

[138] Ibid., #42, 213ff. See also #65, 229.

[139] Ibid., #81, 239.

> such as *yo veda nihitaṃ guhāyāṃ parame vyoman*[140] *tad akṣare parame vyoman*[141] etc., remains nonetheless essentially one.[142]

Rāmānuja tacitly acknowledges the tension created in the notion that an entity can both be one and diverse, that it can have "another form, nature and power added to its own form, nature and power."[143] He admits that it is impossible for a quality that is exclusively found in fire to be found in water, which is categorically different from fire. However, this is not the case with Brahman, for Brahman is categorically different from anything else, and as such, "has all natures and all powers."[144] Therefore, he argues, "it is not contradictory that this one being has an infinite and wonderful variety of forms and still retains His uniformity in this infinite and immeasurable diversity."[145]

Rāmānuja's intent is to show that scripture—*śāstra*—reveals that Brahman has diversity. Further, that different scriptures reveal different aspects of Brahman.[146] *Śāstras* such as the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which mention that those who perform acts while resorting to him (that is, Kṛṣṇa) will attain, by his grace, "the eternal place",[147] are not to be discounted, since they inform people who have not studied the Vedānta that they must not lack faith in acts. Moreover, he argues, those who have studied the Veda know that all śāstras are one śāstra. In any case, there are many examples of *śruti* that declare that:

> He possesses one invariable divine form that is in accordance with His pleasure and in harmony with Himself; He has an infinite variety of unsurpassed beautiful ornaments that suit His form, and immeasurable,

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[140] van Buitenen, 240, n. 367: *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1: "who knows that which is laid down in the innermost of the Supreme Heaven".
[141] Ibid., n. 368: *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* 1.2: "that is in the indestructible Supreme Heaven".
[142] Ibid., #81, 240.
[143] Ibid., #82, 240.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid., #110, 263. "In the same manner as, among all *śrutis*, the Nārāyaṇa section [at the end of the *Taittirīya Āranyaka*, that is, the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*] serves only to set forth a certain aspect of the Supreme Brahman's proper form, so the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* only sets forth a certain aspect of Him."
[147] *Gītā* 18:56.

> endless and marvelous weapons of all kinds that are equal to His power; He has a Consort who suits His pleasure and who is in harmony with Him, possessing an immeasurable eminence of proper form, qualities, supernal power, ascendancy and character; He has an infinite entourage of attendants and necessaries, suitable to Him, the knowledge, actions etc. of whom are perfect and whose qualities are limitless; He has an infinite glorious manifestation, such as is fitting to Him, comprising all objects and all means of experience; He has a divine residence, the proper form and nature of which are beyond the ken of thought and the power of expression: all this and so forth is everlasting and irreproachable.[148]

This being the case, the above description is then worthy of investigation. Regarding the attendants and necessaries, whom Rāmānuja understands to be the *sūris*,[149] they cannot be said to be persons "who are released", or to be among "the continuous flow of released souls".[150] In other words, they have never entered the realm of *saṃsāra* or the phenomenal realm of transience. Had they done so, then they would not have been always regarding him. Rather, they are to be understood as the beings detailed in scriptural statements such as *Ṛg Veda* 10,90,16: "where the ancient gods have found the fulfillment of their ends," "where the first-born *ṛṣis* of olden times."[151]

An objection is raised: do the words *paramaṃ padam*—the supreme place—found in different *śrutis*[152] not indicate the same thing, viz., the proper form *(svarūpa)* of the Supreme One *(para)?* That is, should references to the supreme place not be understood as Viṣṇu? No, says Rāmānuja. According to him, scripture clearly establishes that there really is a supreme place, not to be considered a metaphorical way of speaking about the proper form of supreme being. In some cases they do denote Viṣṇu or Bhagavān (the

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[148] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #127, in van Buitenen, 282.
[149] Ibid., see 282–283, 285, ns. 678, 692 and 709.
[150] Ibid., #128, 285.
[151] Ibid., #131, 287.
[152] (i) *tad viṣṇoḥ paramaṃ padam sadā paśyanti sūrayah:* the *sūris* regard always that supreme place of Viṣṇu *(Subāla Up.* 6); (ii) The *paramaṃ padam*, free from all imperfection, that has the name of Viṣṇu *(Viṣṇu Purāṇa,* 1.22.53); (iii) During creation, subsistence and resorption the *prakṛti* exists on in a triple form according to the activity of the three *guṇas;* but its *paramaṃ padam* is beyond *guṇas* and great *(Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 1.22.41). See ibid., 285–288.

Lord, with devotional connotations), as in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* I.22.53, "the Supreme '*pada*', free from all imperfection, that has the name of Viṣṇu." In others, however, they denote a supreme place, such as the scriptural reference found in *Subāla Upaniṣad* 6, "the *sūris* regard always that supreme place of Viṣṇu." In yet other cases, the proper form of the soul freed from *prakṛti* is meant, as in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* I.22.41, "During creation, subsistence and resorption the *prakṛti* exists on in a triple form according to the activity of the three *guṇas;*[153] but its *paramaṃ padam* is beyond *guṇas* and great." Each of these is indicated by the phrase *paramaṃ padam* and, according to Rāmānuja, all three meanings are the supreme object of attainment. This is so because Bhagavān is the supreme end to be attained. Attainment of Bhagavān necessary implies attainment of the other two, for the soul attains that condition which is free from bondage at the same time that it attains

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[153] The three *guṇas* are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Rāmānuja defines these as the three qualities of matter, adding that these stand as attributes in relation to matter. Their existence is to be inferred from the effects which they are instrumental in producing, such as brightness [of disposition]. The three qualities are in a latent state in matter when it is unevolved, but are manifest when matter is in its evolved state (see end of note). When the essentially free individual soul inhabits a body, which is produced out of evolved matter, these qualities impound the body.

The characteristic of *sattva* is its luminosity and its capacity not to harbour that which will cause pain; hence *sattva* "produces in the embodied creature a predisposition for happiness and knowledge." [Hence *sattva* is translated as "goodness."] *Rajas*, derived from *rāga*, means lust or carnal desire, and causes thirst *(tṛṣṇa)* for sensual enjoyment and *saṅga*, attachment; it engenders desire to undertake activity. [Hence *rajas* is translated loosely as "passion."] *Tamas* is the reversed perception of what a thing actually is; equivalent to *mohanam*, that which deludes, and is the cause of listlessness, sloth and sleep. It obscures intelligence and perverts understanding. It literally means darkness, and is translated as such. For the above, see Rāmānuja's *Gītābhāṣya*, commentary on 14:5–9 in Govindāchārya, 446ff.

Rangacharya and Aiyangar note in their translation of the *Śrībhāṣya* (148, n.2): "Four different states of the *prakṛti* or Nature are mentioned in *Sub. [Subāla] Up.*, II. In its primary undifferentiated state, it is called the *Avibhakta-tamas*; in its first differentiated state, it is called the *Vibhakta-tamas*; in its next state, it is called the *Akṣara* in which even the qualities of *sattva, rajas* and *tamas* are not seen to be differentiated, and in which it is also said to be promiscuously mixed up with the individual self; in its last state, it is called the *Avyakta* in which the differentiation of the three *Guṇas* has begun to take place. From this *Avyakta* proceeds the principle known as the *Mahat*, from this again proceeds the principle called *Ahamkāra* or egoity, and so on." Rāmānuja has this schema in mind when he argues that *māyā*, when it is identified with *prakṛti*, is not indescribable, that is, it cannot be understood as denoting unreality, that is, ignorance or *avidyā* as the term is used in the Advaitin sense.

Bhagavān, and it is self-evident that the attainment of the supreme abode takes place at the same time. In order to attain the Lord, it is necessary that first the soul attain its own proper form, released from the bonds of *karman*, a reading that Rāmānuja derives from the scriptural verse *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8,3,1: "those desires are real but they are concealed by the unreal [= one's personal *karman]*".[154]

We can see that Rāmānuja does not want to collapse the meaning of *paramaṃ padam* to the proper form *(svarūpa)* of the supreme being, because to do so would lend credence to the notion that the scriptural statements testifying to the reality of a supreme place must be sacrificed. This would imply that only Brahman is real, and all other descriptions denoting his place and the world as his body are not, or are the result of limiting adjuncts upon him.[155] It is interesting to note that Rāmānuja amplifies the objector's term for the supreme one *(para)* to Bhagavān and Viṣṇu, emphasizing further the divine form *(divya rūpa)* that is in the supreme abode *(paramaṃ padam)*. Several scriptural verses can be cited to show that the supreme place exists, by drawing upon the notion that wherever is mentioned that the supreme being lies beyond *rajas*, it means that the supreme being dwells beyond the pale of three *guṇas*, that is, in a definite place beyond the phenomenal world that is characterized by the three *guṇas*. To "lie" somewhere is understood as meaning to "dwell" somewhere. This supreme abode is imperishable and eternal.[156]

Having established that the supreme place really does exist, it is clear that there is a supreme being that must exist in that place, along with attendants *(sūris)* that eternally regard him. This divine form is beyond sensual perception and can only be viewed by the internal faculty.[157] Rāmānuja adds that the defining qualities assert that Brahman is essentially different from everything else, being opposed to all evil, and as such, is without limitations. His auspicious attributes, too, are essentially different from anything else. In the same way, "His form, attendants, residence etc. are essentially different from everything else, are proper to Him exclusively and have an inexplicable[158] proper form and nature."[159] Elsewhere he remarks that the "proper form and nature of His infinite supernal manifestation *(mahāvibhūti)* are undefinable."[160]

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[154] Cited in *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #129, in van Buitenen, 286. See also M.R. Rajagopala Ayyangar, *Vedartha Sangraha of Sri Ramanuja* (Kumbakonam: The Cauveri Colour Press, 1956), 192ff. for a translation that makes Rāmānuja's stance somewhat clearer than found in van Buitenen.

[155] The position held by the Advaitavāda and Bhedābhedavāda *darśanas*, or philosophical schools.

[156] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* # 131, in van Buitenen, 287.

Since the supreme place has a form that cannot be subject to transformation, it is imperishable. Celestial bodies such as the sun cannot be meant here, for these are perishable. The attribute *satyakāma* mentioned in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8,1,5 means that he is one whose *kāmas*, that is, (the objects of) his desire are *satya*, or real, which means that they are eternal. But we must pause here. For does not Rāmānuja assert that Brahman is *satyakāma* with respect to the world of names and forms? Rāmānuja explains this apparent conflict: "whereas an entity that is the means of another's sport, is liable to transformation and, therefore, albeit real in so far as capable of connexion with *pramāṇas*, yet unreal in so far as impermanent, the sūris etc. on the contrary are permanent."[161] The same may apply to the attribute *satyasaṃkalpa*, that is, he whose every will is realized. In this case, although the objects and means of experience suitable to his divine form are eternal—and hence, we assume, cannot be augmented by released souls—, none the less, it is through his will alone that new entities may come into realization *(siddhiṃ).* What does he mean here? Does he refer here to those mentioned in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 4.1.84: "*Yogins* who in perfect concentration constantly meditate upon Brahman possess that supreme place which the *sūris* regard"?[162] Or is this a reference to the grace of the Lord that is necessary in order for a devotee to ken its proper form, which, as discussed earlier, is also *paramaṃ padam?* Rāmānuja's meaning is not very clear in this instance. He has to preserve, on the one hand, the integrity of scripture by arguing for the reality of the descriptions of eternal manifestation *(mahāvibhūti)* of the supreme person in the supreme place. On the other hand, if this is the highest attainable goal, then he has to explain how those who change from the condition of bondage to release may come upon this place that, being eternal, can brook no change. To admit the *yogins* and/or those who attain supreme liberation, therefore, he has to draw upon divine volition[163] as that which holds the paradox together.

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[157] Ibid., #135, 291. The scriptural verse is *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 3.1.8. See n. 759.

[158] That is, "baffle description." Ayyangar, *Vedartha Sangraha*, 207. This does not mean that it is without qualities.

[159] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #136, in van Buitenen, 292.

[160] Ibid., #140, 295.

[161] Ibid., #132, 288.

> *Satyasaṃkalpa* asserts, that although these objects and means of experience etc. be eternal, unsurpassed and endless, an infinite number of new entities owe their realization to His will alone. So *satyasaṃkalpa* declares that the differences in proper form, condition and activity of these means of experience and means of His sport, spiritual and non-spiritual, permanent and non-permanent, are entirely dependent on His volition.[164]

Brahman, then, is he who has five defining attributes, innumerable auspicious attributes, chief of which are six[165] in number, and for whom *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* in both their subtle and gross states form his body. Brahman is also the supreme person in that eternal supreme place, constituted of matter that is beyond the three *guṇas* *(apṛkrta)*, who is adorned, and who is surrounded by the eternal *sūris* who continually gaze at him. He creates for his sport the non-permanent world of names and forms, in which he is the inner ruler *(antaryāmin)* who is lord, controller and supreme soul. He may take on any other manifestations of himself that he wills; or the form that he assumes as a boon to his worshipper. In all these cases, it is one entity that is being spoken of and all his manifestations are real, dependent upon his will, and subject to his power. That is, just as "the qualities of knowledge etc. have been stated to constitute the proper form of the Supreme Brahman, in the same manner His form belongs to His proper form, for the scriptures declare that His proper form is such."[166] Further, "He possesses one invariable divine form that is in accordance with His pleasure and in harmony with Himself."[167] Rāmānuja distinguishes this manifestation from the means of Brahman's sport *(līlā)* that consists of the phenomenal world. In all cases, however, Brahman "is modified by all because all constitute His body".[168]

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[162] Ibid., #133, 289.

[163] As a tangent to this discussion is the polarity in the divine nature, an issue to which attention has been drawn by both John B. Carman and Patricia Y. Mumme. This is the tension and polarity expressed in the Lord's autonomy, on the one hand, expressed in his qualities of supremacy, and the Lord's accessibility, on the other, expressed in his qualities of mercy. That is, "the problem of salvation, from the theological perspective, is how to reconcile the Lord's supreme status as the ruler and judge of *karma* with His mercy for souls whose destiny is to attain communion with Him." See Patricia Y. Mumme, *The Śrīvaiṣṇava Theological Dispute: Maṇavāḷamāmuni and Vedānta Deśika* (Madras: New Era Publications, 1988), 188; see 187ff. for the discussion regarding the *paratva–saulabhya* polarity. It should be noted, however, that here it is *satyasaṃkalpa* that reflects the Lord's mercy, while in the above-mentioned discussion on polarity the same attribute is placed among those that express His supremacy *(paratva)*, that is, indicating His autonomy.

[164] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #132, in van Buitenen, 288.

[165] The *ṣaḍguṇas: jñāna, bala, aiśvarya, vīrya, śakti* and *tejas*, "qualities which are natural to Him *[svabhāvika]* and of matchless excellence." See Carman, *The Theology*, 69.

Two questions may be posed here. What is the relationship between Brahman and his divine form *(divya rūpa* or *mahāvibhūti)* ? Are they the same or are they different? Rāmānuja does not answer this question. Rather, he approaches it in a different way. He reiterates that Brahman, the Supreme Being *(paramātman)*, the inner ruler *(antaryāmin)*, or Viṣṇu of *mahāvibhūti* description are all one and the same. Here the rule of *sāmānyādhikaraṇya* would apply, that is, of applying several terms to the same object, or correlative predication. Rāmānuja gives no indication as to why the supreme being would have a supernal manifestation; only that the scriptures establish that indeed, in all reality, a supreme place—*paramaṃ padam*—exists, and in that place is to be found the supreme manifestation—*mahāvibhūti*—who is none other than Nārāyaṇa, also known as Viṣṇu. We may note, however, that Rāmānuja does seem to distinguish between the "proper form" *(svarūpa)* of Brahman, which "is purely boundless knowledge and bliss" and his "supernal manifestation" *(mahāvibhūti)*, the proper form *(svarūpa)* and nature *(svabhāva)* of which "are undefinable".[169]

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[166] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #135, in van Buitenen, 291.

[167] Ibid., #127, 282. A description of this divine form is given in Rāmānuja's Introduction to his commentary on the *Gītā*; see van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā*, 45: "whose divine shape is adorned with manifold and maniform endless, wonderful, eternal, irreporachable, immeasurable divine ornaments and equipped with innumerable weapons which, being worthy of their bearer, are of inconceivable power, eternal, impeccable and incomparable ... ."

[168] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #140, in van Buitenen, 295.

It is tempting to view Rāmānuja's descriptions of Brahman in his pre-phenomenal world state as being two: (i) the Brahman whose proper form *(svarūpa)* is knowledge and bliss, and (ii) the Brahman who has a supernal manifestation *(mahāvibhūti)* as a Brahman whose essence is knowledge and bliss (characterized by the five defining qualities), and who has a supernal or divine form *(divya rūpa).* Such a bifurcation, however, would do disservice to Rāmānuja's conception of the supreme being as it would bring it very close to Śaṅkara's notion of an attributeless Brahman who is solely knowledge, and a lower-order, qualified Brahman—Īśvara—who is viewed as such from the realm of nescience *(avidyā).* Rāmānuja is intent on establishing that the two descriptions denote the same reality, the same supreme being, although he distinguishes them by saying that Brahman has a supernal form. Why did Rāmānuja feel so strongly the need to include this supernal manifestation in his descriptions of Brahman?

This question has been lucidly answered by Lipner. He isolates several reasons:[170] (1) both *śruti* and *smṛti* speak of a celestial form; (2) several conflicting scriptural texts are thereby reconciled, in the literalist manner Rāmānuja has adopted; (3) other notable authorities such as Bādarāyaṇa have accepted this form; (4) the supernal form "plays a central role in the development of the aspirant's salvific devotional relationship with the Lord in this life, and is the focus of bliss in the next."

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[169] Ibid.
[170] Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 94ff.

In other words, since scripture or *śabda* is the source of our knowledge of Brahman, if it says that Brahman has a supernal form, this must indeed be so. For Rāmānuja the issue is not whether Brahman has a form or not. Rather, the issue is whether the divine form mentioned in the scripture belongs to one among "Indra and the others" (the gods) who has claimed distinction in merit, as claimed by opponent. Not so, argues Rāmānuja, for the epithet of this form, viz. "to be with sins destroyed" must be interpreted to mean: "indeed to be with *Karman* destroyed; that is, to be void of even the tinge of being subject to *Karman*; ... Therefore, being with sins destroyed is a characteristic of Paramātman alone ... ."[171] Indeed, Rāmānuja identifies this supernal manifestation as being beyond *prakṛti:* "But that (supernal body) is definitely a self-desired one, befitting him and not arising out of *Prakṛti*".[172] Lipner adds that a distinction must be made between Brahman's proper form *(svarūpa)* or quiddity and the supernal form because the characteristics defining the former are not easily localisable in the latter, that is,[173] "the supernal form is a necessary if personal expression of the Lord."[174] He also points out that the supernal form is the source of the *avatāric* form, but is closer to the "quidditative centre" than the latter. For, "though an avatāric form 'is fashioned from' the supernal form (without yet 'exhausting' it), it is contingent, while the supernal form is innate."[175] In this respect, the supernal form emphasizes the notion of divine accessibility to the seeker, a notion that is central to Rāmānuja's spiritual framework: "The most compassionate Blessed One *[bhagavān]*, by his own desire and out of love for the devotee, makes this innate [supernal] form take on godly, human and other configurations, in accordance with the devotee's understanding."[176]

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[171] *Śrībhāṣya,* 1.1.21 in Karmarkar, 303.
[172] Ibid., 304.
[173] Ibid., 95.
[174] Lipner, *The Face of Truth,* 95-96; see also 167–168, n. 42: "It is in this broad sense of 'proper form' that Rāmānuja also includes the heavenly abode and the heavenly attendants of the Lord. Further, the supernal form, heavenly attendants and abode belong to Brahman's 'proper form' in the sense that they were eternally with him in an unchanging condition, in contrast to the world and its inhabitants, whose state is continually changeable as the world is regularly produced, 'comes to fruition' and is then dissolved."
[175] Ibid., 96.

B. Viṣṇu as Sustainer

Rāmānuja may well have been aware of the tension arising from naming Viṣṇu as Brahman, on the one hand, and Viṣṇu as a member of the triad Brahmā–Viṣṇu–Śiva on the other. For the latter, indeed, are gods, and gods fall within the realm of *guṇa*-bound, *saṃsāric* creatures. That is, they are creatures with limitations and with a store of karma. Carman suggests that Rāmānuja may have preferred Nārāyaṇa as the proper name of God out of consideration for this tension. As he points out, Rāmānuja in the *Gītābhāṣya* accepts Viṣṇu both as supreme cause and as created deity.[177]

However, this question is taken up by Rāmānuja in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha.* Calling upon the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* to establish the identity of Viṣṇu with Brahman, he cites a long passage, from which we may quote briefly: "The world has originated from Viṣṇu and in Him it subsists. He is the One who sustains and annihilates the world and He is the world."[178] From the *Brahmasūtras* we learn that Brahman is the cause of the world. Thus it follows that Viṣṇu and Brahman are identical. In that case, Rāmānuja is asked, how then do we square the notion, found in the self-same *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, that "The one venerable Lord Janārdana assumes the names of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva to create, sustain and destroy"?[179]

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[176] Lipner's translation of Rāmānuja, *Śrībhāṣya*, I.I.21: *tadidaṃ svābhāvikam eva rūpam upāsakānugraheṇa tatpratipattyanuguṇākāraṃ devamanuṣyādisaṃsthānaṃ karoti svecchayaiva paramakāruṇiko bhagavān.* Although the term *svābhāvikam* is used here, the context in which this sentence occurs is clearly a reference to Brahman's supernal manifestation. See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 96, and 168, n. 43.

[177] Carman, *The Theology*, 185.

[178] *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 1.1.31, cited in *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #110, in van Buitenen, 263, n. 574.

[179] Ibid., 1.2.66, cited on 264.

Rāmānuja attempts to resolve this ambiguity by stating that Janārdana, who is synonymous with Viṣṇu, enters the phenomenal realm—which includes the gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva as a class—as their ensouler. This interpretation is buttressed by the declaration in the same scripture that Viṣṇu ensouls all. All of creation is his embodiment, for Viṣṇu, as the imperishable one, is embodied by all. In other words, here Viṣṇu *qua* Janārdana *qua antaryāmin qua* Brahman enters the phenomenal world as its ensouler and the relationship between the world and him is that of *śarīra–śarīrin* (body–possessor of body). The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* substantiates this: "So Viṣṇu, most excellent, beneficient and benevolent, is embodied by all in the various modes of Brahmā etc., in which He is creating and created, protecting, consuming and protected."[180]

The problem arises, however, when Rāmānuja intimates that Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva must be taken together as a class. In this respect, they are manifestations of Janārdana, manifestations by which he creates, sustains and destroys himself. It is clear that here the notion of "himself" that is subject to creation, sustainment, and destruction is the phenomenal world. We have already seen above how Rāmānuja construes the world to be Brahman only insofar as it is ensouled by Brahman as *antaryāmin* or inner ruler. But what does Rāmānuja mean when he says Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva are manifestations of Janārdana, together as a class? For it is clear that gods such as Brahmā "are all subject to karman as they belong to the three *bhāvanās*."[181] This appears to be clear indication that

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[180] Ibid., 1.2.68–69, cited on 264.

[181] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #113, in van Buitenen, 265. See also n. 585 where van Buitenen states: "R. quotes the *bhāvanātraya* as proof that Brahmā and the gods are *kṣetrajñas* and as such subject to *karman.*" In n. 585, van Buitenen locates the term in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 6.7.47ff., suggesting that it has the sense of "creative potency manifesting itself in three successive ontological orders *(bhāva-)*, that of Brahman, the creator, *Karman*, the creation, and Brahmakarman, the mediators of creation Sanandana, etc." He adds: "R[āmānuja] quotes the *bhāvanātraya* as proof that Brahmā and the gods are *kṣetrajñas* and as such subject to *karman.*" He directs us a a fuller discussion in his paper, "The Śubhāśrayaprakaraṇa *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 6,7 and the meaning of *bhāvanā*", *Adyar Library Bulletin* (Adyar 1955), XIX, 1–2, 3ff. Carman draws attention to an alternate reading that does not seem to be applicable here, that of Rajagopala Ayyangar, who translates *bhāvana* as "three kinds of mental effort." See Carman, *The Theology*, 293–294, n. 15.

Viṣṇu too, if he is included among the three gods as a class (denoting a form of unity among them), is subjected to *karman.*

Rāmānuja, however, is not willing to let the matter stand at that. He first establishes that Viṣṇu, "the Supreme Brahman, is imperishable and yet ensouls the world in so far as all constitute His body".[182] Then he introduces into his discussion the notion of the descent or *avatāra* of the sovereign Lord Viṣṇu into animals, men and gods, such as Brahmā, and refers us here to a previous discussion.[183] Turning to this previous discussion, we find that Viṣṇu enters into an effect, meaning here the world, as a voluntary descent (1) to help the world, and (2) just for his sport. Thereby, "he completes the number of entities of certain categories which are his own effects. So, as a matter of sport, the Supreme One becomes Upendra, completing thereby the number of divinities."[184] We may pause to note that Upendra is one of the names of Kṛṣṇa, who is stated to be an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. To say that Upendra (= Kṛṣṇa) completes the number of deities is to say that the same One who descended as Upendra, descended as a deity, for we know that Kṛṣṇa is not a deity but a "scion of the Lunar Dynasty".[185] Thus only the deity of the same name, that is, Viṣṇu, can be meant here. Returning to his original discussion, we find Rāmānuja asserting there that while the gods Brahmā, etc. are all subject to *karman,* Viṣṇu, as the sovereign lord, "descends among gods etc., by his own free will and in his own proper form *[svena eva rūpena]* to succour the entire Universe".[186] Further, while Brahmā and other gods are born in the body of a god, which is constituted of *prakṛti* and corresponds to their various karman, Viṣṇu, the sovereign, who is *satyasaṃkalpa,* does not suffer births in the above manner. However, he is born, among other forms, as a god "but by his own free will and in his own proper form which is unsurpassingly good, and in order to succour the world."[187]

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[182] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #113, in van Buitenen, 265.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid., #107, 260.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid., 265.

We may conclude then, that in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, Rāmānuja is not willing to concede at all that Viṣṇu, the sustainer god in the triad Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva is a *karma*-bound entity. On the contrary, he builds a careful argument that although the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* refers to the three deities comprising the *trimūrti* as equal, this is in reference to the class of deities, who as a class, do share equality in their generic characteristics, and not to the individual members of the class, who may differ. By introducing the notion of *avatāra* here, he is clearly seeking to draw a line between the gods Brahmā and the like, who are *karma*-bound, and the *avatāra* or descent of Viṣṇu into the form of a god. Although the various *avatāras* of Viṣṇu may occur in the animal, human or godly form, they are not to be confused with the limitations of these forms. For Viṣṇu's "body in his incarnation as a god etc., is not of the stuff common bodies are made of",[188] that is, they are not subject to *karman* and thereby tainted by imperfection, but rather comprise his own proper form. In this respect we may note that Rāmānuja treats the identification of Viṣṇu, the sustainer god, with Brahman as primarily the latter's manifestation of himself as an *avatāra*.

Carman's observation that Rāmānuja in the *Gītābhāṣya* accepts Viṣṇu both as supreme cause and as created deity must thus be qualified by the discussion in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*. Further, it leads us to raise the question why Rāmānuja allowed the reference to Viṣṇu as the chief of the Ādityas to pass without the attendant qualification, found in the mention of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, of being a direct manifestation. The reference to Viṣṇu as chief of the Ādityas, twelve in number, occurs in *Bhagavad Gītā* 10:21. Rāmānuja does not add anything in his commentary to this verse. Later, however, in his commentary to verse 31 of the same chapter, which states that "Of the wearers of weapons,

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[187] Ibid., #113, 265–266.
[188] Ibid., 265.

I am Rāma", Rāmānuja adds the comment that Rāma here is a direct manifestation. He then adds:

> In indirect manifestations, such as 'of Ādityas, I am Vishṇu' etc. Ādityas etc., are *kshetrajñas* or *jīvas* (individual souls) and constituting the body of the Lord—Who is their Soul—they are in the relation of attributes to Him, like the weapons (in this case) forming attributes to Rāma (the direct Incarnation of the Lord).[189]

Carman interprets this as indicating that Rāmānuja therefore, accepts Viṣṇu as created deity, since Rāmānuja does not here offer the qualification, as he does with Rāma, that this is a direct manifestation.[190] If it were to be assumed that the Ādityas are celestial deities, among whom Viṣṇu is one, then it may be said that Rāmānuja does, indeed, accept Viṣṇu as a created deity. However, by the time we find the reference in the *Bhagavad Gītā* numbering the Ādityas as twelve, the probable source for which is the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, the Ādityas have begun to correspond to the twelve months of the year. This is a development in the mythology surrounding them, for in earlier texts the Ādityas are considered to be the sons of the goddess Aditi, and their numbers vary as to whether they are seven or eight. There is no known connection between the Ādityas as sons of Aditi and the triad controlling the state of the world.

When we examine the mythology surrounding the Ādityas, we find that Aditi, the "mother of the gods" *(deva-mātā* or *deva-mātri)* is named as wife of Viṣṇu in the Yajur Veda. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, she is named the mother of Viṣṇu, in his dwarf incarnation, and for this reason he is called Āditya.[191] Rāmānuja was certainly familiar with the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* for he quotes it extensively in his *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, a work that van Buitenen suggests was likely written before the *Gītābhāṣya*.[192] In his commentary on *Gītā* 10:21, Rāmānuja glosses the *ādityas* to mean *kṣetrajñas* or *jīvas*, and specifies that they constitute the body of the Lord, thereby drawing attention to the *śarīra-śarīrin* relationship. It is in this respect, then, that Rāmānuja interprets the statement, "Of the Ādityas, I am Viṣṇu", wherein the *ādityas* are the *jīvas*, and Viṣṇu is their Lord, thereby making the *Ādityas* analogous to his attributes *(dharma)*, of whom Viṣṇu is the possessor. No doubt he was also playing on the double entendre of Viṣṇu's appelation, Āditya, in his dwarf *avatāra* as Vāmana ("Lord of the three worlds").

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[189] *Gītābhāṣya* 10:31, in Govindāchārya, 338–339.
[190] Carman, *The Theology*, 185.
[191] John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology* (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1973), s.v. "Aditi," 3–4.

The second issue arises out of the commentary on *Gītā* 10:31, quoted above. This passage addresses the notion that in some cases Kṛṣṇa says that he is the best of such-and-such category: For example, in van Buitenen's reading: the sun is the best of the luminous bodies.[193] This is not to say that the sun is the *avatāra* among the celestial bodies; rather, the relationship between the best of the *kṣetrajñānin* and the lord (that is, Kṛṣṇa) is one of body–possessor of body *(śarīra–śarīrin)*. Now, while van Buitenen reads in "Ādityas, etc.", *kṣetrajñānins* such as the sun, the text itself would imply that "Ādityas etc." should mean Ādityas, luminous orbs, Maruts, stars, etc.. That is, the Ādityas are named as an example of the species or class under consideration. Viṣṇu, on the other hand, is named as the chief of that species, that which is equivalent to Kṛṣṇa, the speaker. Thus, for van Buitenen to have equated the Ādityas with the sun is to take a leap from the species to the best in that species. When Rāmānuja says that the Ādityas, etc. are *kṣetrajñā*, then accordingly, we must understand all other species or classes such as luminous orbs, Maruts, stars, etc. His interpretation, then, is to clarify that as *guṇa*-bound entities, these are all in relation to the Lord as his body, or *śarīra.*

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[192] van Buitenen, *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, Introduction, 30. See also van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā*, 17, where van Buitenen argues that the *Gītābhāṣya* presupposes the *Śrībhāṣya*.

[193] van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā*, 125, n. 436. The Sanskrit passage does not clearly mention the sun. It only mentions that: "its purported meaning *(arthāntara)* is that Ādityas, etc. are *kṣetrajñā*", that is, experiencing entities, that is, *guṇa*-bound. Van Buitenen, however, reads into this: "The meaning is this: the aforementioned *kṣetrajñas*, the sun etc (vs. 21 ff.) constitute themselves *dharmas* of God for they are his body ...". Thus he reads Ādityas, etc. as including sun, etc., a meaning that Rāmānuja probably did have in mind.

Then emerges the issue: when Kṛṣṇa names Viṣṇu, the sun, and the moon as being Himself, in what sense does he mean this? We know from the *Vedārthasaṃgraha* that "He completes the number of entities of certain categories which are his own effects."[194] Does this mean to say then that the best of all the species or classes is an *avatāra?* It is here that it would be instructive to return to the context of the *Gītā* passages under consideration. Kṛṣṇa has been asked to recount his *yoga* and his manifestation *(vibhūti)* by Arjuna . In responding to this question, Kṛṣṇa replies that he will do so in their salient points, for there is no end to his infinity. Here Rāmānuja elaborates that by *vibhūtitva* is meant "the being governed"[195] while the term *yoga* connotes "the Ruling of all creatures—or their Governance—is displayed by His abidance in every creature as its Soul, and that that term also connotes the function of the Lord as the Creator, the Protector, and the Destroyer of all".[196] If this be the case, "of the Ādityas I am Viṣṇu, of the luminous orbs, the radiant Sun" etc., must be understood as denoting two things: (1) Kṛṣṇa's yoga, by which he abides in every creature (viz, the Ādityas, the luminous bodies, and so forth) as its inner soul, and (2) Kṛṣṇa's *vibhūti,* by which he governs that particular class or species. Thus it is no surprise to find in this list, in *Gītā* 10:30, "of animals too, I (am) the lion". Thus Viṣṇu, the sun, Rāma, and the lion all denote Kṛṣṇa in his aspect as ruler. Now, to this there is an additional aspect that must be mentioned, and this Rāmānuja does in his commentary on Gītā 10:31. When Rāmānuja mentions that in Ādityas, etc, the Lord *(bhagavataḥ)* abides *(avasthita)* as the soul, he mentions Ādityas because it is the first item in the whole series, and the reader is to assume, from the mention of the first in the series, that all subsequent members are also meant. Now, while all the members of all the series are experiencing entities and, therefore, *guṇa*-bound, Rāmānuja has to clarify that here, although Rāma denotes the Lord by virtue of his rulership, in addition Rāma is also a direct manifestation of the Lord, unlike the other cases, such as sun, etc, in which these denote the Lord by virtue of their rulership over their class but are not in addition to be construed as avatāras in the same manner as Rāma. So again we ask: why did Rāmānuja not have to make this clear in the case of Viṣṇu of the Ādityas? To this we can say that perhaps it was an oversight on Rāmānuja's part: that in beginning his list with Ādityas, he simply assumed that by pointing out that Rāmā was a direct manifestation of the Lord the reader would pick up the clue that all *avatāras* when they formed part of the series should be identified as, on the one hand, the rulers of that series, and on the other, also direct manifestations. He simply wants to draw attention to an additional point and not tacitly accept Viṣṇu as one of the created deities, for as we have seen above, he knew his sources far too well to accept that.

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[194] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #107, in van Buitenen, 260.

[195] *Gītābhāṣya* 10:19, in Govindāchārya, 333. The translator adds "all the Kosmos is under His government".

[196] Ibid.

When the passage in which Rāmānuja identifies Rāmā as a direct manifestation, and the Ādityas, etc. as indirect manifestations is examined, the context shows that Rāmānuja appears to view Viṣṇu in this case as the *antaryāmin* in relation to whom the *kṣetrajñānins*, that is, the Ādityas, are attributes. It is clear that Rāmānuja wants to establish a *guṇa–dravya* (attribute–substance) relationship here between the Ādityas, whom he likens to the weapons (= attributes) of Rāma, and Viṣṇu, whom he likens to Rāma (= bearer of weapons). Indeed, he calls the latter a direct manifestation, and the former an indirect manifestation. In both cases, of course, the proper form of either the *avatāra* or the *antaryāmin*—who are different manifestations of the supreme being—are only visible once the human soul has attained knowledge of its own proper form, as we shall see in a later section. However, it would be salient to mention at this junction a few points that Rāmānuja makes about the *antaryāmin*. The *antaryāmin* continues during the period of manifestation the *dravya–guṇa* or *śarīrin–śarīra* relationship that obtains between Brahman as the principal and the remaining two eternal *tattvas*, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, respectively, as accessories to him in their subtle state. Having been asked the question raising a doubt over how "Brahman, who is irreproachable, untransformed and endowed with all perfections, can ensoul a phenomenal world that is partly evil",[197] Rāmānuja first draws attention to scriptural texts that identify Brahman as the immanent soul of all beings and replies:

> there is no contradiction in that Viṣṇu, the Supreme Brahman, is imperishable and yet ensouls the world in so far as all constitute His body: for this defines the natures of body and soul from each other.[198]

Indeed, since "the *śāstras* declare that the proper form of the soul is itself ensouled by the Venerable Lord, because it is the soul's sole proper form and essence to be accessory to its principle."[199] In order for the soul to be accessory to its principal, its principal must be present wherever it is, for the principal directs and controls and renders it existent: "He is the soul immanent in everything, because each and every spiritual and non-spiritual entity is brought into existence by His will."[200] Having established that the supreme Brahman continues the *dravya-guṇa* relationship across the subtle state into the state of manifestation, it may also be noted that the *apṛthaksiddhi* relationship that obtains between the three eternals continues to obtain in the form of Brahman as *antaryāmin*, and *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* as the world of names and forms.

Rāmānuja adds another dimension to this relationship. In the presence of the *antaryāmin* as inner ruler and controller, what freedom of action can be left for the embodied *jīva?* Rāmānuja's reply is significant for clarifying the role of the inner ruler:

> The Supreme Spirit has bestowed equally upon all spiritual beings all that is required for activity or inactivity, for instance the capacity of spirituality, the

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[197] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* # 113, in van Buitenen, 264.
[198] Ibid., #113, 265.
[199] Ibid., # 78, 238.
[200] Ibid.

> capacity of activity, etc. *So as to enable them to accomplish this*, He has become their substratum and has entered into them as the principal to whom they are accesory, directing them by consenting.[201]

That is, as he points out, "As it is impossible for them to release themselves from this *saṃsara* without resorting to the Venerable Lord, therefore, to serve this purpose, the *śāstras* start with setting form the equality of those souls ... [t]hen declare that that proper form of the soul is itself ensouled by the Venerable Lord ... ."[202] As the *antaryāmin*, Brahman (i) upholds the *apṛthaksiddhi* and *dravya–guṇa* relationship; (ii) sustains the world by his will; (iii) affords the means of release from *saṃsāra* for the embodied being. In addition, he also partakes of the variety of creation (more precisely, manifestation) himself:

> it is declared that ... release of the ... soul from ... *saṃsāra* ... is impossible without resorting to the Lord. ... Likewise He says: ... "having entered into the world—which is of an infinitely varied, miraculous character—as its immanent soul with an infinitesimal particle *[ayutāṃśena]* of Myself, I keep supporting it entirely by My will and I remain, while in this form possessing an infinite supernal manifestation ... ." ... while remaining one by being its sole controller, He enters the Universe as the soul immanent in the various spiritual and non-spiritual entities; having a variety of modifications in the forms of these entities and instigating a variety of activities He partakes of variety Himself.[203]

That is, he is both able to partake of variety himself and retain his unity in his aspect as immanent soul and inner ruler. It is also as immanent soul that he is able to direct the activities of Brahmā and Rudra (Śiva), the two deities that form part of the triad Brahmā–Viṣṇu–Śiva:

> We have explained before that it is Nārāyaṇa whom the contexts that deal with creation and resorption declare to be the supreme cause. ... in the *Atharvaśiras Upaniṣad* Rudra enlarges upon his own universal sovereignty ... as witness ... in so far as the Supreme Spirit has entered into him ... . Here the ground that justifies this type of statement is mentioned: the

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[201] Ibid., #90, 247. Italics mine

[202] Ibid., # 78, 237–238.

[203] Ibid., # 81, 239–240.

> ground is that the Infinite One is omnipresent: the Supreme Spirit is omnipresent as the immanent soul of all spiritual and non-spiritual entities which constitute his own body. ... the sovereign Lord Nārāyaṇa exists as the immanent soul in Rudra, Brahmā and all embodied beings. ... Nārāyaṇa, existing as their immanent soul, shows Brahmā and Rudra the way so that they can work creation and resorption respectively.[204]

How is this done? Likely in the same manner that the activities of souls are "consented" to by the immanent soul, that is, the *antaryāmin*, who does not take sides in observing the soul in its doings.[205] However, "When someone of his own accord has been active before in an extremely good action, then the Venerable Lord is pleased with him and by granting him a mental disposition for good actions helps him to be so active."[206]

C. Viṣṇu as *Avatāra*

In his proem to the Gītā, Rāmānuja connects the infinite, immutable Brahman to the incarnations or *avatāras*. He begins by telling us who is "The Lord of Śrī". We find a description of Śrī in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, culled from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa:*

> Śrī, Viṣṇu's faithful consort, the Mother of the world is eternal herself, and she is omnipresent even as Viṣṇu Himself is.[207] When He is god, she assumes a divine body, when He is man she assumes a human body: she makes her own body agree with that of Viṣṇu.[208]

Here Śrī is identified as the consort of Viṣṇu. In another passage, Rāmānuja identifies Śrī as the consort of Nārāyaṇa:

> this Supreme Brahman Nārāyaṇa has a proper form of undefinable knowledge and beatitude in the purest form; ... He has a Consort who suits His pleasure and who is in harmony with Him, possessing an immeasurable eminence of proper form, qualities, supernal power, ascendancy and character ... .[209]

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[204] Ibid., # 108, 260–261.

[205] Ibid., # 90, 247.

[206] Ibid.

[207] *Viṣṇu Purāṇa,* 1.9.145, cited in *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #133, 289, and identified by van Buitenen in n. 738.

[208] *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 1.8.39, cited in ibid.; see n. 739.

[209] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #127, in van Buitenen, 282.

It is fitting that Rāmānuja should begin his commentary on the *Gītā,* a work that contains as its pivotal point the unveiling of the divine form of Kṛṣṇa, otherwise the charioteer of Arjuna, with the mention of the lord of Śrī. Thereby he identifies immediately that this commentary is about Viṣṇu, who is also Nārāyaṇa. Indeed, Viṣṇu–Nārāyaṇa[210] is also Brahman, for immediately Rāmānuja defines the Lord of Śrī thus:

> whose proper form *(svarūpa),* antagonistic to all that is evil and solely comprising all that is good, is nothing but knowledge and bliss;
>
> the ocean of innumerable beautiful qualities, such as boundless and supreme knowledge, power, force, sovereignty, fortitude, mastery, etc., qualities proper to his nature ... .[211]

In this manner he immediately identifies Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa, different names for the self-same consort of Śrī, as the one Brahman of the defining and *ṣaḍguṇya* descriptions discussed above. Having established the identity of Brahman, Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa, he then establishes that this supreme entity has a refulgent (divine) form *(divya rūpa):*

> Whose one permanent celestial form *(divya rūpa)* is a treasure store of infinite qualities such as radiance, beauty, fragrance, delicacy [tenderness], charm, and youthfulness, which are inconceivable, celestial, wondrous, eternal, flawless, and supremely excellent a form, agreeable and appropriate to Him.[212]

We know from this description that this is a reference to the divine form discussed above, that is eternal, associated with the supreme place, and whose proper nature and beings "are incomprehensible by speech and thought".[213] Then Rāmānuja goes on to describe this deity as the one who originates, sustains and dissolves the world of phenomenal reality as a means of sport *(līlā)*, and identifies this deity as: the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Person, and Nārāyaṇa.[214] Thus he moves ostensibly from a description of Viṣṇu—the consort of Śrī, to a recital of the defining attributes and *ṣaḍguṇyas*, along with all other auspicious attributes, to a description of the eternal divine form, and thence, to the Lord's connection with the phenomenal world. Having done all this, he then overtly names the one implied so far, that is, Viṣṇu, with Brahman, the Supreme Person, and Nārāyaṇa.

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[210] This is a correlation I have coined in order to denote that Rāmānuja correlates Viṣṇu to Nārāyaṇa and vice-versa, and both to Brahman.

[211] Introduction to the commentary, trans. by van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā,* 45.

[212] *Gītābhāṣya,* introduction, translated by and cited in Carman, *The Theology,* 171.

[213] Introduction to the commentary, trans. by van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā,* 45. van Buitenen considers the description immediately following, viz. "who, whereas his proper nature and beings are incomprehensible by speech and thought, reigns a boundless and wondrous dominion which abounds in numberless objects, means and places of experiences of all kinds and forms, and which suits his pleasure" as describing "God's relation to the non-spiritual world which provides the *jīvātmans* with the objects, means and places of experience" (see note 12). I do not aver with this interpretation; rather, it is more likely that Rāmānuja is still talking about the boundless and wondrous dominion in

We dwell at length on Rāmānuja's introduction to his commentary on the *Gītā* because it lays down the essential elements of the framework through which he approaches what may be considered one of the major devotional texts in Hinduism. It is here that he tells us how he understands the *avatāra* form of the Brahman the supreme being, the supreme person, Nārāyaṇa, that is Viṣṇu:

> He has created the entire universe, from Brahmā to minerals, and, although He is inaccessible to the meditation, worship etc. of gods—Brahmā etc.—and men when He exists in his proper form, has by his own will (for He is a shoreless ocean of compassion, goodness, love and generosity) assumed a shape of the same structure *(saṃsthāna)* as theirs without giving up his proper nature, and in that shape He has descended *(avatīriya)* repeatedly to various worlds in order that He might be worshipped by the beings who live in these worlds and so bring them nearer to the fruits of *dharma, artha, kāma* and release in accordance with their desires; thus He has descended, seemingly to rule the earth but actually to alleviate the burdens of *saṃsāra* even of the like of us, and so become visible to all mankind; and He has accomplished feats which drove away the sufferings of all people of all ranks ... ; then slaking the thirst of all with the elixirs of his glances and words animated by boundless mercy, kindness and tenderness, He has made Akrūra, Mālākāra and others the most ardent Bhāgavatas by revealing the multitudes of his unsurpassed virtues of beauty, goodness etc.; until, at last, while pretending to exhort Arjuna to fight, He has revealed the *bhaktiyoga*, promoted by *jñāna-* and *karmayoga,* which in the Vedānta is declared to be

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which he is *satyakāma*, that is, where his every pleasure is realized, and not the world of phenomenal being, which is created for his sport *(līlā)*. Further, the context suggests that the description is still of the eternal, divine form, since it continues to talk about the supreme heaven, *paramavyoman.*

[214] Ibid., 46–47. For a discussion of the name and form of Brahman, see Carman, *The Theology*, 158ff.

> the means of attaining man's supreme end, release, and of which He himself is the object.[215]

Here Rāmānuja clearly makes the connection between the creator of the universe and the avatāras, and key to this connection are two notions: (1) that the supreme being, although incognizant to the meditation and worship of gods, humans, etc., takes on, out of compassion, a form resembling theirs *(manuṣyatva-saṃsthānam-āsthitam)* so that he may be worshipped; and (2) that in so doing, the supreme being did not abandon his proper nature *(svakīyam-svabhāvam). Prima facie* this would mean that despite the creaturely form, the *avatāra* retains the divine nature.[216] In other words, verily the *avatāra* is the Lord of Śrī himself, Viṣṇu, that is, Nārāyaṇa, that is, Brahman. The decision to take a form resembling that of the human stems out of compassion, goodness, love and generosity; the objectives stated here meanwhile are:

1. . To be worshipped by the beings of the phenomenal worlds in order that he may bring them closer to the four *puruṣārthas*, or ends of human life.
2. To appear to rule them while in reality he alleviates the burdens of *saṃsāra* and so becomes visible.
3. To accomplish feats that drive away the sufferings of all peoples of all ranks.
4. To slake the thirsts of all with his divine glances and words.
5. To make people his devotees so as to reveal his unsurpassed virtues.
6. To exhort Arjuna to fight as a device to reveal the teachings of the *Gītā*, or the means to attain release, that is, he himself.

We have listed these separately in order to take in the particulars of each statement made by Rāmānuja in his introduction. However, it is possible to collapse these into broad objectives. The *avatāra* comes to make people his devotees, so that he may assist them in accomplishing the goals of human life: *dharma, artha, kāma* and *mokṣa.* Therefore, the *avatāra* is (1) he who is to be worshipped, and (2) he who assists in accomplishing the goals of human life: *dharma, artha, kāma* and *mokṣa.* In his *avatāra* as ruler (an indication of his *avatāra* as Rāma), it is (3) he who alleviates the burdens of *saṃsāra;* in his other descents he accomplished feats that reveal him to be (4) he who drives away the sufferings of all peoples of all ranks. Within the aim of assisting people to accomplish the supreme goal of their lives, that is, release, the *avatāra* is (5) he who slakes the thirst of his devotees and (6) he who makes his devotees ardent. He teaches them the way, detailed, it is implied, in *Bhagavad Gītā,* and given scriptural sanction by the Vedānta. In this way, he reveals the means to attain the final aim by becoming (7) he who is the divine teacher. Finally, it is (8) he who is the object of the ultimate aim, release from the state of *saṃsāra.* Let us look at this list closely:

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[215] Ibid., 47. Another translation is found in Govindāchārya, *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā*, 8–9.

[216] "In order to be a refuge for gods, men, and other creatures, the Supreme Person, without at all abandoning His very own nature *[svakīyam-svabhāvam]* associates Himself with the characteristic form *[rūpa]*, structure *[saṃsthāyān]*, qualities *[guṇa]*, and actions *[dharman]* [elsewhere translated as characteristics] of the different classes of being, and then is born in many ways." *Śrībhāṣya*, 1.3.1, translated by Carmen, *The Theology*, 184–185; see also Karmarkar, 394.

(1) he who is to be worshipped

(2) he who assists in accomplishing the goals of human life

(3) he who alleviates the burdens of *saṃsāra*

(4) he who drives away the sufferings of all peoples of all ranks

(5) he who slakes the thirst of his devotees

(6) he who makes his devotees ardent

(7) he who is the divine teacher of *bhaktiyoga,* promoted by *jñānayoga* and *karmayoga*

(8) he who is the object of the ultimate aim, release

As stated by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna in *Gītā* 4:7, "Whensoever and wheresoever, Bhārata!, virtue wanes and vice waxes, then (and there) do I create Myself". Rāmānuja adds that while no fixed periods are appointed for the *avatāras*, whenever *dharma* as ordained to be practiced by the four *varṇas* (castes) according to the four *āśramas* (stages of life) declines, and whenever its opposite, *adharma*, increases, then out of his own free will, the Lord of Śrī manifests himself in incarnations.[217] He further underscores this point in his commentary to *Gītā* 4:8: "For protecting the virtuous and destroying the wicked, and for firmly re-installing *dharma*, am I born from *yuga* to *yuga*." The virtuous *(sādhunām)* "are those who are "devoted to dharma", "the foremost among the Vaiṣṇavas *(vaiṣṇava-āgresarāḥ)*" and "who seek Me out as their Shelter *(samāsrayaṇe pravṛttāḥ)*."[218] Rather than dwelling on the peril caused to the earth due to the increase in *adharma*, Rāmānuja shifts the emphasis to these devoted eminent Vaiṣṇavas, who

> feel that without seeing Me, whose names and wonderful works transcend the powers of speech and mind, they cannot live and move, cannot support their very being. They are those to whom a single moment of My absence from their memory, is as it were a *kalpa* . . . lest they, in their agony at not seeing Me, pine away, I grant them the privilege to be able to see Me and My doings ... .[219]

In a very subtle manner Rāmānuja here interprets "protecting the virtuous" to mean that the Lord "protects" them from pining away from not seeing him by granting "them the privilege to be able to see" him. In this manner, Rāmānuja connects the waning of *dharma* with the loss of the virtuous, or its obverse, the firm re-installing of *dharma* with protecting the virtuous. Indeed, in Rāmānuja's view, the purpose of the *avatāras* is to "be actually an Object for all men's sights to see"[220], and lest one were tempted to argue that devout humans will always feel the privation of an object of worship, indicating that an *avatāra* needs be present at all times, Rāmānuja states in *Gītā* 4:11 that the term *bhajāmi*—I serve—indicates *darṣayāmi*, that is, I cause myself to be seen: "In the way they resort to Me

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[217] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:7, in Govindāchārya, 140–141.
[218] Ibid., 4:8.
[219] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:8, in Govindāchārya, 141.
[220] *Gītābhāṣya*, Proem, in Govindāchārya, 9.

(prapadyante), in that way do I serve *(bhajāmi)* them."[221] Rāmānuja states here that the Lord is saviour to those who seek refuge in him not only through his incarnations, but through any other method or form that they may select. That is, although the divine nature is such that even *yogis* find it transcends speech and thought, yet, for his devotees he takes on a form that is not only visible but by which they can enjoy him in every one of their senses and in all diverse ways.

Although Rāmānuja does not explicitly state as much here, later Vaiṣṇava tradition has taken the commentary on this verse to mean that Rāmānuja sanctioned the *arcā* or consecrated image of the deity. Such an image (viz, *Gītā* 4:11 "in the way they resort to me"; in Rāmānuja's gloss: "by any other method or form" that they may select or "by whatever conception") was considered by the worshipper to truly be the divine. Indeed, Rāmānuja must himself have worshipped at such forms.[222] Carman suggests that Rāmānuja may not have been overt in his sanction here as he could not find Vedāntic approval for the Pancarātric notion that the deity was fully incarnated in the consecrated image. Young's careful analysis of Rāmānuja's commentary on *Gītā* 4:6–11 suggests, however, that Rāmānuja's intent was clearly to include the 'image-form' of God, found implicitly in the conceptions of the Āḻvār poets, and explicitly in the instructions laid out in the manuals for the construction and worship of images *(pancarātrāgamas)*.[223] In fact, Young's analysis of Rāmānuja's commentary on *Gītā* 4:7–11 leads to a convincing argument that Rāmānuja's comments on the Lord's incarnation offered a "blueprint" for subsequent Śrivaiṣṇava theology regarding arcā or consecrated image.[224] That is, "he points to *saṁsthāna:* the shape, the plan the blueprint" to show that although God has his own form, "he also adjusts himself to the 'shape' of gods, men, etc."[225] The significance of this is that through his gloss on 4:11, Rāmānuja is able to introduce the sectarian Vaiṣṇava position on *arcā* and *prapatti.*[226] The point of significance here is that Rāmānuja's commentary allows for the devotee to enjoy the Lord with all his physical faculties of sense-perception.[227]

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[221] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:11, ibid., 143.
[222] See Carman, *The Theology*, discussion on 181.
[223] See Katherine K. Young, "Beloved Places *(ukantaruḷiṉa-nilaṅkaḷ)*: The Correlation of Topography and Theology in the Śrīvaiṣṇava Tradition of South India" (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1978) for a full discussion. Some of these issues are discussed in Katherine K. Young, "Rāmānuja on *Bhagavadgītā* 4:11: The Issue of *Arcāvatara*" in *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 23:2 (1988), 90–110.
[224] Ibid., 106.

Although *Gītā* 4:8 suggests that all three conditions outlined in the verse should be present, that is, the *avatāra* should appear when the virtuous need protection, the wicked need to be destroyed, and *dharma* must be reinstalled, Rāmānuja does not draw any attention to these preconditions in his commentary, suggesting that for him the presence of the *avatāra* was seen more broadly in terms of its devotional, *puruṣārthic* and liberating value.

We do not want to press this point too far. In Rāmānuja's view, the *avatāra* does appear to help humans deal with the burdens of a *saṃsāric* existence, and Rāmānuja would have been well aware that the famed king Rāma's objective was, indeed, to alleviate the sufferings of his people through vanquishing the wicked. In his other *avatāras,* Viṣṇu alleviates the sufferings of all people of all ranks. This is in keeping with the ethos of the *Gītā,* and Rāmānuja indicates in the introduction his belief that the Lord manifests himself and acts so "as to captivate the hearts and the eyes of all creatures high and low."[228] Further, Kṛṣṇa's conversations with Arjuna are to impel him precisely to wage war upon those who represent *adharma,* or loss of *dharma.* However, this action is not to be motivated by the promise of a reward; rather, it is to be undertaken selflessly with the knowledge that in performing one's *dharmic* duty one is playing the part of an instrument of the divine,[229] on the one hand, and engaging in devotion,[230] on the other. That is, as the destroyer, as time, it is really the Lord who determines when someone will die. The human being is simply the instrument who carries out this task; if the task is not carried out by one human being, it will be by another. Here Kṛṣṇa is asserting his sovereignty over the birth, sustainment and death of all creatures. At the same time, he is educating Arjuna that in performing his *dharma*—which is to fight—he is simply carrying out the will of the lord, that is, he is an instrument in the realization of the divine will. From this the larger view emerges: having gained recognition of the sovereignty of the lord over all creatures, it is befitting that all worship be directed towards him. For indeed, how should the universe refuse obeisance to him, who was there prior to all creatures and full of glory?[231] Following from this, then, comes the awareness that indeed the lord is the supreme aim of human beings, and, therefore, all acts must be directed towards him as their goal, not towards any promised rewards. Hence, in carrying out acts—which Rāmānuja asserts are in any case forms of worship of the lord—without attachment to their rewards or fruits, peace results. Rāmānuja lays out the spiritual path: "By performing actions—which in truth are forms of My worship—and not craving for their reward,"[232]

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[225] Ibid., 93.
[226] Young, "Beloved Places".
[227] Ibid.
[228] *Gītābhāṣya,* Proem, in Govindāchārya, 9.

1. Soul-contemplation ensues *(akṣara-yoga:* first 6 chapters);
2. Resulting in the obliteration of all beclouding impediments such as *avidyā*
3. Resulting in soul-vision *(pratyag-ātma-sākṣātkāra)*
4. Of which the natural product is devotion to the supreme *(parā-bhakti)*
5. Leading to 18:46—man wins the Goal
6. Leading to 18:53—made fit to become like unto Brahman
7. Attains to 18:54—supreme love of Kṛṣṇa.

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[229] *Gītābhāṣya* 11:33, ibid., 364.
[230] *Gītā*, 11:55; also 12:12.
[231] Ibid., 11:36–44.
[232] *Gītābhāṣya* 12:11, in Govindāchārya, 387.

We are restricted to a brief treatment of Rāmānuja's commentary on the *Gītā's* teachings since the chief purpose of this section is to outline Rāmānuja's view of the *avatāra*. The *Gītā* commends action unattached to rewards, and devotion to the Lord in order to attain the love of Kṛṣṇa, detailed in *Gītā* 18:54. The verse immediately following, *Gītā* 18:55, declares that the result of having attained this love is to enter into the Lord, glossed by Rāmānuja as meaning "joining" the Lord. In *Gītā* 11:39–43, through Kṛṣṇa's manifestation of his own terrible form to Arjuna, the latter is able to understand why he should be devoted to the Lord. He beseeches Kṛṣṇa, after having repented for having viewed him merely as his human charioteer and friend, to display his benign form to him once again. Rāmānuja's gloss on *Gītā* 11:47 makes Arjuna the *bhakta* or devotee of Kṛṣṇa, and out of grace towards him Kṛṣṇa manifests himself, although the text of the *Gītā* itself indicates that Arjuna becomes Kṛṣṇa's devotee after the manifestation (that is, vss. 11:43–44). Ordinary devotees have no such vision to nurture their love and devotion. In this respect, the *Gītā* functions as a testament, and as such, helps aspiring devotees to form a mental image of the verity of the manifested form of Kṛṣṇa. In this respect, many can identify with Arjuna, whose experience transforms him into becoming, according to Rāmānuja, the devotee *(bhakta)* of Kṛṣṇa.

Thus for Rāmānuja, Kṛṣṇa the *avatāra* is at once Brahman, Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa. It is significant that Rāmānuja opens his introduction with a reference to Viṣṇu, the Lord of Śrī, and that this is the substantive nominal phrase to which all adjectival phrases are attributed. Thus, the equations made are: Viṣṇu: who is the Supreme Brahman, this Nārāyaṇa, who is the Supreme Person *(Puruśottama)*, and, who, having made the universe from Brahmā (that is, the created god) to the immoveables, "remains with His same essential nature *[svena-rūpena]* and is inaccessible even by such means as the meditation and worship of men or of gods like Brahmā."[233] The implication here is clear: that it is Viṣṇu that is viewed as the cause in this commentary to the *Gītā*. In the *Śrībhāṣya*, where the first section is primarily on investigating Brahman, and which is a work directed primarily at those studying the scriptures, Brahman is named as the cause (and, indeed, the effect). The commentary on the *Gītā*, which was likely to be utilized primarily by other Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* and their students, but which was also a work that would be carefully scrutinized by rival philosopher–theologians, was no less significant despite its obvious sectarian beginning. However, the range of its readership must have made Rāmānuja just as stringent as he was in the *Śrībhāṣya* with regard to respecting the intellectual rigour that is characteristic of the magnum opus. By giving the supreme being a name, to which all other adjectival phrases are attributed, Rāmānuja immediately plays upon the notion of accessibility, and calls to the forefront the personified aspect of the supreme being, that is, the supernal manifestation. In the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, Rāmānuja identifies the avatāra as Viṣṇu voluntarily descending to the world, "so as to help the world, just for his sport".[234]

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[233] Carman, trans., *Gītābhāṣya*, proem, in *The Theology*, 78.

In his introduction to the commentary on the *Gītā*, Rāmānuja projects the notion that the Lord of Śrī, having brought the world into its manifested state, retires into his own self, thereby becoming inaccessible to the meditations and adorations of all creatures. This is the fundamental premise upon which the *avatāra's* advent into the world is to be understood according to Rāmānuja's thought. It was primarily in order to make himself cognizant to his creatures that the Lord takes on the *avatāric* form. In other words, the reason for descent is epistemological in basis. The ultimate aim of the *avatāra* is, through inspiring devotion, to make human beings aware of the true nature of their individual selves and of the supreme being, resulting in the human soul's entering into the Lord.[235] Thus, the epistemological function has direct bearing on ontological matters. The supreme being effects a change in the ontological mode of his body—collectively gathered together in a subtle state comprising *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*—by bringing the world of names and forms into manifestation. In this form, as we will see in the next chapter, experiencing entities, or the resultant creatures, come to know through scripture that out of the ignorance resulting from their *karma* and their mistaken identification with their bodies leads to an ontic mode of being in which the soul, although "in essence unimpaired, uncircumscribable knowledge and bliss, ... is susceptible to various degrees of contraction and expansion due to ignorance in the form of ageless *karman* ...".[236] In this respect, although Rāmānuja's comment in his introduction to the *Gītā* seems paradoxical, the *karma*-engendered contraction of the soul's knowledge literally "causes" the supreme being to retire from view. Rāmānuja's comment is paradoxical given that the process of manifestation includes Brahman entering into the world as the *antaryāmin*, the inner ruler. However, due to entanglement with *guṇa*-bound *prakṛti*, the individual soul loses ken of both its own essential nature and the Lord, and in this respect, Viṣṇu disappears from view. In order to help humans to restore their knowledge of their own proper natures and their Lord, Viṣṇu decides, out of sport, to come to their assistance, in the form of the *avatāra*. The purpose of the *avatāra*, then, is to lead them through devotion to himself[237] into a state of correct knowledge,[238] through which their original, eternal ontic state may be reaffirmed[239] and, once this is done, they may attain not only release from *saṃsāra*[240] but may enter into the Lord thereby remaining continually in a state of beatific vision. That is, knowledge of the scripture attests to the necessity of *bhakti*, which, through divine grace, ensues in the state of that knowledge which is bliss for the soul in which it kens both its own proper form and that of its principal, the Lord.

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[234] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* # 107, in van Buitenen, 260.

[235] Described as "joining" the Lord, according to R.'s gloss. It is likely a reference to going to the highest lights, that is, that realm from which there is no return. See *Gītābhāṣya* 18:55 for the gloss, and 8:26ff for the ultimate goal.

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[236] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #87, in van Buitenen, 245.
[237] *Gītā* 11:36–44; 12:11.
[238] Items 2 and 3 in this discussion above. See comm. on 18:53 for correct knowledge of the soul, and 18:55 for correct knowledge of the lord.
[239] Item 6, *Gītā* 18:53.
[240] *Gītā* 14:2.

One of the questions that may be raised here is how all these different forms can be sustained without compromising the simplicity or singleness of the supreme being. In the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, Rāmānuja recalls Kṛṣṇa, the *avatāra*, as saying in the *Gītā* (5:19): "having entered into the world—which is of an infinitely varied, miraculous character—as its immanent soul with an infinitesimal particle of Myself, I keep supporting it entirely by My will and I remain, while in this form possessing an infinite supernal manifestation, the abode of boundless perfect qualities as I am supremely miraculous."[241] Here we have the confluence of *avatāra, antaryāmin, mahāvibhūti* (or *divya rūpa)*, and possibly Brahman (repository of innumerable perfect qualities). How can all this be possible? Rāmānuja's answer to that is:

> For any other entity but Brahman it is impossible to have another form, nature and power added to its own form, nature and power. But this Supreme Brahman, being categorically different from all entities, has all natures and all powers. There it is not contradictory that this one being has an infinite and wonderful variety of forms and still retains His uniformity in this infinite and immeasurable diversity.[242]

If the reasons for an *avatāra's* advent into the world of created beings are clear, it is still not clear how such a manifestation of the divine would not compromise the essential nature of divinity, especially with respect to immutability and stainlessness. Rāmānuja interprets Arjuna's question to Kṛṣṇa in *Gītā* 4:4 as a foil to allow Kṛṣṇa to expound on the meaning of the *avatāras.* One of the key issues he identifies is whether the *avatāras* of He who is the antidote to all evil *(heya-pratyanīka)*, the abode of all perfections *(kalyāṇaikatāna)*, the lord of all *(sarveṣvara)*, the omniscient *(sarvajña)*, the infallible-willed *(satya-saṃkalpa)* and the fulfilled of all desires *(avāpta-samasta-kāma)* "are like the *karma*-determined births of *devas*, men, etc.?"[243] Rāmānuja understands Kṛṣṇa to affirm, on the one hand, the reality of his past births as various *avatāras*, in *Gītā* 4:5, and on the other hand, that he is, in essence, birthless and imperishable, in *Gītā* 4:6. Kṛṣṇa explains the nature of this paradox by declaring that he chose to establish himself in his own *prakṛti* through willing this to be so. For Rāmānuja this is a key point: "I enter into My own nature *(prakṛti)*, take on My own form, and with My own free-choice, I take on births."[244] This emphasis on the free will of the supreme entity to enter into the wheel of birth and death[245] connotes an important difference from the births and deaths evinced by all other creatures, from *devas* to the blades of grass. While these latter are bound to the wheel of *saṃsāra* through their association with the *guṇas,* which bind them to *karman* and the fruits of *karman*, the Lord of Śrī does not fall under the operation of the laws of *karman.* Thus although he is in essence birthless and deathless, he can, through divine fiat and will, choose to enter into the generic forms *(saṃsthāna)* of created beings for his own purposes, outlined in *Gītā* 4:7–8. While works and their fruits are essential for *guṇa*-characterized creatures, Kṛṣṇa asserts in the second stanza of *Gītā* 13: "Works soil me not. No interest have I in works' fruit." His essential freedom is to be contrasted with the bondage in which creatures find themselves, explained by Rāmānuja when he comments that the wonderful variety in beings such as *deva,* man, etc. is due to "their own deeds of merit and demerit . . . inasmuch as one's own deed, or no-deed results in his becoming conditioned or not conditioned in material existence *(prāptāprāpta-viveka),* the man himself is his author . . .".[246] Moreover, while it is a fact of embodied existence that creatures "take to enjoying the things of the world, as a consequence of their attachment to fruit",[247] no such condition applies to the supreme entity, for he has no interest, as declared in vs. 13, in the fruit of works.

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[241] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #81, in van Buitenen, 239–240.
[242] Ibid., #82, 240.
[243] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:4, in Govindāchārya, 137.

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[244] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:6, in Govindāchārya, 138.
[245] R. distinguishes between his own *prakṛti* and the nature of the beings within *saṃsāra*: I take on forms as pertain to the *devas,* man and so on: and manifest Myself as if I were of their nature, by My own free choice." See *Gītābhāṣya* 4:6, in Govindāchārya, 140.
[246] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:13 1/2, ibid., 146.
[247] Ibid.

For Rāmānuja it is evident that the willed choice to take on birth in the form of creatures is an important element in safeguarding the supreme entity's immutability, since ordinary creatures, including *devas*, exist in their various forms due to the limitations of *karman* and their *guṇa*-bound condition, and therefore,experience a surcrease or decrease in their mode of existence. No such change occurs for the supreme entity. This point is further underscored in the commentary to an earlier verse, *Gītā* 3:22, wherein Kṛṣṇa declares to Arjuna: "In all three worlds, Pārtha! naught is there for Me to do; naught is there not gained or to gain. Yet I am in work." Rāmānuja points out that Kṛṣṇa means to say here that although he could be present in any guise in any of the three worlds through his mere will, he has no work that he is bound to do, for he is the Lord of all *(sarva-īśvara)*, and hence, has nothing to gain or lose by working. Yet, he works for the interests of the world.[248] In other words, it is not his immutability which is affected by his taking on creaturely form; rather it is the mutability of the created world which is so affected.

If creatures owe the varieties of their existence in the forms of *devas*, humans or tufts of grass to their accumulated *karman* and to the *guṇa*-bound existence, and the *avatāras* do not, being in reality the supreme entity who has willed to take on whatever form is deemed necessary for the purpose of restoring *dharma* and as a merciful condescension to devotees, the question still remains, to what degree is the *avatāra* divine, and to what degree human (or any other creaturely form)? Rāmānuja has been at pains to point out that the *avatāra* is divine, and those *mahātmas*—great-souled ones—who can discern him as *avatāra* clearly understand that the *avatāra* is in reality, despite the human or other form, truly divine. We have already seen that the condition of existence is that it is *guṇa*-bound and *karman*-decreed, and this facet of ordinary existence does not devolve on the *avatāra*, who is self-willed and immutable. The indications found in Rāmānuja's commentary on those verses of the *Gītā* that discuss the nature of the *avatāra* point to the fact that it is not from the *avatāra's* perspective that the paradox exists of whether the *avatāra* is divine or human, but rather, from the human or creaturely perspective that the *avatāra* is mistaken to be human or creaturely. *Gītā* 9:11 declares: "The witless fancy Me as man incarnate, ignoring My transcendent character, that I am of beings, the Sovereign Paramount." Rāmānuja's comment on this verse makes abundantly clear that the human or creaturely form of the *avatāra* does not raise the thorny issue of the dual nature of god-made-incarnate for him:

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[248] *Gītābhāṣya* 3:22, ibid., 108.

> On account of their sins, ignorant dunces mistake Me, who am human in semblance, to be like any other specimen of humanity; Me the great lord of creatures, the omniscient, the true-willed, the only cause of the vast cosmos, who assumes the mask of humanity from motives of infinite compassion for creatures that they may have access to Me.
>
> Ignoring this My superior and singular hypostatic nature, distinguished in human form, assumed on purpose to be within the reach of all, and a vehicle for the display of divine qualities of shoreless mercy and bounty, simplicity, love, etc., pertaining to the great lord of beings, they despise and disregard Me as if I belonged to the human kind.[249]

Rāmānuja's stance throughout the *Gītā*, and perhaps elsewhere[250] is to safeguard the divinity of the *avatāra* and the grace-impelled presence of the supreme entity in the world of conditioned existence without undermining it with discussions of any differentiation in the unity of the supreme entity that might apply to different realms.[251] However, even though he succeeds in pointing out that the stainlessness and immutability of the divine nature are not affected by its manifestation as *avatāra*, there are still questions to be raised. It is clear that the forms adopted by gods, humans and tufts of grass depend on their previous *karman*, which not only determines the form their souls will take in corporealized existence, but also makes these subject to contractions of knowledge. The question remains, nonetheless, whether association with the body leads to the placing of a limitation on the substance so embodied. In other words, if grossness is indicative of evil, as we saw earlier, then how does his connection with matter leave him unstained? We have seen in this section that from Rāmānuja's perspective, limiting adjuncts arise from previous *karman*, and since the *avatāra* has no *karman* to speak of, there is no possibility of limiting adjuncts originating from this source. However, does conjunction with matter introduces its own deficiencies, and if it does, how does the *avatāra* transcend these?

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[249] *Gītābhāṣya* 9:11, ibid., 296.

[250] See Carman's discussion of the *avatāra* forms of the supreme entity, *The Theology*, 176–186.

[251] For a discussion of the Pāñcarātric system which Rāmānuja adopted, but not fully, with respect to this issue, see Carman, *The Theology*, 180.

Rāmānuja, however, would question the very basis of this premise. For him, the *avatāra* form is not in any way associated with *prakṛti* or *guṇa*-bound matter:

> That his body in his incarnation as a god etc., is not of the stuff common bodies are made of is put forward in the *Mahābhārata* as well: "the body of this Supreme Spirit has not the common structure of being built up by the various elements," and in the *śruti:* "Unborn though He remains, He is born variously: the wise know his origin."[252]

Throughout the *Gītā,* when expounding on himself, Kṛṣṇa talks of himself as being beyond *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajña,*[253] beyond *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, beyond *akṣara* and *kṣara,*[254] that is, of being the *antaryāmin* in all phenomenal existence. Rāmānuja asserts time and again what Kṛṣṇa is not, that is, he is not matter and not souls. He also asserts what he is, that is, he is *antaryāmin,* or inner ruler, he is the cause of the universe, which is his effect insofar as it is governed by him as inner ruler and forms his mode as his body. Kṛṣṇa in relation to the world is its inner ruler and the world is as his body. The notion of a body implies that it is an instrument through which something that is distinct from the body but in some form of relation to it can be identified, and which is controlled by that something. That is, the body not only serves to highlight and point to the presence of something, but it is also passive with respect to that something, to whose will it responds.

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[252] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #113, in van Buitenen, 265: *na bhūtasaṃghasaṃsthāno deho 'sya paramātmanaḥ* (possibly from *Mahābhārata*), according to van Buitenen, n. 687 (sic, should be 587).

[253] *Gītābhāṣya* 13:2, in Govindāchārya, 400: "by *sāmānādhikaraṇya*, ... are both *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajñā* to be understood as inseparably adjectival to Me as relates." *Kṣetra*, lit. "field", understood as "matter, body, habitat, field, place or that which is enjoyed", while *kṣetrajñā* is the "knower of the field", that is, "the soul, the knower, the conscious dweller". See Govindāchārya, 399, n.1 and n.2.

[254] Intro. to *Gītā* 15, ibid., 464. In his gloss to 13:2, R. calls *kṣara* "the sum of all existences" which his translator amplifies to mean "the perishable—matter-bound souls); similarly, *akṣara* is termed "the constant *[kūtastha]*" by R., amplified by Govindāchārya to mean "the imperishable=matter-freed souls". See Govindāchārya, 401.

With respect to the *avatāric* form itself, Rāmānuja says no more in his commentary on the *Gītā* than stating that Kṛṣṇa assumes "the mask of humanity"[255] out of compassion for his creatures so that they may see him, and "who incarnates in the guise of man"[256] out of compassion to protect the good and destroy the evil-doers.

The revelation that the human charioteer is, in fact, an *avatāra* occurs in Chapter 11 of the *Gītā*. This manifestation of the divine form cannot be seen with the physical eye, "fitted only to see limited and conditioned objects."[257] Arjuna is enabled to see the divine—as opposed to the creaturely—form of Kṛṣṇa the charioteer, which is beyond the limited capacities of his physical organs of perception, only when Kṛṣṇa confers upon him a divine eye, capable of seeing the lord: "I grant thee the Divine eye: See My Sovereign Yoga."[258] It is due to human limitations that we perceive the *avatāric* form as human and assume that it must have a *prakṛtic* basis. In reality, however, this is a mistaken assumption. In his commentary on *Vedāntasūtra* 21, Rāmānuja in his *Śrībhāṣya* examines the doubts raised by references in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1, 6, 6–8[259] concerning that Person who is within the sun *[antar āditye]* and within the eye. Rāmānuja reports that others have interpreted the reference to the person within the sun and within the eye to denote the essential nature of the individual self, since only the individual self associates with a body in order to experience the consequences of accumulated *karman.* Great merit could, according to these others, result in sovereign powers such as those of Brahmā, whose merit enabled him to engage in the work of creation of the world and so forth. Thus it would be quite in keeping with the text of the Upaniṣad to maintain that both the one within the sun and the one within the eye are the essential individual self, disparate only because of their accumulated merit.

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[255] *Gītābhāṣya* 11:11, ibid., 296.
[256] *Gītābhāṣya* 11:12, ibid., 297.
[257] *Gītābhāṣya* 11:8, ibid., 351.
[258] *Gītā* 11:8, which Rāmānuja glosses: "Hence let me confer on thee that *Divya* or spiritual (immaterial) eye, capable of seeing Me." *Gītābhāṣya* 11:8, ibid., 351.
[259] "Who this one is seen *[dṛśyate]*, the person within the Sun, constituted of gold *[hiraṇmaya]*, gold-bearded, gold-haired, gold all over right upto the tips of the nails,—of Him are the two eyes like the lotus *[puṇḍarīkam evam akṣiṇī]* opened up by the Sun. Of Him '*Ud*' [High] [is] the name. He, this one, has risen up from all sins. Rises up, indeed, he from all sins, who knows thus. Of him the *Ṛk* and the *Sāman* are the two singers.—This concerning [His being] the Deity." *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 301.

Rāmānuja, however, is not satisfied with such an explanation. To him, the scriptural passage clearly indicates the supreme self himself, "because His attributes are declared [in the context]."[260] The specific attribute he has in mind is that of having risen above all sins, that is, to be free from *karman.* He goes a step further, declaring that *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* I.6.7, "He, this one, has risen up from all sins" in fact means "to be void of even the tinge of being subject to *Karman*",[261] for it is only those who are *karman*-bound that can have sin. Therefore, only the supreme self can be meant, since all individual selves possess *karman* and are, therefore, not exempt from sin.

Moreover, there are other characteristics that clarify that the person within the sun and the eye are not the individual soul, the *jīva.* These comprise being the Lord of the worlds, having all thoughts fulfilled, being the inmost *Ātman* or soul of all beings which are conditioned by his own nature and so forth. These characteristics are not possible for the *jīva.*[262]

Furthermore, Rāmānuja questions the assumption that association with a body necessarily implies possession of *karman*, "because it is possible for Him who wills the truth to have the association with a body merely through His own will."[263] Someone who is subject to *karmic* influence cannot avoid association with a body, and bodies are considered to be aggregates of the elements of *prakṛti* made up of the three qualities.[264] This association with the *prakṛtic* body is unavoidable since the *karman*-influenced individual self must experience the consequences of its *karman.* The supreme self's body, however, "is in accordance with His own desire, and is suited to His own nature, and is altogether non-material."[265] How can this be so? Rāmānuja states that all the auspicious qualities are Brahman's by virtue of the fact that He possesses a nature that is wholly knowledge and bliss and opposed to all evil (denoting the essential qualities discussed above). "In the very same manner, there is a natural and divine form also, which is in accordance with His desire and is suited to Himself"[266] and which approximates to the description we have of the celestial form of Viṣṇu on his serpent couch, home of all the *kalyānaguṇas* or auspicious attributes. Rāmānuja continues:

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[260] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 304.
[261] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 301.
[262] Ibid.

> With the object of favouring His worshippers, He [i.e. Nārāyaṇa] causes the same form of His to assume such a configuration as is suited to the understanding of each of those [worshippers]—Nārāyaṇa who is the ocean of boundless mercy, sweet disposition, affection and generosity, who is free from even the smallest taint of all that is evil, who is free from all sin, who is the Highest Self, the Highest Brahman and the Highest Person.[267]

Clearly, Rāmānuja's intent is to establish that the Brahman defined by the essential attributes (knowledge, bliss, freedom from all evil, and so forth) is the same as the one who has the divine form (he who is in the highest heaven, seated on his serpent couch) and is the very same who appears as an *avatāra* such as is described in the *Gītā* (4:6–10). In addition, as argued by Young, Rāmānuja's interpretation of *Gītā* 4:11 allowed the scope for the notion of *arcā*—consecrated image form of the deity—as the form the supreme being makes available to his devotees, fashioned according to their conception of him.[268] In making the equation Brahman=Viṣṇu–Nārāyaṇa in *paramavyoman=avatāra*, Rāmānuja is also establishing that Brahman's omnipotence is such that he has an eternal supernal form (as in *paramavyoman)* as well as will to take on a form that to all appearances, is creaturely (as, for example, that of Kṛṣṇa). With respect to the latter, however, Rāmānuja still must establish that in taking creaturely form, Brahman remains free from association with *prakṛti*, since such association would taint him. He does this by pointing to scriptural passages[269] that deny, according to him,[270] that Brahman

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[263] Ibid., 305.
[264] Ibid. The three qualities or *guṇas* are, of course, *sattva, rajas* and *tamas.*
[265] Ibid.
[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid., 305–306.

> possesses such qualities as belong to *prakṛti* and as deserve to be discarded; [they deny] that He is associated with a body make up of *prakṛti* and [thus] worthy of rejection, and that He has any association with the condition of being subject to the influence of *karma*,[271] which has that [association with the body] at its root; and then they declare that He possesses auspicious qualities and has a beautiful form.[272]

Rāmānuja then goes on to argue that scripture establishes that it is this same Brahman, whom scripture denies possessing qualities that belong to *prakṛti*, or that He is associated with a body made up of *prakṛti*,[273] or that He is subject to *karman*, who "makes this same aforesaid natural form of His assume, in accordance with His own desire, the configurations of gods, men, etc., so that it may have that appearance which is suited to the understandings of those [worshippers]."[274] From this statement it may be said that Rāmānuja considers the *avatāra* to be an implosion[275] of the *paramavyoman* form into the phenomenal world. How so? In *Śrībhāṣya* 1.3.1, Rāmānuja declares:

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[268] See Young, "Beloved Places", and "The Issue of *Arcāvatara*", 95. Rāmānuja does not draw explicit reference to this verse as indicative of the *arcā* form. In addition, although it may be argued that 4:11 may refer solely to the *arcā* concept, there is sufficient lattitude in Rāmānuja's interpretation that the verse could be seen to apply equally to the notion of *avatāra* and that of *arcā*, or both, and R. was no doubt aware of this ambiguity.

[269] Passages cited are: (That which is) without attributes, without taint *(Adhikaraṇa Upaniṣad*, 68); (This Self) is devoid of sin, is free from old age, free from death, free from sorrow, free from hunger, free from thirst, and desires the truth and wills the truth *(Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 7.1.5; 7.7.1); He has neither body nor senses, and there is seen neither His equal nor His superior; His supreme power is revealed, indeed, as varied and natural and as consisting of knowledge, strength and action *(Śvetaśvatara Upaniṣad*, 6.8). Ibid., 306.

[270] We have seen above that these are the same kinds of passages that Śaṅkara, for example, would call upon to establish the *nirguṇa* nature of Brahman.

[271] "I know this great Person of sun-like lustre who is altogether beyond darkness" *(Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, 3,12,7), cited in *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 306.

[272] Ibid., 306–307. Passage cited in support of this last declaration include the previous citation and "All the *nimeṣas* were born out of the Person who has the lustre of lightning" *(Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, 1,8).

[273] Established, according to Rāmānuja, by the passage, "The omniscient Lord who creates all beings, gives them names, and, calling them [by those names], ever continues to be" *(Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, 3,12,7), cited *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 306.

> the highest *Puruṣa* is born at will, endowed with the form, configuration, qualities and characteristics belonging to the various species, without even abandoning his own nature, for being fit to be resorted to by the gods etc.[276]

In cross-checking this statement with the earlier statement in *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21: "(the Śruti) speaks of the auspicious qualities and the auspicious form. The highly merciful Lord by his will itself creates, verily, this same natural form, the configuration of gods, men, etc., having a form conforming to the various apprehensions, by way of favouring the worshippers ... ."[277] Among the scriptural verses garnered in support of this is *Gītā* 4:8: "For the protection of the good, and for the annihilation of the evil-doers," clearly a verse concerning the *avatāra* form. The text cited in the *Śrībhāṣya* also indicates that Rāmānuja considers the *Puruṣa* to be the auspicious form, that is, the *divya rūpa*. It is in this manner that we advance the view that Rāmānuja considers the *avatāra* form to be an implosion of the divine form into the phenomenal world. How can an implosion of one state occur upon another? It is my view that Brahman retains his aspect of the controlling entity in the *apṛthaksiddhi* relationship that governs relations between the three *tattvas* (eternal entities) at all times. However, with the manifestation of the world, this relationship is expressed in terms of Brahman's entry into the world as its *antaryāmin*. Correspondingly, the *divya rūpa* is subsistent eternally, and parallel to the *antaryāmin* aspect, finds expression in the manifested world as *avatāra*, or by extension *arcā* when the *avatāra* is not physically present.

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[274] Ibid., 307.

[275] This notion is explored by James J. Preston, who in speaking of the consecrated image *(arcā)* writes: "This interprenetration of divinity with the material world reflects a principle of "cosmic implosion" that is embedded in the nature of Hindu image making. The cosmos implodes in a particular space and time, becomes a focus of worship, and then withdraws." See James J. Preston, "Creation of the Sacred Image: Apotheosis and Destruction in Hinduism" in Joanne Punzo Waghorne and Norman Cutler in association with Vasudha Narayanan, eds., *Gods of Flesh/Gods of Stone: The Embodiment of Divinity in India* [Chambersburg, PA: Anima, 1985], 27. I assume he means that the divine, not the cosmos, implodes in a specific place and time, if by the latter the phenomenal world is meant. However, if by the cosmos is meant Brahman, who has the universe as his body, then this reading is closer to what I mean. The manner in which I use this term is that *divya rūpa*—which, it is assumed, is a form that, being eternal, subsists whether Brahman's body (the world) is in a subtle or a manifest state—implodes into the phenomenal world, which is, of course, a state in which Brahman is qualified by *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* in their evolved or gross state.

[276] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.3.1, in Karmarkar, 394.

[277] Ibid., 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 306.

Rāmānuja's discussion of who is meant by the person in the sun and the person in the eye is quite significant. *Prima facie*, he wants to establish that in neither case is the individual soul being meant. Logically, since the sun is a luminary orb considered to be a *deva* or god, the *pūrvapakṣin* (primary objector) concludes that the person within the sun must indicate a *jīva* of great merit, and nothing else. In addition, the person in the eye, that is, someone who is visible, and who has a body, must indicate the *jīva* or ordinary human soul bound in *karman*. This is not how Rāmānuja interprets the person in the sun and in the eye. As explicated above, due to the characteristics of this person mentioned in the scriptural verses, Rāmānuja understands that person to be "the *Paramātman* himself, over and above the *jīvas*, Āditya and others."[278] In his shorter commentary on the same *sūtra* verse in the *Vedāntasāra*, Rāmānuja reiterates the Vākyakārin's view[279] that this person denotes the wise and inner one *(sarva-antara)*, whom Rāmānuja connects to the *antaryāmin* in his commentary on the verse immediately following.[280] From the context of the *Chāndogya* verses cited, it is clear that this person in the sun has a form, that is, he is brilliant like gold and his two eyes are like the petals of a lotus opened by the sun. Accordingly, the

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[278] Ibid., 307.

[279] *Vedāntasāra* 1.1.21. Identified by Ayyangar, the translator, as Ṭaṅka (Brahmanandin), author of the *Vākya*, an explanatory treatise on the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. See 43, n. 1.

[280] *Vedāntasāra* 1.1.21–22, in Ayyangar, 42–46. Rāmānuja cites [the Mādhyandina recension of] the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.7.9: He who dwelling in the sun, is within the sun, whom the sun does not know, whose body is the sun, who internally rules the sun—He is thy Self *[ātma]*, internal ruler *[antaryāmī]* and immortal *[amṛta]*."

Vākyakārin relates that "His form is artificial and is assumed to bless His devotees because He displays His sovereign power",[281] thereby clearly identifying a form taken by the supreme being, in order to bless devotees. We must assume that Ṭaṇka, the Vākyakārin, means the *avatāra*, although we cannot rule out completely that the consecrated image may also have been included here, as a form assumed in order to bless devotees. Ṭaṇka says in his next sentence: "His form is indeed beyond the reach of the sense-organs; because it is mentioned to be perceived by *Antaḥkaraṇa* or inner sense]."[282] Clearly, there is a contradiction here, which Rāmānuja understands not as the self-evident contradiction that forms assumed in order to bless devotees must be perceptible to the eye. Rather, he focuses on the notion that the form is artificial, implying that it is within the realm of being an effect or that it is illusory. It is to counteract that implication, says Rāmānuja, that the Vākyakārin makes his statement that the form is beyond the reach of the sense-organs (which are within the realm of the effect). Through citing the authority of the Vākyakārin, Rāmānuja has introduced the notion of *antaryāmin* and *avatāra* (and *arcā)* while, at the same time, delimiting the person in the sun from the range of the physical eye.

Rāmānuja then introduces the authority of Dramiḍācārya:

> The form of the creator of the universe is not illusory; it is real and natural. It cannot be apprehended by the eye; but could be apprehended through the mind, which must be free from impurity, by one who has resorted to a different means of attaining him.[283]

It is assumed that Rāmānuja means the *divya rūpa* when he mentions the form of the creator of the universe. Rāmānuja does not elaborate here what the different means of attaining this might be. However, his conclusion regarding the matter of the person in the sun and the eye appears, from the authority of those he mentions, that this form is indeed

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[281] Ibid., 43.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Ibid.

Brahman, who is also *antaryāmin*, who has a form that cannot be perceived by the eye but by the mind, and who assumes form to bless his devotees. His own conclusion, in addition, is: "Brahman, who is other than the Pradhāna and the individual self ... has unlimited omniscience *[vipaścittva]*, whose natural characteristic is unsurpassed bliss, who possesses a divine form that is peculiar to Him, and not made of matter. He is the Highest Person and not made of matter."[284]

Indeed, in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, Rāmānuja mentions the person in the sun in order to immediately describe the *divya rūpa*.[285] Thus, it is clear that for Rāmānuja the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* verses referring to person in the sun and in the eye do not only denote Brahman, who is the highest person, cause of the world, free from subjection to *karman*, beyond *prakṛti*, entirely distinct from all other things, possessing a nature that is infinite knowledge and bliss, and which is hostile to all that is evil. Rāmānuja could simply have identified this person as the *antaryāmin*, as Ṭaṇka the Vākyakārin did before him. However, along with the earlier respected authority, he had to explain the reference to the form ("golden-hued" and so forth). Both Ṭaṇka and Dramiḍācārya identified this form as existing—since scripture declared as much—but commented that it was beyond the reach of the senses. Rāmānuja connects the form to the *divya rūpa* or a as is clear from his commentaries on the verse in the *Śrībhāṣya*, the *Vedāntasāra* and the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*. Again, he could have left the interpretation of the verses at that. However, perhaps taking his cue from Ṭaṇka, he extends the meaning of the scriptural verses to include the *avatāra*:

> In the very same manner, there is [to Him] a natural and divine form also, which is in accordance with His own desire and is suited to Himself, which is uniform, unthinkable, immaterial, wonderful, eternal and faultless, and which is the home of endless collections of unsurpassable qualities such as splendour, beauty, fragrance, tenderness, elegance, youthfulness and the like. With the object of favouring His worshippers, He [i.e., Nārāyaṇa] causes the same form of His to assume such a configuration as is suited to

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[284] Ibid., 44.
[285] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #134, in van Buitenen, 289–290.

> the understanding of each of those [worshippers]—Nārāyaṇa who is the ocean of boundless mercy, sweet disposition, affection and generosity, who is free from even the smallest taint of all that is evil, who is free from all sin, who is the Highest Self, the Highest Brahman and the Highest Person.[286]

There are three issues that Rāmānuja likely had to deal with. The first is that "the person in the sun" could be effectively understood as Brahman, *antaryāmin*, and *divya rūpa.* However, "the person in the eye" could not be dealt with as easily. The reference to the latter in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*[287] identifies it as being the same as the person in the sun, having the same form *(rūpa)* and name *(nāma).* Such a reference might have easily been explained as the *antaryāmin*—given that one may tell if a person has passed away by looking into their eyes— had there not been the connotation of name and form, and for this reason the inclusion of *divya rūpa* is essential.

However, in addition to that, there is another issue. Does the phrase "the person in the eye" refer to the soul within—in this case, the *antaryāmin*, for reason Rāmānuja has already outlined—or does it refer to someone who is reflected in (the pupil of) the eye? Perhaps what was meant by "the person in the eye" was self-evident to Rāmānuja and his audience. However, it does not escape notice that the *pūrvapakṣin* remarks, after having established that the *Chāndogya* verses must denote someone whose merit is so exceedingly high as to make that person the Lord of the worlds and of desires, that "surely as a consequence [must follow]—being the object of worship, being the bestower of fruit, and being useful for [securing] salvation by being the destroyer of sin."[288] It is, therefore, quite possible that by "the person in the eye" is meant someone who is the object of worship. If such is the case, then it may explain why Rāmānuja needs to make a connection between the "person in the sun" and worshippers, as he does when he says: "With the object of favouring His worshippers, He [i.e., Nārāyaṇa] causes the same form of His to assume such a configuration as is suited to the understanding of each of those [worshippers]".[289] Although this verse is generally understood as referring to the *avatāra*, it may also have referred to the *arcā*, an allusion that would have been meaningful, given Young's argument regarding the interpretation of *Gītā* 4:11.[290] However, it may be asked why the earlier authorities cited by Rāmānuja in the *Vedāntasāra* did not take this reading—that the person in the eye denotes the object of worship. In all likelihood, they did, for both mention that although the divine form is not visible to the eye, it is perceptible by the *antaḥkaraṇa* (Ṭaṇka) or the mind (Dramiḍācārya), indicating that the divine form may well have functioned as the point of focus in meditation.

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[286] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 305-306.

[287] "Now this is what relates to Him as He is in ourselves ... Again, that Person who is seen within the eye, He is that same *Ṛk* and that same *Sāman*, He is that *Uktha* [the recited, rather than sung, portion of the *Śāstras*], that *Yajus* and that Brahman. The form of this above-mentioned Person [in the eye] is the same as the form of that [other Person in the Sun]. The psalms in praise of that other [Person] are [the same as] the psalms in praise of this [Person]. The name of that [other Person] is the name of this [person] also." *Chāndogya Upaniṣad,* I.7.1–5, quoted in *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 302.

[288] Ibid.

Rāmānuja, however, has an additional issue to deal with. In keeping with his policy of giving scriptural statements credence wherever possible, he could not dismiss "the person in the eye" so readily. He may have done so, had he been able to confine the meaning of the scriptural verses to denote *antaryāmin*. However, references to the form of this "person" precluded such a reading, as witnessed by the earlier authorities Rāmānuja cites. Having once mentioned this form, and having, from other scriptural verses made the connection of this form with the *avatāra*, whose form is immediately visible to the physical eye, Rāmānuja was left with another problem: where was that form to be found? The *avatāra*, after all, only appears at certain times. Thus the issues facing Rāmānuja were twofold: one, that the "person in the eye" be someone visible in some form to the physical eye, and two, that the "person in the eye" not be confined to certain moments in human history. This explains his emphasis on the worshippers in his interpretation of *Gītā* 4:6–8 in the context of the discussion of the *Chāndogya* verses:

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[289] Ibid., 305–306.

[290] See Young, "Beloved Places".

> And the smṛti also [says the same thing][291] thus—"Although I am unborn, and inexhaustible in My own nature, and although I am the Lord of all beings—taking up My own *prakṛti*, I am then born again and again, by means of My own *māyā* ... for the protection of the good and for the destruction of evil-doers." Indeed, the good [here] are the worshippers. The principal object of accomplishment is nothing other than their protection. But the destruction of evil-doers is an object of secondary importance, because that is possible [to Him] even by merely willing it.[292]

This emphasis on the worshippers, that is, the good, to the extent of relegating the destruction of evil-doers to secondary importance is significant, given that the *Gītā* lays equal importance to the two reasons: protecting the good and destroying the evil-doers. In another context, Rāmānuja interprets *Gītā* 4:11 to mean: "I suit Myself in a manner that I am, to them [worshippers], not only a Visible Demonstration, but they may enjoy Me by every one of their sense-faculties, and in all diverse ways."[293] Rāmānuja's intention then, is clearly to link the "person in the eye" with the *avatāra* who is visible—in its creaturely form at least—to the physical eye, and to leave sufficient latitude in his interpretation that "any other method or form"[294] invoked by the worshipper[295] would become the locus of the Lord's manifestation. Young has argued that Rāmānuja has in fact laid the blueprint for how the consecrated image *(arcā)* is to be viewed. It is clear from this discussion that Rāmānuja establishes that "the person in the sun" is none other than Brahman, whose nature is made up of infinite knowledge and bliss; who has a divine form. This is the same as "the person in the eye": although the issues facing Rāmānuja are not made explicit in the body of the text, this analysis strongly suggests that "the person in the eye" is the object of worship. This object of worship is the *avatāra*, and by extension, in his "absence", that is, when he is not available in that particular form, then it is any other method or form designated by the worshipper. The latter, of course, is primarily the consecrated image, the *arcā*, which was not only gloriously visible but which, in all likelihood, formed the focus of worship in Rāmānuja's day and continues to be so in the present.

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[291] That is, "To bless His worshippers, the Divine Lord who is all-merciful makes this same aforesaid natural form of His assume, in accordance with His own desire, the configurations of gods, men, etc., so that it may have that appearance which is suited to te understandings of those [worshippers]." *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 307.

[292] Ibid.

[293] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:11, in Govindāchārya, 144.

[294] Rāmānuja's gloss on *Gītā* 4:11.

[295] That is, the worshipper invoking the Lord as refuge, and the Lord coming to his worshipper's aid as saviour.

We may pause here to suggest an underlying structure that Rāmānuja may have had in mind but may not have articulated explicitly. In light of the fact that the world, as a mode of Brahman, is therefore, contingent upon him, and Lipner's observation that the *avatāra* (or, more precisely, the *avatāric* form) "is contingent upon the production of the world"[296] among other things, it may be possible to posit the view that there is a parallel structure at work here. Brahman-in-himself, described in terms of his essential attributes, also has the supernal, divine form in which he is described as Viṣṇu–Nārāyaṇa in *paramavyoman.* When Brahman enters into a relationship with the world with an infinitesimal portion of himself, then he is understood in that context as the *antaryāmin*, the inner ruler, thus continuing the *apṛthaksiddhi* relationship between the three *tattvas.* Lipner's point of contingency is well taken only if it is understood that this contingency in no way implies dependency, for the truth, according to Rāmānuja, would be the other way around: the very salvation of the embodied beings in the world would depend on Brahman's agreeability to making himself available to his devotees in the form of an *avatāra* (or *arcā).* We may argue that the *antaryāmin* aspect of Brahman is equally "contingent"—much as Rāmānuja would dislike this term—upon the production of the world. That is, the very manifestation of the world depends on Brahman's agreeability to sustaining the world through entering it as its inner ruler. If, in the phenomenal world, the *antaryāmin* is understood as the correlative of Brahman-in-himself, then perhaps we may similarly understand the *avatāric* form to be the correlative of the supernal form in *paramavyoman.* That is, although both *antaryāmin* and *avatāra* are localisable upon the production of the world, they are both nonetheless fully divine, fully the self-same Brahman. In no way must this contingency be viewed as denoting poverty or impotence in the conception of the supreme being. Rather, the term contingency is used here in the sense that until the world was brought from an unmanifest state into a manifest state, or, until Brahman became "the cause" of the world—albeit with an infinitesimal portion of himself, through his will and out of sport—the very conception of *antaryāmin* and the correlative manifestation as *avatāra*—would have been meaningless as there would have been no embodied beings which needed sustenance or salvation through those particular modes of the divine being. The contingency of these two aspects of the supreme being does not rely in any way upon something that is more substantial than they upon which they depend, for in this respect the *antaryāmin* continues to be the possessor of all modes, while the *avatāra* continues to be the willed, form-imbued manifestation of the divine.

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[296] Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 96, where he argues that although the *avatāric* form is a "particular manifestation" of the divine supernal form, the latter is innate to Brahman's proper form *(svarūpa)*, whereas the *avatāric* form is contingent upon things such as the production of the world, the divine will, the age *(yuga)*, the understanding of the devotee, and so forth; ways in which the supernal form is not contingent.

These distinctions may also be viewed horizontally: in himself, Brahman manifests himself eternally in his supernal form, while in relation to the world, the *antaryāmin*—which is what Kṛṣṇa insists he is—manifests himself at his will in his *avatāric* form. The reasons for his manifestation stated in *Gītā* 4:8, which we have mentioned above, are to protect the virtuous, destroy the wicked, and re-establish *dharma.* Rāmānuja stresses in his commentary on this verse in his *Gītābhāṣya* that Kṛṣṇa assumes the *avatāric* form so as to give the virtuous—identified by Rāmānuja as the eminent Vaiṣṇavas—the privilege of seeing him, lest they pine away. In his commentary here, Rāmānuja stresses equally all three reasons given in the *Gītā* verse for the appearance of the *avatāra.* In the *Śrībhāṣya,* however, Rāmānuja comments on *Gītā* 4:8 that the good or virtuous are to be understood as the worshippers, and that the "principal object of accomplishment is nothing other than their protection. But the destruction of evil-doers is an object of secondary importance, because that is possible even by merely willing it."[297] In the *Gītābhāṣya*, however, Rāmānuja stresses the notion that manifestation in creaturely form depends on the Lord's will, in addition to the explicit thrust of *Gītā* 4:7: "Whensoever and wheresoever, Bhārata! virtue wanes and vice waxes, then [and there] do I create Myself."[298] In other words, instead of limiting his comments to the decline of *dharma*, Rāmānuja chooses instead to focus on the fact that whenever he does manifest himself, he does so out of his own will. Rāmānuja implies in the very next verse that the re-instatement of *dharma* is linked to the manifestation of the *avatāra* as an object of worship. That is, *dharma* will be re-instated when the virtuous are protected through having an object of worship, for otherwise they will pine away. We have already raised the issue that the virtuous will always feel the privation of an object of worship and, therefore, *dharma* is always in danger of decline: therefore, should the *avatāra* not be continually present? Given Rāmānuja's comment in the *Śrībhāṣya* that the *avatāra* stems from the divine supernal form, which is eternal, it would be logical to assert that the *avatāric* form is at least in existence as long as the world of names and forms subsists. The *Gītā* does provide for the recurrent birth of the *avatāra* in 4:8 where Kṛṣṇa says "I am born from *yuga* to *yuga*", understood by Rāmānuja to mean that the *avatāra's* births are not restricted to any one age or *yuga*. However, the *Gītā* text does not explicitly suggest that the *avatāra* is continually present in the world for worshippers. Rāmānuja senses the problem of the continual necessity of a visible form of worship for devotees and locates it not in the necessity of the Lord's presence in the *avatāric* form *per se*, but in the necessity of the function of the *avatāra*, viz., making accessible to devotees a form by which they may hold the divine to be the object of their worship. In his commentary on *Gītā* 4:11, he states:

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[297] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 307.

[298] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:7, in Govindāchārya, 140.

> Not only by the method of Incarnations, in the forms of *devas*, men etc., I am saviour to those who seek Me as their Refuge, but any other method or form, which it may be their pleasing option to select. Whatever that is, to that I adapt Myself. By whatever conception they choose to seek Me, I manifest Myself to them in that mode.[299]

Rāmānuja then adds that the term *bhajāmi* in the text of the *Gītā* verse, translated as "I serve" means here *darṣayāmi*, "I appear to them". As previously mentioned, while this verse has been taken by later Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition to legitimize worship of the deity in the *arcā* or consecrated image form located in temples, shrines or homes, Rāmānuja's comments serve to highlight his preoccupation with the necessity of continual access to the divine for devotees. In this respect, Young's study highlights the pivotal role Rāmānuja has in all likelihood played in the development of the later tradition.[300]

It is clear that in order to render himself visible—and thereby accessible—to his devotees, the divine supreme being must take on form. Therefore, we may assume that whether the divine takes on the *avatāric* form or any other form that the devotees select, it must be through establishment in his own divine nature *(prakṛti)* and by virtue of his *māyā* (to be discussed under). In his commentary on *Gītā* 4:6 in the *Gītābhāṣya*, Rāmānuja does not go into details regarding this *prakṛti*. He says simply that it is substance, literally, or the material part of the divine nature, or nature itself.[301] In the *Śrībhāṣya*, in his commentary on the same *Gītā* verse in the context of the discussion of "the person in the sun", he clarifies: "'My own *prakṛti*' means His own peculiar nature"[302] and adds that this means that he takes his own peculiar nature but not the nature of those who are in *saṃsāra*,[303] that is, not the *guṇa*-bound *prakṛti*. Rāmānuja's intent here is to clearly distinguish the *avatāra* from association with anything that would be the result of *karman*, and an ordinarily

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[299] Ibid., 4:11, in Govindāchārya, 143–144.
[300] Young, "Beloved Places".
[301] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:6, in Govindāchārya, 138.
[302] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 307.
[303] Ibid.

prakṛtic body would imply involvement in *karman.*[304] He therefore, calls upon the *Mahābhārata* to emphasize further that "even the incarnated form is not made of *prakṛti*".[305] He has already stated earlier what this *avatāric* body may be: "But that is in accordance with His own desire, and is suited to His own nature, and is altogether non-material."[306]

With respect to *māyā,* in both the *Śrībhāṣya* and the *Gītābhāṣya,* Rāmānuja understands it to mean will, knowledge, consciousness, intelligence or understanding,[307] and in the *Śrībhāṣya* he clarifies that it means both will ("by means of that mental power which is of the nature of His own will"[308]) and knowledge *(jñāna).*[309] The following description given by Rāmānuja in the *Śrībhāṣya* details the implosion of the divine supernal form in paramavyoman into the phenomenal world: [the divine form is] "uniform, unthinkable, immaterial, wonderful, eternal and faultless, and ... is the home of endless collections of unsurpassable qualities", which, at divine will *[sva-ichchaya],* assumes "such a configuration *[saṃsthāna]* as is suited to the understanding of each of those [worshippers]" in order to favour them.[310] We are left with pondering how an eternal supernal form can enter into time and withdraw from it. It is to questions such as these that Rāmānuja offers his interpretation of both *prakṛti* and *māyā.* Thus, Rāmānuja cites authorities who have used the term *māyā* to indicate divine knowledge: by his knowledge, the divine knows the virtues and vices of his creatures,[311] and adds that 'by his knowledge' means 'by his will' *(saṃkalpa).*[312]

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[304] Since association with a prakṛtic body is unavoidable for those who are subject to the influence of *karma.* Ibid., 305.

[305] Ibid. The text in question says: "The body of this Highest Self is not a configuration of the collection of material elements." This dovetails with Rāmānuja's definition of body given earlier (ibid., 305): "The body is known to be that aggregate of the elements which are modifications of the *prakṛti* made up of the three qualities", a definition that relates more to what may be commonly agreed upon rather than being inclusive of all that Rāmānuja may have meant by the term body. See Lipner, *The Face of Truth,* discussion on 121–123 where Lipner shows that Rāmānuja moves beyond the definition of body as locus of the senses and composed of *prakṛti* to the definition of the body as 'any substance of a conscious being which can be entirely controlled and supported by that being for the latter's own purposes, and whose proper form is solely to be the accessory of that being' (122). See also Hunt Overzee, *The Body Divine,* Chapter 4, "The body of Brahman in the writings of Rāmānuja".

[306] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 305.

[307] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:6, in Govindāchārya, 139, and *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 307.

[308] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.21, in Karmarkar, 307.

[309] Ibid., for which he cites the definition, *māyā vayunam jñānam.*

[310] Ibid., 305–306.

In sum, then, if the purpose of divine incarnation is to favour worshippers, and if the *Gītā* indicates that this favour occurs both in the form of *avatāric* incarnation and in whatever other form the devotee deems suitable, then it would follow that Rāmānuja must have concluded that potential for manifestation of the divine in the phenomenal world, in visible form, must continue for as long as the world is in the mode of manifestation from its unmanifest state. It is perhaps for this reason that Rāmānuja interprets *Gītā* 4:11 to mean that it is not only through the *avatāra* that the divine reveals himself to humans, but through "any other method or form, which it may be their pleasing option to select."[313]

At the same time, however, attention must be drawn to the reason Rāmānuja identifies in his introduction to the *Gītā* for which the supreme being descends into the world: to render himself, who had become incognizant, accessible to his worshippers. It is clear that Rāmānuja has to grapple with the issue of whether the supreme being—whatever his form—can be seen with the physical eye or not, and his theological instincts lead him to assert that there is always an object of worship that is perceptible to the physical eye. However, Rāmānuja was also faithful to his texts, and *Gītā* 11:8 clearly declares that "By this thy eye alone, thou wilt not indeed be able to see Me: I grant thee the Divine eye: See My Sovereign *Yoga.*" Rāmānuja's gloss on this verse clearly concurs: "But with your physical eye, fitted only to see limited and conditioned objects, you will not be able to realize that sight, unique, beyond example, and beyond measure. Hence let Me confer on you that spiritual *[divya]* eye, capable of seeing Me."[314] In other words, although the object of worship—whether *avatāra* or *arcā*—is fully divine, and although it is visible to the devotee at the level of the physical eye, this does not mean that it is thereby seen to the extent that it is possible to see it. Ṭaṇka and Dramiḍācārya recognized this, and so does Rāmānuja, that there is much more to be seen than the physical eye is capable of, even if the vision of the physical eye is a necessary conduit of knowledge to awakening the internal eye (the *antaḥkaraṇa* of Ṭaṇka or the "pure mind *[manasā tu viśuddhena]*" referred to by Dramiḍācārya). In other words, had we, too, a divine eye, we might have been able to see the *avatāra* for what it really is: glorious, all-pervading, eternal, infinite and omnipotent[315] supreme being, supreme person, Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa, Brahman. Before we address how Rāmānuja approaches this question, we must first examine his conception of the human soul, to which we now turn.

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[311] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:6, in Govindāchārya, 139.

[312] This differs from his commentary on *Gītā* 7:13: "Verily is this, My divine *guṇa*-imbued *māyā*, hard to surmount." Here he notes that *māyā* as meaning "that which is capable of producing marvellous protean effects" is universally accepted. However, here *māyā* is equated with *prakṛti*, and is permeated with the characteristics of the three *guṇas, sattva, rajas* and *tamas.* The difference between the *māyā* caused by *prakṛti* and the divine *māyā* causing the appearance of the *avatāra*, is that the former is *guṇa*-permeated, while the latter cannot be, since to be so would defeat the purpose of retaining the *avatāra's* purity from *guṇa*-bound existence. *Prakṛtic māyā* veils the deity from creatures, both by luring creatures to seek pleasures in itself (ibid., 241), and to make the mistaken assumption that the human form of the *avatāra* denotes that he too is like them (ibid., 251), *guṇa*-bound and subject to *karman.*

[313] *Gītābhāṣya,* 4:11, in Govindāchārya, 144. Young argues that the Lord, out of his grace, withdraws his own will in order to allow devotees to will the particular form or method they choose to make an object of their worship. See Young, "The Issue of *Arcāvatara*", 96, 98, 102. Also see Young, "Beloved Places".

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[314] *Gītābhāṣya* 11:8, in Govindāchārya, 351.

[315] As some of an infinite number of auspicious attributes, opposed to all evil.

CHAPTER2

Ātman: The Journey Through Bondage

Introduction

Although the soul *(ātman)* in its essential nature *(svarūpa)* can be distinguished as having three phases, there are certain features pertaining to it that remain constant throughout. The first phase may be identified as that in which the soul is still in a subtle *(sūkṣma)* state, that is, when the phenomenal world of name and form *(nāmarūpa)* has not yet been brought into being. In the second phase the soul is embodied by matter, that is, it is in its gross *(sthūla)* state, at which time it is most commonly referred to as the individual soul *(jīvātman)*. The third phase, that of *jīvanmukti*, occurs when the soul is liberated from the bonds of *saṃsāra*—the wheel of birth, death and rebirth—and is no longer subject to *karman* or the accumulation of meritorious and evil acts; the soul is now *mukta-jīva*, a released soul. The consequences of *karman* are played out in succeeding lives until (1) either the soul attains liberation *(mokṣa)*, at which point the *karmic* legacy has been effaced, or (2) the universe enters into dissolution at the end of the age *(kalpa)* and the soul takes its *karmic* legacy with it into its dissolved, subtle state. In this chapter some of the salient features of the soul will be identified and attention drawn to those features that are distinctive to each of the phases, bearing in mind that the soul retains some of its essential features through all its phases.

1. The Soul in Its Subtle State, or Prior to Creation

In the previous chapter, it was shown that Rāmānuja considers creation the willed act of Brahman to be manifest, to be many. This does not consist in the origination of new, previously non-existent entities. Rather, it consists in effecting changes in the two eternal entities that are dissolved in Brahman in their subtle state, changes that ultimately lead to the "creation" of the world of name and form, or the phenomenal world as we know it. This world constitutes an infinitesimal portion of Brahman. Brahman is considered the creator since, as the controlling entity, he alone can will the changes required of the other two eternal entities in order that the world may come into being. In this respect, he is the cause, and as cause, he is one. Unitariness in this respect means that the remaining two eternal entities, *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, are dissolved in him, but not annihilated.[1] Indeed, in his causal state they are extremely subtle, so much so that they "become one in the *Paramātman* [that is, Brahman], owing to their not being fit for a separate mention"[2]—Brahman is thus one alone, without a second.

Among the key features of the *ātman* (soul) are that it is eternal *(nitya)*; it is a knower *(jñātṛ/jñot)*; it is atomic *(aṇu)*; it is an agent *(kārtṛ/kartā)*; it is an enjoyer *(bhoktṛ)*, and it is a portion *(aṃśa)* of Brahman. It may be questioned, however, whether these features are significant when the soul is in its subtle state, that is, when it is not fit for a separate mention and is conceived of as being one with Brahman. Rāmānuja does not address this issue directly. In addition, qualities such as its being an agent *(kartṛ/kartā)* or an experiencer *(bhoktṛ)* of pleasure and pain are dependent on having things to control or experience, respectively, and as such, may only be exercised when the world of name and form has come into being. Rāmānuja's discussion on the features of the soul occurs within the context of the *jīvātman*, that is, when the soul is embodied by matter in the phenomenal world, although since the soul is understood to be eternal, it would be reasonable to expect that its key features remain with the soul throughout its existence.

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[1] Śrībhāṣya, 1.4.23: na tu layaḥ.
[2] Ibid., 1.4.27, in Karmarkar, 549.

Bearing in mind that since the soul is so subtle as to be not distinguishable from Brahman in the latter's causal state, it is perhaps not an issue whether the soul's features are present in its subtle state. For example, the soul can not exercise its ability to experience pleasure and pain if the boundaries between itself and Brahman are so fluid that it is not worthy of mention and Brahman is considered in his causal state to be one, since the presence of an experiencer would make it necessary for there to be two: the experiencer and that which is experienced. In this regard, Lipner has drawn attention to Rāmānuja's statement that:

> [Knowledge's] proper form, contracted [in the first place] by [past] *karma* into the condition of the embodied self, exists [as further determined] in accordance with the variety of individual *karma*. It is conditioned once again by means of the senses [in everyday cognition]. And the feature of the rise and termination [of cognition] is a function of this flow of knowledge by means of the senses. Now, being a *kartṛ* has to do with the flow of knowledge, and this is not essential [to the *ātman*]. In other words, the *ātman* remains essentially unchanging in that [being a *kartṛ* is an extrinsic change] brought about by *karma*.[3]

A clue regarding the features of the soul in its subtle state may be found in Rāmānuja's discussion of the soul's ability to know in a state of deep sleep. At that time, says Rāmānuja, even though no object of knowledge may arise in the consciousness, "there is the possibility of its manifestation in the waking state ... just as the virile ingredient".[4] It can, therefore, be extrapolated that just as the soul's ability to know is a potential power while a person is in a state of deep sleep and is manifested when the person is awake, so, too, the features of the soul are contained within it potentially while the soul is in a subtle state to be manifested when the soul enters into its embodied or gross state.

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[3] See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 70, citing *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1; see 163, n. 18.

[4] *Śrībhāṣya* 2.3.31 in Karmarkar, 733. That is, the virile ingredient in a man is something contained potentially in him when he is a child and can be made manifest when he is an adult.

Rāmānuja defines the proper form of the soul thus:

> The proper form of the soul is free from all various differentiations consisting in the distinctions that are brought about by the natural evolution *[pariṇāma]* of *prakṛti* into the bodies of gods, men, etc. In essence it is only characterized by knowledge and beatitude. When these differentiations of god, man, etc.,—which have been brought about by the *karman* of the soul—have vanished there persists a differentiation in its proper form *[svarūpabheda]*; it is beyond the power of expression and can only be known by the soul itself. So the soul can only be defined as essentially knowledge; and this essential nature is common to all souls.[5]

This definition would appear to indicate that the quality that abides through all phases of the soul is that of knowledge, accompanied by a beatitude that is only known to itself.

The key factor that will have an impact on the soul when it changes from its subtle to its gross state is that of beginningless *(anādi) karman* in the form of ignorance *(avidyā)*.[6] Although this notion will be explored further below, it is to be noted that Rāmānuja states that "Even in the state of not being divided, the sentient and the non-sentient entity extremely subtle, stands with the impressions of the *Karman*".[7]

2. The Soul in Its Embodied State: *Jīvātman*

Earlier, we have already seen how the world of name and form comes into being. Rāmānuja comments on Chāndogya Upaniṣad verse: *"tad aikṣata bahu syāṃ prajāyeyeti"*[8] as follows:

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[5] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #5, in van Buitenen, 186.

[6] Ibid. #87, in van Buitenen, 245.

[7] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.4.27, in Karmarkar, 548.

[8] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.2.3: "It reflected—Let me be many, may I procreate."

> That Supreme Brahman, denoted by the word *tad,* who is omniscient and omnipotent and has his every will realized and all his desires materialized, decided nonetheless, for the sake of his own sport: "I be many in the form of a world composed of an infinite variety of spiritual and non-spiritual beings; to that purpose I will multiply."[9]

That is, the process of creation ensues upon the will of the Supreme to "be many", and this decision is undertaken "for the sake of his own sport." van Buitenen adds the note that the final stage of creation is reached only after Brahman has entered with the ensouled soul into *prakṛti.*[10] All non-spiritual matter at this stage is capable of being denoted by name, an object of classification *(padārtha),* and the assumption of name-and-form thus completes the process of coming into being.[11]

The *mahāvākya "tat tvam asi"* (that thou art) yields at first impression the meaning that "thou", the individual, is "that", Brahman. Rāmānuja agrees with this prima facie view; however, he qualifies it to clarify that by *"tat"* is meant "Brahman as the One who is the cause of the world, the abode of all perfections, the immaculate and untransmutable One".[12] The term "tvam" indicates "that same Brahman under the aspect of inner Ruler of the individual soul as being modified by the embodied soul."[13] Accordingly, "the words *tat* and *tvam* both apply to the same Brahman but under different aspects."[14] In either case, all sentient *(cit,* that is, *puruṣa)* and non-sentient *(acit,* that is, *prakṛti)* entities form the body of Brahman and are in an *apṛthaksiddhi* relationship to it. That is, they can not be found apart from Brahman. The distinction to be made between the first phase of the soul and the second phase of the soul is that in the first, the distinction of name and form does not apply, while in the second, it does. "When [Brahman] has name and form distinguished, then that same is spoken of as being many and as being the effect; and when it has name and form not distinguished, then [it is spoken of] as one without a second and the cause."[15]

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[9] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #17-a, in van Buitenen, , 193.
[10] Ibid., n. 92, 193.
[11] Ibid., 194.
[12] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* # 20, in van Buitenen, 196.
[13] Ibid.
[14] That is, it is a *sāmānādhikaraṇya* construction, or "the bearing on one sense of more words with different reasons for their application." Ibid.; see also 187, n. 55.

Rāmānuja considers the world of phenomenal reality and all the sentient and non-sentient beings in it to be the effect of Brahman and hence real. It could be argued in that case that the substratum of evolution or change and ignorance—also translated as nescience—is also Brahman. The Advaitavādin sought to establish, therefore, that the world was ultimately unreal, as Brahman could not be the cause of nescience. Similarly, the *asatkāryavāda* theory—that the effect is not contained in its cause but originates in a new entity[16] —was also developed in response to this problem.

Rāmānuja, however, holds to the *satkāryavāda* theory by pointing out that although the universe and all that it contains is real, the substrate of evolution/change and of nescience is not Brahman but is to be located in *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, respectively. In other words, for him the universe is not the effect of Brahman in the sense that Brahman's essence undergoes modification in order to constitute the universe, but rather, that the universe is the result of modifications made by the controlling eternal *tattva*, Brahman, in the remaining, essentially contingent, two eternal *tattvas*, *cit* and *acit*. (Although the two

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[15] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.4.23, in Karmarkar, 541.
[16] van Buitenen, n. 167, 208.

tattvas are eternal, they are in a continual state of dependence upon Brahman, and as such, they are eternal only because he is so, and not because they are self-subsistent in their own right.) The relationship between *cit* and *acit* in their subtle as well as gross states and Brahman is like bodies to a soul; that is, they are in invariable accompaniment with Brahman but they are also continually controlled by him for his own purposes. It is in the narrow gap of difference between the three eternal *tattvas*—Brahman, *cit* and *acit*—that room is made for the assertion that Brahman is neither the substrate of change (*pariṇāma*, also translated as evolution) nor of the ignorance or nescience *(avidyā)* that is ultimately responsible for the bondage of souls. By arguing thus, Rāmānuja maintains that Brahman, or *sat*, is the cause of the universe or world of name and form, and that the substrate of change/evolution *(pariṇāma)* is *prakṛti*. Ignorance, which has no substrate, is that condition whereby the knowledge that is a *dharma* (attribute or property) proper to the soul is caused to contract by *karman* .[17] That is, Brahman remains free from the blemishes associated with creation.

In his commentary on *Gītā* 4:13[18] Rāmānuja acknowledges that the whole universe, from Brahmā to a blade of grass, is divided by the Supreme "into the fourfold classification, in conformity with the dispositions, or qualities, viz. *sattva* etc., and in conformity with the occupations suited to the qualities that the several classes possess."[19] With regard to the source of differentiation in beings, in his commentary on *Gītā* 14:2, Rāmānuja states quite directly that it is necessary to state that all beings, no matter how small, are fashioned by the Lord himself only in order to point out how "matter's qualities come to be the cause of bondage."[20] He goes on, in his commentary to the next verse, to interpret the term *brahma* in the verse[21] to mean inert or inanimate matter-stuff. It is into this "womb", *brahma* or matter-stuff, that the Supreme casts "the seed of the aggregate of the animate principle *(jīva)*."[22] Thus, according to Rāmānuja's reading, are all beings from gods to tufts of grass produced, from the conjunction of matter and animate principle.

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[17] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* # 43, van Buitenen, 215.

[18] "The fourfold *varṇa* (class or caste) was created by Me according to dispositions *(guṇa)*, and occupations *(karma)*. Though I am its Creator, know Me to be the Imperishable Non-Creator." *Gītā* 4:13, in Govindāchārya, 145.

[19] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:13 in Govindācharya, 145–146.

Gītā 14:3 states simply that of every form and every womb, the Supreme is the seed-giver, and the great womb of all is matter *(brahma)*.[23] Rāmānuja, however, adds in his commentary that the Supreme causes the conjunction of matter and spirit, "determined by each one's [soul's] *karma*."[24] His concern is clearly with how generation is perpetuated in differentiated forms, although the *Gītā* itself does not at this point introduce the notion of *karman* as a differentiating factor. In fact, the next verse points out that *"Sattvam, Rajas, Tamas*, are qualities matter-born, which, O Great-armed! bind the imperishable ego in the body." [25] Although elsewhere[26] the soul's *karman* is the source of determining difference in all birth, here the text suggests that the initial impulse for binding the soul may be attributed to matter alone, and Rāmānuja, in his commentary on the verse, does not mention the role of *karman*. He simply states that these three qualities stand in the relation of attributes to matter, and are found in a latent state in it when it is in an unevolved state, but become manifest once evolved (that is, placed in conjunction with the animating "seed").[27] He continues: "And they impound in a body, the essentially free soul, but forced withal to dwell in bodies such as those of *deva*, man, etc.—forms manufactured from out of the Mahat and other evolutes of matter-stuff."[28] In subsequent verses, Rāmānuja develops the notion that each of the three qualities of *sattvam*, *rajas* and *tamas* produce in the embodied creature a predisposition toward happiness and knowledge

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[20] *Gītābhāṣya* 14:2, in Govindācharya, 444.

[21] "The vast *brahma* is My womb, into which I sow the germ. Thence comes, Bhārata! the birth of all beings." Ibid., 445. Other commentators have understood *brahma* to denote either the Supreme, or the Vedas. Rāmānuja substantiates his interpretation through recourse to other scriptural passages.

[22] *Gītābhāṣya* 14:3, in Govindāchārya, 445.

[23] Rāmānuja glosses *brahma* thus: "The inert or inanimate matter-stuff alluded to in: 'Earth, water, fire, air and space, *manas, buddhi* and *ahaṃkāra*, thus constitute My eightfold differentiated matter.' 'But this is inferior' is what is designated here by the term *brahma*, (the vast or great, or infinitely extended) by reason of its being the primal cause of all the differentiations which emanate therefrom in the forms of *Mahat (=buddhi), Ahaṃkāra* etc." See *Gītābhāṣya* 14:3, in Govindāchārya, 445.

[24] *Gītābhāṣya* 14:4, in Govindāchārya, 446.

[25] *Gītā* 14:5, in Govindāchārya, trans. 446.

[26] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* # 4, in van Buitenen, 185, : "the individual soul [has the misconception] that it is identical itself with that one of the four types of bodies ... into which it has entered by the impulsion of the continuous flow of good or evil *karman* amassed during ageless ignorance."

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[27] It may be worthwhile to note here Hiriyanna's comment that Rāmānuja accepts only two categories, substance *(dravya)* and attribute or non-substance *(adravya)*, and that *karman* is subsumed under *adravya*. That is, *karman* is an attribute and not a constituent, just as are the three *guṇas*, the five sensory qualities, and causal potency *(śakti)*. *Karman* is explained in terms of conjunction *(saṃyoga)* and disjunction *(vibhāga)*. See Hiriyanna, *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy*, 179, 182. We might argue, therefore, that *karman*, which is an attribute of *prakṛti* according to Hiriyanna's reading of Rāmānuja, becomes manifest once matter comes into conjunction with *ātman*, and henceforth, *karmic* residue becomes a feature of the *jīvātman* until that point when the *jīvātman* attains release or *mokṣa* from the cycle of rebirth *(saṃsāra)*. The beginningless *(anādi)* nature of ignorance that is *karman* could then be explained by virtue of the fact that *prakṛti* is beginningless, or, as pointed out to me by Arvind Sharma, by virtue of the fact that the *jīvātman*—*ātman* in an embodied state—is also considered to be beginningless since creation has no beginning. However, the source of initial differentiation must be the initial conjunction of *ātman* with matter that would result in origination of the now *jīvātman's* attributive consciousness, that is, *dharmabhūtajñāna*. Through it ignorance could be allowed to take root—since the soul uses the body to act according to its consciousness—and hence to incur a *karmic* legacy. While we must accept that these are logical distinctions that we make in order to understand the challenge facing the *jīvātman* with respect to its teleological purpose, we must bear in mind that, as Hiriyanna points out, the question of "when the responsibility for what one does was first incurred ... is really inadmissible, for it takes for granted that there was a time when the self was without any disposition whatsoever. Such a view of the self is an abstraction as meaningless as that of mere disposition which characterizes no one. The self, as ordinarily known to us, always means a self with a certain stock of dispositions; and this fact is indicated in Indian expositions by describing *karman* as beginningless *(anādi)*." (47–48) It is true that I am exploring the possibility that there was a state—if not a time—when the *ātman* was without dispositions, although not a state when *prakṛti* was without potential dispositions. Of course, when we shift the forum of discussion from the *ātman* to the *jīvātman*, then true enough, we cannot talk about a self, that is *jīvātman*, without dispositions. I base my assumption on Rāmānuja's reading of *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 6.7.22 in *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, # 79, 238–9, in which he points out that "the properties of unhappiness, ignorance and impurity are proper to the *prakṛti*, not to the *ātman*" (fn. 350, on 238) "inasmuch as they derive from *karman* resulting from the natural conjunction of soul with matter ... these properties belong to matter exclusively." (238).

[28] *Gītābhāṣya* 14:5, in Govindāchārya, 446.

(sattvam), desires prompting one to active work *(rajas)*, and ignorance, that is, the completely reversed perception of what a thing actually is *(tamas)*.[29] By provoking in the embodied being desires according to the *guṇa* that is predominant, beings enter and are confined within the wheel of *saṃsāra*. The only reconciliation possible between these two differing accounts of the cause of differentiation between embodied souls is to note that although karman is responsible for the type of body that the soul enters, the *guṇas* of matter "feed" (or efface) this *karmic* legacy by predisposing the soul to act in a certain manner while it is in that particular body. That is, if the soul's *karmic* legacy is the source of differentiation, then matter's qualities are the source of bondage, inasmuch as they lead the soul to act in a manner that will bind it to the continual cycle of *saṃsāra*.

The Soul Is a Part

An essential characteristic of the soul is that it is a part of Brahman. However, this statement is not to be understood as meaning that Brahman is divisible, for he is not. Rather, it is to be understood in the sense of *deśa*, that is, the soul is an aspect of Brahman. At the root of this notion lies the view that the soul is to Brahman as body is to the soul, that is, it exists for the latter's purpose. The analogies provided by Rāmānuja are that the soul is like the lustre of gems, or the generic character of cows, or the body of an embodied being. That is, all three—lustre, generic character, and body—cannot be found apart from the substratum upon which their existence is contingent, yet they all are distinct from this substratum in their essential nature and characteristics.[30] Thus, the soul is non-different from Brahman in that it cannot be found apart from it, and yet it is different from Brahman in that its pleasures and pain and limitations do not affect Brahman.[31]

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[29] *Gītābhāṣya* 14:6–8, in Govindāchārya, 447–448.
[30] *Śrībhāṣya* 2.3.42.

The Soul Is Eternal

The soul is eternal (nitya), not produced. This raises the question of how something eternal can also be an effect. As an effect, the individual soul *(jīvātman)*, according to Rāmānuja, is considered to be that which modifies Brahman. With respect to the world of name and form, Brahman appears as the *antaryāmin* or inner ruler of the phenomenal world, and the world stands in an accessory–principal relationship to it. That is, the individual soul is the *śeṣa* (accessory) with respect to the *antaryāmin*, which is the *śeṣin* (principal). The relationship between the world and the *antaryāmin* has also been described as one of *śarīra-śarīrin* (body–possessor of body). The body is defined by Rāmānuja as "that substance *[dravya]* that a spiritual entity can use and support entirely for his own purposes and that in its essence is exclusively subordinate *[śeṣa-]* to that entity, is the body of that soul".[32] The relationships that obtain between Brahman and the material and spiritual entities *(prakṛti/acit* and *puruṣa/cit*, respectively) do not change when creation occurs, that is, when Brahman, as cause, becomes Brahman, the effect. Put another way, when the entities are moved from their subtle to their gross state, the relationships between themselves and Brahman do not change. Rāmānuja offers the explanation that "by effect is meant that the substance has attained a new condition."[33] In the case of the individual soul, its being an effect is understood thus:

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[31] Ibid., 2.3.45.

[32] van Buitenen, 17, n. 46, and 185, n. 21; see also *Śrībhāṣy* a 2.1.9: *yasya cetanasya yad dravyaṃ sarvātmanā svārthe niyantuṃ dhārayituṃ ca śakyaṃ taccheṣataikasvarūpaṃ ca tat tasya śarīram iti śarīra-lakṣaṇam āstheyam*, translated as "that substance [is] the body of a conscious being which can be controlled and supported [by that conscious being] for its own purpose in all circumstances, and which has the essential form of being its accessory." See Hunt Overzee, *The Body Divine*, 63.

> Changing over to another state in the case of the *Jīva* is characterized by contraction and expansion of knowledge. In the case of sky etc. [*prakṛti*-based] however, it is characterized by the transformation of one's [very] nature. And that such origination characterized by the change over of one's nature is repudiated in the case of the *Jīva*.[34]

Thus, the taking of a new condition—becoming an effect—does not have an impact on being eternal, if the term eternal *(nitya)* is understood as something that is not originated anew and which is capable of taking on varying conditions. It is not understood in the sense of being created anew each time that its condition changes. Rāmānuja specifies that the *ātman's* change in state is not the same as that of *prakṛti.* Although both entities undergo change from a subtle to a gross state, there is a difference in that *prakṛti* undergoes a change in its very nature *(svarūpa).*[35]

> There, when [Brahman] in the causal state attains to the state of effect, the non-sentient portion which is bereft of [distinctions due to] words etc., in the causal state, becomes possessed of [the distinctive features] words etc., for being fit for enjoyment, and thus there is the modification of the nature of change over of one's own form.[36]

Ātman, on the other hand, undergoes the changeover of state from the subtle to the gross not in its own form but in the contraction and expansion of knowledge.[37] "And in the case of the sentient portion for being the enjoyer of the particular fruits of *Karman*, there is the transformation in the form of the expansion of cognition befitting that."[38] Therefore, the intention of scriptural passages that speak of the origin and destruction of the *jīva* is really to denote the connection and separation of the *jīva* to various bodies, and the contraction or expansion of knowledge that occurs as a consequence. Scriptural passages that identify the *jīva* as that which is not born nor dies, or that which is eternal among the eternals, affirm that the *ātman* is not originated and is eternal in that there is absence of change in its essential nature, unlike *prakṛti*.[39]

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[33] *Śrībhāṣya*, 2.3.18, in *Brahma-Sūtras Śrī-Bhāṣya: With Text and English Rendering of the Sūtras, Comments and Index*, Part I by Swami Vireswarananda and Part II by Swami Adidevananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978), 282.
[34] *Śrībhāṣya* 2,3,18 in Karmarkar, 720.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 721.
[37] Ibid., 720.

The Soul Is Atomic

Another key characteristic of the soul is that it is atomic *(āṇava,* from *aṇu,* atom*)* in size. This view is premised on scriptural texts such as *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.2* and *6*[40] that mention the soul's entering in and out of the body, of its going to heaven, and other movement such as this. For Rāmānuja, this is possible only if the soul is atomic, for if it was all-pervading then the references to its coming and going would not fit in."[41] Further, if separating from the body were all that were meant when speaking of the soul's movement, then it would still be possible for the soul to be infinite. However, if one were to include the activity of going and coming, then this would be possible only if the soul were atomic in size,[42] and by implication, not infinite or all-pervading. However, if the objection is raised that if the soul is not infinite or all-pervading, then how can it possibly experience pain and pleasure throughout the body? This objection can be levelled by virtue of the soul's consciousness, that is able, by drawing an analogy with a light, to pervade the whole body just as a light placed in the corner of a room brings the whole room into view. Thus, the soul is able to experience pain and pleasure throughout the body.[43] Accordingly, it is clear that it is not a characteristic of the soul to be all - pervading in its embodied state, for were it to be so, it would not have expansion and contraction in its knowledge. Rather, Rāmānuja interprets the texts referring to the all-pervasiveness or infinitude of the soul, for example, "That infinite, birthless self"[44] to denote the supreme Self or Brahman, and not to the individual self or *jīvātman.*

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[38] Ibid., 721.

[39] Ibid., 722. The distinction to be made here is that *prakṛti* is subject to evolution *(parināma)* and is the substrate of change. The term for origination is *utpatta*; all the elements, which are insentient, are originated, beginning with *tejas*. Thus, although *prakṛti*—primordial nature—is also considered to be beginningless *(anādi)* and eternal *(nitya)*, that is, everlasting, it sustains change or evolution in its essential form *(svarūpa)*, whereas the *ātman* does not change in its essential form—which is to be knowing or cognizant—but in its distinguishing characteristic, knowledge.

[40] *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.2: "By that lighted up, this *Ātman* departs, from the eye, or from the head, or from the other regions of the body." *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.6: "From that world he comes back to this world due to his *Karman*." Trans. in Karmarkar, 727.

[41] *Śrībhāṣya*, 2.3.20, in Karmarkar, 727.

At the same time, souls are different from each other depending on their connection with the body. Just as fire is the same, so all souls are the same with respect to their having intelligence for their essential nature, at the same time, the fire from a household hearth is acceptable for sacrifice, while that from a funeral pyre is not. Similarly, some souls are permitted to study the Vedas, while others are not.[45] In addition, since the souls, being atomic, are different in different bodies, so too the results of the actions committed in those bodies are pertinent only to the soul attached to that body, and not to all souls.[46] In other words, the limiting adjuncts *(upādhis)* caused by beginningless and unseen principles *(adṛṣtas)*, such as *karma*, do not affect Brahman, but only the souls, and the effect of these adṛṣtas can be seen in the *karmic* consequences that determine the kind of body the soul will enter into.[47]

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[42] Ibid., 285.
[43] Ibid., 2.3.24–26, on 286–287.
[44] *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.22, cited in *Śrībhāṣya*, 2.3.22.
[45] Ibid., 2.3.47.
[46] Ibid., 2.3.48.

In his commentary on *Gītā* 4:13, Rāmānuja once again iterates the view that beings such as gods, etc., come into existence in accordance with their own antecedent *karma*-potencies. At the time of creation, souls are enveloped by ignorance in the form of *karman* and take on bodies in proportion to this, leading them then to the erroneous identification with their respective bodies. In pursuing this matter further, we find that Kṛṣṇa declares in *Gītā* 4.13 a slim thread that seems to indicate that the divisions in the human realm, into the four varṇas *(castes)*, were ordered by the Supreme in accordance with the *guṇas* and the works each of these four *varṇas* were to do *(varṇāśramadharma).* In that case, the sources of differentiation are localized both in *guṇa*-characterized matter and the antecedent *karman* of the soul. This matter is an issue that Arjuṇa is under stress to deal with when he begins his conversation with Kṛṣṇa. Rāmānuja has to keep the source of differentiation in sentient beings located in both *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, for were he to read the texts unequivocally to assign differentiation at the primal stages of creation solely to matter, he would run the risk of making the whole enterprise of the soul's struggle for liberation along scripturally defined pathways quite meaningless. It is much more salient for him to focus on the soul's ignorance—resulting from antecedent karman—that keeps the soul within the wheel of *saṃsāra* than it is for him to suggest that differentiation between embodied souls can be located solely in *guṇa*-bound matter. Rather, *guṇa*-bound matter is simply the earth in which the plant of the soul can be sown, manifesting itself in time according to its inherent potencies; it is that which provides the vehicle of enjoyment for the soul, through which it can play out its *karmic* legacy. Rāmānuja clarifies this by calling upon the testimony of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.10.7, which specifies that birth in different wombs is dictated by the residue of good or bad *karman*. Rāmānuja connects this notion of birth in a particular womb with entitlement or dispossession of the right to perform meritorious deeds, thereby establishing a link between *karmic* legacy and *varṇāśramadharma*, the duties pertaining to one's caste and stage in life: "Only he, who has good conduct to his credit is entitled to perform meritorious deeds [that is, the conduct prescribed by *smṛti*]."[48]

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[47] Ibid., 2.3.49–50.

However, this does still not explain satisfactorily why souls enter into different forms in the first place. Why did they not all enter the forms of the *sūris* or the forms of the gods? In the passage cited above, Rāmānuja seems to indicate that the souls are enveloped in ignorance in the form of *karman*, which makes their knowledge subject to contraction according to their *karman*. Even though souls are distinct, Rāmānuja does mention that "any member of the order of souls is, when abiding in its proper form, equal to any other member, because it has the common form of knowledge as *nirvāṇa*."[49] Thus, if all souls are distinct but equal, then it would logically follow that if they were to enter into a prakṛtic existence, they would be enveloped by ignorance to an equal degree, and hence, take on the same generic form, that is, all be gods, or all be humans, and so forth. Since this is clearly not the case, it is necessary to recognize that souls are not all equal when they are in their subtle state. To assume that souls are equal in their knowledge because they are so subtle as not to be worthy of distinction from Brahman in their subtle state is incorrect. Already, even in their subtle state, souls must be conceived of as different with respect to their inherent streams of *karman*. They are equal only once they have attained their proper form, that is, after they have effaced their *karmic* legacies. Even though Rāmānuja seems to gloss over this perplexing aspect of embodiment with the statement "they are subject to contraction of knowledge proportionate to their *karman*", it is clear that logically speaking, this is not strictly the case. Rather, their knowledge is proportionate to their *karman* whether in a subtle or a gross state, being inherent in the first state while manifest in the second. The recognition that the knowledge of the soul is in a condition proportionate to its *karman* comes into play only after it is declared to be so by scripture, and affirmed once the soul has actually gained the state of liberation.

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[48] *Śrībhāṣya*, 3.1.10, in Karmarkar, 787.

[49] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* # 79, in van Buitenen, 239.

The Soul Is an Agent and Experiencer

Two other key characteristics of the soul are that it is an agent *(kartṛ/kartā)* and that it is an experiencer *(bhoktṛ)* of pleasure and pain. Although there are texts that appear to indicate that the soul merely experiences and is not really an agent, but falsely perceives itself to be an agent once it enters the body,[50] the truth is otherwise. For, were the self not to be an agent, then this would be tantamount to ascribing both agency and enjoyment to an inert substance, *prakṛti*. Since inert substances are incapable of desire, then the internal organs would have to remain in a constant state of activity, unlike the soul that can withdraw action or enjoyment at its will.[51] Thus, it is clearly not the case that agency devolves on the organs, for there are scriptural injunctions[52] clearly commending the soul to act in order to attain heaven or to attain liberation. Rather, the texts suggesting that the soul is not an agent are to be understood as indicating only that the soul is eternal and that its activity during the state of bondage is not due to its essential nature but occurs as a result of its contact with the *guṇas*.[53] There are two points to be made here. If a killer thinks that he kills someone, then this is an erroneous view, as shown by scriptural verses to that effect. For, the *ātman* cannot be killed, since it is eternal. Secondly, verses that suggest that *prakṛti* is the agent do so only to clarify that the *guṇas* affect the discrimination of the soul with regard to its action. The soul is prompted to act in a certain way because of its association with the *guṇas*, and not because of its own nature, since its knowledge is altered as a result of the association.[54] In this regard, Lipner draws attention to Rāmānuja's commentary on *Gītā 5:29*:

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[50] Such as *Kathopaniṣad* 1.2.19; *Bhagavad Gītā* 3:27, and 14:19, as well as 13:20.
[51] *Śrībhāṣya* 2.3.39 in Vireswarananda and Adidevananda, 294.

> this is the position regarding the *guṇas'* being a doer: that this being-a-doer does not belong to the *ātman's* proper form; in fact, it arises through connection with the *guṇas*. In other words, that being-a-doer is guṇa-produced is known by discriminating what happens from [the *ātman's*] conjunction with and disjunction from *prakṛti*.[55]

Finally, if agency were to be ascribed to *prakṛti*, in the form of the internal sense organ, *buddhi*, then clearly the enjoyment of the fruits of action should also be ascribed to it, and this would result in an inversion of the power of experiencing. Without the capacity to experience—and by extension, agency—what proof would there be of the soul's existence?[56] Further, the agency of the soul is indicated in texts that declare the soul to be taking the organs of sense-perception—which are from *prakṛti*—and moving about the body in the dream state, and in performing sacrifices and acts.[57] While the performance of sacrifices and acts is attributed to intelligence *(buddhi)*, clearly the soul is meant and not the *buddhi*, for if the latter were meant, then the instrumental case would have been used in the text, not the nominative. Nor would *samādhi,* the state through which liberation *(mokṣa)* is attained, be possible, for samādhi consists of the realization of difference from *prakṛti*, and it is not possible for the *buddhi* to declare itself to be different from *prakṛti*. Therefore, the soul must be the agent capable of achieving the state of *samādhi* and able to enjoy it.[58]

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[52] Mentioned in *Śrībhāṣya* 2.3.33 on 292.

[53] Ibid., in Karmarkar, 737.

[54] See also Lipner's discussion in *The Face of Truth*, 72ff. in which he argues that Rāmānuja, in his commentary on *Gītā* 2:47 counsels one to be a non-doer *(akartṛ)* by way of casting "all one's actions upon the Lord".

[55] Ibid., 73.

The question may be posed, however, regarding the independence of the soul as agent. Does the soul have the free will or independence *(svātantrya)* to act or is its activity dependent upon the Lord *(paramātmāyattam)*? Rāmānuja cites an opponent who declares that the soul acts independently, for if it did not, then scriptural injunctions and prohibitions would be useless. He himself, however, in agreement with the *sūtrakārin*, holds otherwise, viz. that the agency of the soul is dependent on the Supreme Lord, citing texts that point to the establishment of the Lord as the inner ruler *(antaryāmin)* . The opponent's substantial objection is based on the notion that "[only] he who is competent to begin or refrain from an activity by his own will—he alone is fit to be enjoined."[59] Otherwise, scriptural injunctions hold no meaning. In response to this, that is, whether the *ātman* has free will or not, Rāmānuja implies that indeed, the *ātman* has free will; however, this free will is itself permitted by the Lord *(paramātman)*, the inner controller (*antaryāmin)*:

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[56] *Śrībhāṣya* 2.3.37.
[57] Ibid., 2.3.34–35.
[58] Ibid., 2.3.38.
[59] *Śrībhāṣya* 2.3.40, in Karmarkar, 740.

> In respect of all activities, *Paramātman*, the inner Controller, makes [the *Puruṣa*] act, by granting him permission, taking into account the effort, labour gone through by the *Puruṣa* . This is the sense—Without the permission of the *Paramātman*, his [the *Puruṣa's*] activity would not be forthcoming. Whence this? *Vihitapratiṣiddhā-vaiyarthyādibhyaḥ*—[So that the thing enjoined and the thing prohibited etc. would not be useless.][60]

Rāmānuja's concern here is to establish that the soul is an agent (or doer). At the same time, he wants to retain the dependence relation that exists between the soul and Brahman. In order to emphasize the dependence relation, he must argue that the soul acts independently, but with permission from the inner ruler or controller. In this respect, his argument is ontological rather than predestinarian. It is an ontological argument in the same manner that the soul is held to be eternal, but nonetheless essentially contingent on the divine. Were the divine not to exist, then the soul would not either, since it is in an *apṛthaksiddhi* relation with the divine. Similarly, even though the soul acts, it does so only because it has the permission of the divine to act. Without this permission, the soul could not be an agent. However, Rāmānuja is careful to point out that the divine is not affected by the soul's actions—or agency. If he was arguing on predestinarian (rather than ontological) grounds, he would have to concede that then, therefore, the supreme being is responsible for all evil. This distinction is highlighted in Rāmānuja's assertion in his commentary on the *Gītā* that although the supreme being is the creator, at the same time he is not to be known as the Actor. How so? This is explained by Kṛṣṇa's declaration in *Gītā* 13:2: "Works soil me not. Nor have I interest in works' fruit." Rāmānuja understands this verse in a manner that maintains the supreme's freedom from conditioning or non-conditioning *(prāptāprāpta-viveka)*. That is, this is a position that is essential to maintain in order to safeguard Brahman's immutability—and hence perfection—on the one hand, and also to draw the distinction between Brahman and the phenomenal world, on the other. While all sentient creatures in the phenomenal world are affected by *karman*, the Supreme Being clearly is not, and hence is unsoiled by works *(karma)*, and further, is in no need of its fruits. Thus the discussion in the *Śrībhāṣya* must be understood in light of the commentary in the *Gītā*. That is, the ontological primacy of the supreme being must be retained in order to emphasize that there is a dependence relation between the supreme being and the soul. However, the actions performed by the soul are due to its own effort. Scriptural texts that suggest that the soul does only what the Lord directs it to do, for example, "He makes those whom He will raise do good deeds" are to be understood as meaning that the Lord assists those who choose virtue over vice, and in the opposite case, punishes those who prefer evil actions over good. They are not to be understood as relaying the notion that the soul's acts are performed directly by the supreme being, for he is neither the author of acts nor bears their consequences. In this regard, the supreme being maintains his stainlessness with respect to evil. Therefore, the *Śrībhāṣya* points out that although the Lord has the power to dissuade the soul from engaging in evil acts, he still grants it the permission to do so, thereby highlighting the view that the very fact that the soul is able to act derives from the permission of the Lord, but that the specific act chosen by the soul is the soul's prerogative. Scriptural injunctions and prohibitions therefore retain their force.

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[60] *Śrībhāṣya* 2.3.41, in Karmarkar, 741.

That is not to say, however, that the supreme being is an impartial onlooker with no interest in the soul's actions. Were he to be so, then he would not be a merciful being.[61] Rather, Rāmānuja implies that were the soul to act in a manner, no doubt in accordance with or departure from scriptural injunctions and prohibitions, to commend itself to the assistance or disfavour of the Lord, then the Lord would create the appropriate tendency in the soul:

> But he who is extremely well established in the favour of the Highest *Puruṣa*, acts; the divine one himself, of his own accord, favouring him, creates love [in him] for only those extremely auspicious acts which are the means to attain to him. And for him who is extremely firmly established in his disfavour, He creates love for acts opposed to the attainment to Him, which are the means of the downward course.[62]

In other words, the soul must have first acted sufficiently in one direction or the other to draw the attention of the Lord ("be extremely well established"), and once this attention is attained, then the soul will be helped or obstructed in its aims. An important connection to be established in this regard is that the Lord's assistance is not to be sought very far away. Rāmānuja cites precisely those texts[63] that delineate the relationship between the soul and the Lord as He who controls the self from within it. In this respect, with regard to the dependency of the soul's agency, it is the Lord manifested as inner controller or

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[61] *Śrībhāṣya* 2.3.41, in Karmarkar, 741: "Giving the consent even by one who is competent to dissuade one from a sinful act, does not amount to his being merciless".

[62] Ibid., in Karmarkar, 742.

[63] Ibid., 2.3.40. For a discussion of the soul's moral freedom to act, see Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 70 ff., and Robert C. Lester, *Rāmānuja on the Yoga* (Adyar, Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1976), 8 ff.

antaryāmin that both gives the soul permission *(anumati)* to act and assists it in whatever path—good or evil—that the soul chooses. This suggests that the path to divine felicity or wrath involves opening up the connection between the soul and its inner controller through independent action, to the extent that then the predisposition of the soul is informed by that upon which it is ontologically dependent.

Lipner draws attention to the connection Rāmānuja makes between the *ātman* as agent *(kartṛ)* and as experiencer *(bhoktṛ)*:

> Scriptural texts such as 'Let him who desires paradise sacrifice' and 'He who yearns for liberation should worship Brahman' connect being a *kartṛ* with being a *bhoktṛ*, whether the fruit [in view] be paradise or liberation. For a conscious being [i.e. the *ātman*] cannot be responsible for the agency of something non-conscious [i.e. *prakṛti*] ... Hence the scriptures have point only if a conscious being experiences [pleasure and pain] in virtue of being a *kartṛ* itself.[64]

The Soul Is a Knower

Ātman never loses its distinguishing capacity to know; however, it suffers a change with respect to its knowledge consequent upon its *karmic* legacy, which is manifested when Brahman changes its condition from being a subtle entity to a gross entity. Therefore, the attainment of a gross state, that is, the becoming of an "effect" of Brahman, has consequences for both insentient and sentient entities. Insentient entities are understood by Rāmānuja to undergo changes in their essential nature in order to produce objects of experience. Souls, on the other hand, attain an expansion of intelligence to enable them to experience (also translated as "to enjoy") these objects as a result of their *karman*. This highlights the central and most important characteristic of the soul, that it is a knower *(jñātṛ)*, whether in the state of bondage, that is, embodied, or in the state of freedom or liberation from *saṃsāra*. This is contrary to the Advaitin view that the soul is mere knowledge, on the one hand, and the Vaiśeṣika view that the self remains inert and becomes a knower only when attached to organs of sense-perception, on the other. Rāmānuja does not agree with either of these views, holding instead that the soul is a knower in all of its states. However, he does make the rather paradoxical statement that "in the case of the sentient portion for being the enjoyer *(bhoktṛ)* of the particular fruits of *Karman*, there is the transformation *(vikāra)* in the form of the expansion *(vikāsa)* of cognition *(jñāna)* befitting that."[65] This statement appears to go against the notion expressed in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha* that souls are essentially uncontracted *(asaṃkucita)* and have unlimited and perfect knowledge.[66] There he clearly states that souls are "subject to contraction of knowledge proportionate to their *karman*," and that "[t]heir range of knowledge is now confined to that which their various bodies encompass."[67]

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[64] *Śrībhāṣya* 2.3.33, in Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 74.

How this paradox is to be explained will depend on what is known about the soul's knowledge while it is in a subtle state. It is clear that souls in their subtle state carry the streams of *karman* with them, which will become manifested in the kinds of bodies the souls are associated with once the universe of name and form comes into being. It would be fair to assume, then, that the knowledge of the soul in its subtle state depends upon its *karman*. Furthermore, this knowledge is, as is the case with the soul's ability to act, still a potential power to be manifested once the soul has objects of knowledge amenable to it. In its subtle state, the soul is neither so distinct as to be considered worthy of counting apart from Brahman, nor is it sufficiently freed from *karman* that its knowledge can illuminate an object unobscured. This reading would explain the mention in the *Śrī Bhāṣya* to indeed mean that while souls in their subtle state have no need of knowledge derived from the objects perceptible to sense organs, when they enter into a gross state, in order to be able to function as knowers in the realm of sensory reality, the range of the souls' intelligence must undergo expansion. This reading is corroborated when Rāmānuja goes on to explain that this expansion is necessary in order to allow the souls to experience the objects amenable to sense perception "as a result of the fruit of their karma." [68] The point of departure in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha* is that of the soul as such, that is, the soul in its proper form. It cannot be assumed that the soul in its proper form and the soul in its subtle state are one and the same. Indeed, they cannot be, since the soul in its proper form no longer has the differentiations—god, human, animal and the like—that are brought about as a result of *karman*.[69] That is, the soul's proper form is attained when it has effaced its *karmic* legacy. From this point of view, then, in order to assume a form as a result of *karman*, the soul must necessarily undergo a contraction in its knowledge, for *karman* acts as an obscuring factor that limits the soul's proper ability to know. "Their range of knowledge is now confined to that which their various bodies encompass."[70]

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[65] Ibid. 2.3.18, in Karmarkar, 721.
[66] *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, in van Buitenen, 237.
[67] Ibid.

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[68] *Śrībhāṣya*, 2.3.18, in Vireswarananda and Adidevananda, 283.
[69] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #5, in van Buitenen, 186.
[70] Ibid. #78, 237.

The change of condition in the soul, from the subtle to the gross state is accompanied by beginningless ignorance *(avidyā)* in the form of *karman. Śrībhāṣya* 2.1.35 records the question that since there is no division in Brahman's causal state, then can it not be said that there is no karman in that state? That is, since there is no name and form, and no kṣetra-knower *(jīvātman)*, then is there no *karman*? Rāmānuja, in his commentary to this question, declares that such is not the case, for two reasons. Firstly, *kṣetra*-knowers are beginningless, and secondly, the streams of their *karman* [are present].

> Even though they are beginningless, the non-division [in the causal state] is appropriate, because that entity—the *Kṣetra*-knower—with the name and form abandoned, remains in a very subtle form, unfit to be described separately, although forming the body of Brahman; and if it is not so admitted, there would be the undesirable contingency of experiencing [the fruit of] what is not done, and the destruction of what is done.[71]

For Rāmānuja, this view is corroborated by scriptural passages such as *Kathopaniṣad* 2.18: "The wise one is not born, nor dies" and *Mahānārāyaṇā Upaniṣad* 5.7: "The creator planned the sun and the moon as before." Even in its subtle state, then, the soul is associated with *karman*, probably a residue from the previous *kalpa* or age at the time of dissolution. This *karmic* legacy determines the material form with which the soul associates itself, that is, the form of gods, humans, tufts of grass, and so forth. The ramification of this is that the soul then identifies itself with its *karman*-determined body and performs acts according to this identification. In so doing, it enters the continuous cycle of *saṃsāra* and experiences the joy and pain associated with its acts. This indicates that the body—god, human, tuft of grass or other—that the *ātman* enters into at the birth of the phenomenal world depends on "ignorance in the form of *karma*."

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[71] *Śrībhāṣya* 2.1.35, in Karmarkar, 642.

It must be noted that Rāmānuja does not use the term *avidyā* (ignorance, nescience) in the same way that it is used by the Advaitavādins. His summary of their view is as follows:

> The whole universe, with its infinite distinctions in the form of the ruler and the ruled and the like, is the result of the superimposition of error on an attributeless and self-luminous thing. And that error is the beginningless ignorance [or *avidyā]* which cannot be defined either as existent or as non-existent, and which [nevertheless] is the cause of those varied and wonderful illusory projections that conceal the true nature of things.[72]

van Buitenen points out that because Rāmānuja does not consider knowledge to be an essence (as do the Advaitins) but rather considers it to be a property of the soul, ignorance has a rather limited scope of action.[73] Van Buitenen understands Rāmānuja's concept of ignorance to mean "a concrete lack of knowledge in the saṃsāric being of the fundamental autonomy of its individual *ātman* as a spiritual entity of unlimited knowledge subject to the supreme Spirit." [74]

However, if the soul's consciousness or intelligence is such that it pervades the whole body, then in that case can we say that the soul *is* intelligence or consciousness? According to Rāmānuja, no. Just as smell is different from the earth of which it is a quality, so too is the case with knowledge.[75] However, the soul is considered to be knowledge because knowledge is one of its essential qualities, and like the cow with broken horns who is still called a cow, forms part its essential nature. That is, even if the horns of a cow are broken, the generic nature of "hornedness" is still considered part of its essential nature. Similarly, even if knowledge is not manifest in a state of deep sleep *(suṣupti)*, knowledge or consciousness is still an invariable quality of the self, that manifests itself when the condition of being awake exists, that is, enables it to manifest itself. In this respect, the soul and its knowledge are similar in that they are both self-manifested. When the soul is in a state of freedom, that is, liberated from bondage, then it does not remember—or, have knowledge of—the states of birth, death, and so on that are experienced during the state of bondage. But this does not mean that the soul does not have knowledge, for scripture[76] declares that it is able to rejoice, having no consciousness of the pain associated with the body. If we were to hold on to the notion that the soul is omnipresent, as is the case with the Sāṁkhyas or the Vaiśeṣikas, then this would imply that the soul would be able to perceive and yet not perceive an object simultaneously, and this is contrary to our lived experience. If, however, we declare the soul to be atomic and not omnipresent, that is, that the soul is able to go and come and has knowledge for its quality, then it does not perceive ego-consciousness once it has left the body, which it otherwise would have had to even in its state of release. In other words, it would always have to be connected to sense organs, through which ego-consciousness is brought into awareness.[77] The point that Rāmānuja is trying to make here, we suggest, is that knowledge is an inseparable quality of the soul, and that it manifests or brings into the range of perception whatever it is able to depending on whether the soul is in a state of bondage, that is connected to sense organs, or in a state of liberation, when it is no longer connected to organs of sense-perception.

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[72] *Śrībhāṣya*, 1.1.1, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 119.

[73] Rāmānuja argues this position in para. 43, ibid., 215, where he calls consciousness *(caitanya=jñāna)* a *dharma (svarūpanirūpaṇadharma*—"an attribute describing the proper form" (van Buitenen, n. 36, 186) of the soul, and not the proper form *(svarūpabheda)* of *ātman*.

[74] Ibid., n. 25, 185.

[75] On the relationship of the soul to consciousness or knowledge, see Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, Ch. 3.

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[76] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.12.3,5.
[77] *Śrībhāṣya*, 2.3.27–32.

Thus far we have seen that the chief characteristics of the soul are that it is eternal *(nitya)*, a knower *(jñātṛ)*, atomic in size *(āṇava)*, and has knowledge in the form of consciousness *(vijñāna)* as an inseparable characteristic or property. It is in a *śeṣa-śeṣin* relationship with Brahman, that is, it exists to fulfil the latter's purpose. It is not infinite, all-pervasive, or omnipresent. It is both agent *(kartṛ)* and experiencer *(bhoktṛ)*. At the same time, its agency is dependent on another *(paramātmāyattam)*, the inner Ruler *(antaryāmin)* from whom it receives permission *(anumati)* to act as well as assistance in its resolve toward good or evil actions. It is part of Brahman in that it is an aspect *(deśa)* of it, which allows it to be both non-different from Brahman in that it invariably accompanies it, and different from Brahman in that none of the limiting adjuncts it is subject to apply to Brahman.

The State of Liberation

In his commentary in *Śrībhāṣya* 1.2.12,[78] Rāmānuja points out that the real issue at hand is the right knowledge of salvation *(mokṣa)*, "characterized by the attainment to Brahman, constituting the highest human purpose in life, with a desire to know the real nature of *Ātman*, high and low, and the worship of the highest *Ātman*, which is the means of that [salvation]."[79] This statement contains some of the key features of Rāmānuja's teleology, viz. that attainment to Brahman is the highest purpose of human life. This involves knowing the true nature of the *ātman*, whether in its proper form (high) or in its embodied state (low). It can be extrapolated that this is a reference to the relationship that obtains between the *ātman* and Brahman at all times, the relationship of body–soul, dependent–depended upon. It also entails the worship of the highest *ātman*, that is, Brahman, who, as discussed in the previous chapter, has various manifestations as *antaryāmin, mahāvibhūti, avatāra* (and, by extension, *arcā*) . The highest *ātman* is also that to which the soul, in all its states as subtle, gross or liberated, is as a body.

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[78] Concerning who is the eater, Brahman or *jīvātman*.

[79] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.2.12, in Karmarkar, 351.

Rāmānuja defines mokṣa thus:

> Those well-versed in the doctrines of the three Vedas [i.e., the Viśiṣṭādvaitins] on the other hand, speak of salvation *[mokṣa]* as the natural realisation of the *Paramātman*, preceded by the uprooting of the *Avidyā* in the case of *Jīva*, who is the mode, by being the body of the Highest Brahman, the only cause of the entire world, having a uniform nature of infinite knowledge and bliss, the opposite [or rival] of everything fit to be abandoned, the mine of natural, unlimited, excessive, innumerable auspicious qualities, quite different from everything else, [and] the *Ātman* of everything,—[of *Jīva*] having the nature of favourable and unlimited knowledge, with uniform realisation of the highest *Ātman*, [and] with his nature screened by *Avidyā* constituted of beginningless *Karman.*[80]

The key points in this definition are that: (i) Brahman as having the characteristics mentioned is to be known; (ii) *Jīva*, whether in gross or liberated states is to be known as the body of Brahman; and (iii) realization of Brahman by *ātman* is to be preceded by the removal of *avidyā* in the form of *karman* that accompanies the *jīvātman* in its gross state. Rāmānuja notes that according to the scriptures *(śāstras)*, all the souls released from *saṃsāra*, that is, having achieved *mokṣa*, are equal. For, when they are not differentiated as gods, humans, tufts of grass and so forth, all souls have the same form of knowledge. Further, the proper form and essence of the soul is to be accessory to Him.[81]

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[80] Ibid., 352–353.

Central to the attainment of mokṣa is the conception that Brahman and the *ātman* are not identical in the sense meant by the Advaitavādin, that is, that the *ātman*, upon realization, loses itself in the higher Brahman, which is the only reality. Rāmānuja's theology does not conceive the soul to be such. Rather, he holds to the notion that souls are distinct, innumerable, and although their knowledge is unimpaired in the released state, they are nonetheless distinct from Brahman. In the *Vedārthasaṃgraha* , Rāmānuja states: "the means by which we can attain immortality in person is the knowledge that the soul and its Controller exist separately."[82] That is, although the soul, in its proper form, is immortal, it experiences birth, death and rebirth while it is in *saṃsāra*. Here, by immortality is meant that this continual cycle is no longer experienced. In this regard, three modes of the supreme being must be distinguished: (1) that it is the object [or, that which is enjoyed/experienced] *(bhogya)*; it is non-spiritual, real, and the substratum of transformations, that is, *prakṛti*; (2) that it is the subject [or, that which enjoys/experiences] *(bhoktṛ)*; it is the soul, that is, *puruṣa*. Although the soul is "essentially unimpaired, uncircumscribable knowledge and bliss, it is susceptible to various degrees of contraction and expansion due to ignorance in the form of ageless karman; that it is naturally conjoined with the non-spiritual order which is its object; and that it is capable of release through worship of the Supreme Spirit; etc.; and (3) that it is the inner ruler "of the above subject and object and, in essence, the abode of immeasurable virtues."[83] It must be noted here that the notion of inner ruler brings into focus the relationship that employs between Brahman, *cit* and *acit*: *śeṣa-śeṣin* (body–possessor of body), *aṃśa–aṃśin* (part–possessor of parts, that is, whole), *prakāra–prakārin* (mode–possessor of modes), *dharma–dharmin* (accessory–principal), *niyāma–niyantṛ* (thing controlled–controller); all of which denote a relationship of dependency between the two *tattvas*, *cit* and *acit*, and Brahman, that which is depended upon. This relationship obtains even when the soul attains consciousness of its inherent immortality. For, in that state, it recognizes Brahman for what it is: controller of itself in all its states, whether liberated or bound. Thus, for Rāmānuja, mokṣa necessarily implies that soul, with its vision unimpaired by *avidyā*, recognizes Brahman as having the attributes that characterize it, and further recognizes that it is itself immortal and separate from Brahman in a dependency relationship.

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[81] *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, in van Buitenen, 237–238.
[82] Ibid. #86, 244.

In the fourth *pāda* of the fourth *adhyāya* (i.e. 4.4) of the *Vedāntasūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa are discussed the nature of *mokṣa* and the relation of *mukta-jīvas* with the *Paramātman*. Rāmānuja's *Śrībhāṣya*, which is a commentary on the *Vedāntasūtras*, presents Rāmānuja's interpretation of these. Rāmānuja holds the view that the state of the *ātman* upon attainment of *mokṣa*—here referred to as having attained to the highest light *(jyoti)*, i.e., Brahman—is the manifestation of the *ātman's* own form *(svena rūpeṇa)*. Rāmānuja stresses that the attainment of *mokṣa* results in the manifestation of the soul's proper form and not the assumption of a completely different form, since the latter would imply that the *ātman* was, in that case, produced. As mentioned earlier, the *ātman* is not produced. Therefore, it logically follows that the *ātman* veiled by *karman* in the form of *avidyā* or ignorance manifests its own proper form once this veil is removed. In other words, the knowledge, bliss, etc. that characterize the proper form of the soul are contracted by the beginningless streams of *karman*, and, once the bonds of *karman* are shaken off, undergo expansion.[84] By manifestation is meant that the *avidyā* (ignorance) by which the *jīvātman* was hidden or screened ceases to operate, and the *ātman* is freed from association with *karman* and the body, etc. caused by *karman*.[85]

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[83] Ibid. #87, 245–246.

Two questions arise here: Does the one who has acquired the knowledge of Brahman (the *vidyā*) "attain to the highest lights" while still alive, that is, while occupying the human body, or does that person die instantly in order to attain Brahman? In the *Śrībhāṣya*, Rāmānuja does not appear to address the first question directly. Indeed, part of his commentary deals with the Arcirādi or Devayāna path taken by those who have departed from the physical or gross body, leading to the highest lights, i.e., Brahman. This would prima facie indicate that Rāmānuja does not consider this state to be attained while still attached to the human body. This question will be taken up in greater detail in the next chapter. With respect to the second question, the *vidvat*, or wise one, does not die instantly. Rather, upon attaining knowledge of Brahman, the soul's past sin is destroyed and it establishes non-contact with future sin; that is, the wise one *(vidvat)* is no longer subject to the consequences of previous *karman* or to the effects of future karman. How is this so? Rāmānuja explains:

> *Vidyā* [has] the power to destroy the capacity of producing the fruit of sins done before, and also the power to put forth obstacles in the production of

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[84] *Śrībhāṣya* 4.4.4, in Karmarkar, 1040.
[85] Ibid., 4.4.1, in Karmarkar, 1037.

> the capacity to produce fruit in the case of sins that are yet to come into being ... .[86]

In other words, *vidyā* acts directly in contradiction to *karman*; it is the knowledge that destroys *karman* in the form of *avidyā* or ignorance, by attacking its capacity to produce fruit with respect to past sins and by obstructing its ability to generate more sins in the future. By *vidyā* Rāmānuja means the various *Brahmavidyās*—which he considers to be uniform in intent—found in the *śāstras* that are enjoined for the purpose of meditation *(upāsana).* This will be explored further in the next chapter. To the question raised regarding what happens to those merits and demerits that the power of *vidyā* cannot stop since they have already begun to function, Rāmānuja responds that the friends of the wise will take whatever is meritorious, while those who hate him will take the demerit.[87] This happens at the time of death, for the "happiness and misery that are to be experienced due to the good deeds *(sukṛta)* and the evil deeds *(duṣkṛta)* do not exist over and above the acquisition of Brahman, which is the fruit of the *Vidyā.*"[88] However, in order to proceed along the *Devayāna* path after death to the highest lights (i.e., Brahman), the *ātman* must have a body. Even though the *vidyā* does not itself produce the subtle body, it brings one upon the scene, in order to enable the one whose *karman* has been destroyed (that is, the *mukta*) to acquire the fruit of the *vidyā*, viz. Brahman.[89]

At death, the *vidvat* exits the body through the 101st *nāḍī* (channel) at the tip of the head, while the *avidvat* may exit through any other channel. The *vidvat* follows the rays of the sun, which extend like a royal road linking two cities, and is directed by certain deities or *Arcis* who point the wise ones to the *Devayāna* path, by which they will be guided to the highest lights (Brahman), never to return again. The *avidvat* will be pointed to the Pitṛyāṇa path, by which they reach the Moon and will return to the world of *saṃsāra* once their merit *(sukṛta)* is exhausted. Evil doers reach *Yamaloka*, to be born again in the realm of *saṃsāra* in lower castes or in lower forms of life. There are details too numerous and not directly germane to our discussion to be mentioned here regarding the process by which the *mukta* reaches Brahman. However, it is clear that immortality is assured to it, as is non-return and all the other characteristics that will become fully manifest once Brahman is reached. Rāmānuja in these discussions[90] is simply concerned with unifying the various differing details provided in the scriptures, and not with the soul's state of consciousness along this postmortem path. The state of the *mukta* once it has reached its goal—Brahman—is described under.

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[86] Ibid., 4.1.13, in Karmarkar, 989.
[87] Ibid., 4.1.19, in Karmarkar, 995.
[88] Ibid., 3.3.27, in Karmarkar, 876.
[89] Ibid., 3.3.30, in Karmarkar, 879.

Rāmānuja is at pains to establish that the *ātman* knows itself to be separate from Brahman. In the discussion on the state of the *mukta*, he clarifies further what he means. Although the liberated soul knows itself to be different from Brahman in that it is distinct, at the same time, it experiences itself as not separate from Brahman. By this is meant that the *ātman* knows itself as the body of the Paramātman, who is its *ātman*, and conversely, knows itself as being a mode of Brahman. Thus, it experiences itself as not divided from Brahman, as "I am Brahman". Rāmānuja explains this apparent equality thus:

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[90] For the discussions regarding the departure of the soul from the physical body at death and details of the path taken by it subsequently, see *Śrībhāṣya* 4.2 and 4.3 (that is, the second and third *pādas* of the fourth *adhyāya).*

> The reference to the equality and the possession of the same qualities, propounds the purity equal to that of Brahman by the abandonment of the ordinary forms of gods, etc., because the nature of the inmost *Ātman* who is, verily, the mode of Brahman is equal to it.[91]

This is another way of expressing what is meant by the *mahāvākya tat tvam asi*: the released soul is Brahman in the sense that the body denotes the soul that sustains it. That is, even in this liberated state, the relationship of mode–possessor of mode holds true. The difference between the physical universe as the mode of Brahman and the released soul as the mode of Brahman is that, while in the first case, the universe harbours impurity from which Brahman is completely disassociated, in the second case, the released soul as the mode of Brahman has the same level of purity as him.

The significance of this purity may be found in the discussion following, in which Rāmānuja declares that the released soul becomes manifest by the form of its consciousness *(vijñāna)*, that is, it is self-illuminating.[92] The soul, in this form, is not simply knowledge; it has knowledge as a determining characteristic. As Lipner points out with great clarity in his discussion on the essential self, Rāmānuja uses the analogy of light when speaking of consciousness. The light of the flame is self-originated and hence not dependent[93] on something else; at the same time, it casts light on other things. It is thus both substrate and quality:

> it is the nature of the *ātman* to produce conscious acts. Consciousness is the way of the *ātman's* self-expression; consequently it enjoys a *sui generis*

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[91] Ibid., 4.4.4, in Karmarkar, 1041.

[92] Ibid., 1045.

[93] This must not be confused with the notion that the *ātman* is dependent on Brahman, for that dependency is one pertaining to ontology: the *ātman* exists eternally because Brahman wills it so, and ātman can never be found apart from Brahman (the *apṛthaksiddhi* relationship).

> relationship with the *ātman*. As constituting the *ātman's* essence, it exists substantivally; as separate acts of consciousness characterising and flowing from the *ātman*, it acts attributively. This is what Rāmānuja is trying to articulate when he says that the *ātman* both is of the form of consciousness *(cidrūpa)* and has consciousness for its quality. ... the *ātman* as constituted of consciousness is at the same time a centre (the substrate) of conscious acts radiating out and terminating in their objects.[94]

From this it is clear that light—or consciousness—illuminates more than itself. The significance of this is that although the *ātman*, because it is atomic, resides in one place, by virtue of its consciousness, it is able to pervade the entire body. In the case of the *jīvātman* whose consciousness is contracted as a consequence of *karman*, this pervasion of consciousness extends over the whole of the physical body, but is limited in that it is unable to see the *ātman* in another body. In the case of the released self, such an impediment does not exist. Therefore, it is able to pervade the entire body of Brahman, that is, all other souls, even though it is atomic and occupies only a small space.[95] *Karman* does not impede it here, and its pervasion is directed by its own will. An objector reminds Rāmānuja of a scriptural verse that indicates that the *ātman* knows neither anything outside nor inside.[96] Rāmānuja dispenses with this objection by pointing out that it refers to the jī*vātman* in the state of deep sleep or death, when its consciousness goes into abeyance, and cites other scriptural verses that testify to the omniscience of the released soul.[97]

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[94] Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 52.

[95] *Śrībhāṣya* 4.4.15, in Karmarkar, 1051–1051.

[96] *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.21, cited in Karmarkar, 1051.

[97] *Śrībhāṣya* 4.4.16, in Karmarkar, 1051–1052.

For Rāmānuja, having the nature of consciousness *(vijñāna)* does not preclude the released soul *(mukta)* from having attributes such as the ability to enjoy, sport or having desires fulfilled.[98] This would imply that the mukta would have a body through which to enjoy its blissful state. Elsewhere Rāmānuja clarifies that the soul connects with a body in order to play out the consequences of *karma.* However, when it is released from *karman*, then the *mukta* can will to have a body or not.[99] If it desires not, then it will enjoy itself with the accessories, including the body, provided by the *Paramapuruṣa*, as in a dream.[100] Such accessories are created by the latter out of sport *(līlā).*[101] However, just as the *Paramapuruṣa* for the sake of his own sport creates beings such as *Daśaratha*, etc. to experience the pleasure of enjoyment "in acting like a human being through them", so, too, the released one—capable of having its every will realized *(saṃkalpa)*[102]—can create its own accessories such as the world of the manes *(pitṛloka)*, etc., which are "included within the sport of the *Paramapuruṣa*". Such enjoyment of accessories that it creates from its own will is like the enjoyment of one who is awake, and requires no additional effort on its part since it has the power of will that is realized.[103] The fact that the *ātman* is of the form of consciousness means that it can will the kin to come into existence. By simply willing it, what it needs for its enjoyment comes into being.

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[98] Ibid., 4.4.7, in Karmarkar, 1045.
[99] Ibid., 4.4.12, in Karmarkar, 1048.
[100] Ibid., 4.4. 13, in Karmarkar, 1049.
[101] Ibid., 1050.
[102] Ibid., 1046.
[103] Ibid., 1050.

Indeed, the released soul has no other overlord *(adhipati)*,[104] for it is capable of having its every will realized. To have an overlord (other than Brahman) would mean that the released one was in need of injunctions and prohibitions. One who has his will realized is not in need of such obstructions to his will, for that is the function of injunctions and prohibitions. However, does this then mean that the mukta is overlord in the same way as Brahman: "Free from stains, he attains to the maximum similarity"?[105]

The issue here is whether the *mukta* is able to create *(sṛṣṭa)* the world. As the opponent declares, the *mukta* could not be said to bear extreme resemblance to the highest *Puruṣa* or to have his desires fulfilled if this did not also entail "the control of the world in the form of operations in connection to the world".[106] Rāmānuja disagrees, on the grounds that there are scriptural references declaring that the control of the world is alone Brahman's:

> Operation in connection with the world [is] the control of the diverse nature, stability and activity of the entire sentient and non-sentient entities. Barring that, is the wealth of glory of the Released one with the entire veil completely taken off, having the form of realisation of the pure Brahman. ... If this control of the entire world were to be common to the Released ones also, then this characteristic [that is, from which beings are originated] of Brahman, of the form of being the overlord of the world would not go well; for, only a peculiar characteristic can be a defining factor.[107]

Moreover, there are scriptural passages confirming that Brahman was alone in the beginning, and this clearly excludes the *mukta* from overlordship of the world since the

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[104] Ibid., 1047.
[105] *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.1.3.
[106] *Śrībhāṣya* 4.4.17, in Karmarkar, 1053.
[107] Ibid., 1053–1054.

mukta was not proximate at the time of creation.[108] Otherwise, in all other respects, the *mukta* is like Brahman, in that it is omniscient, seeing by the divine eye,[109] its enjoyments are not subject to *karman*,[110] enjoys a state of bliss, and, although it is not subject to modifications itself, it may enjoy the worlds within modification:

> The Released one realizes the Highest Brahman with its manifestations, with all the modifications shaken away, of a uniformly auspicious nature opposed to everything fit to be abandoned, possessing an excessive bliss, and having all auspicious qualities. The worlds although within the modification are fit for being enjoyed by the Released one, as they are included in the manifestations of that. ... The *Śruti* explains the Released one as abiding as the realizer, in the Highest Brahman without modification, possessing unlimited excessive bliss ... .[111]

Furthermore, the state of bliss attained by the *mukta* depends on the *Paramapuruṣa*, who is the only cause of bliss.[112] The mukta is in a permanent state of bliss and is guaranteed non-return to the world of *saṃsāra* because the highest *Puruṣa* "always desires to have this permanent state [of bliss and permanent stay]."[113]

In Lecture 14 of the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa declares that the *munis*, that is, those who have passed away from the sphere of *saṃsāra*, are not born at evolution nor suffer at dissolution *(Gītā* 14:2). From the context it is clear that Kṛṣṇa means that the *munis* first had to have attained the state of spiritual realization *(siddhi)* before they could pass beyond *saṃsāra*, never to have to return to it again. At the same time, Kṛṣṇa declares in *Gītā* 9:7–8 that all beings enter into His own nature (understood as His body, *prakṛti*, in the form of *tamas* or darkness) at the end of a *kalpa* (cosmic age), and are emitted again at the beginning of a *kalpa*. Rāmānuja understands Kṛṣṇa to say, in his commentary to *Gītā* 9:8: "And I repeatedly create from time to time the four-fold sum of beings composed of *devas*, humans, animal and statutory kingdoms, lying powerless in the folds of My alluring and *guṇa*-sated nature *(prakṛti)*." Rāmānuja's discussion in *Śrībhāṣya* 4.4.18–22 is evidently aimed at this fear, that at the time of dissolution, the released ones will be dissolved into tamas and will perforce begin this repetitive cycle of birth, death and rebirth once again. It is to dispel this fear that Rāmānuja, in his discussion in the *Śrībhāṣya*, calls upon the *Gītā*[114] to emphasize that released souls never re-enter the realm of *saṃsāra*:

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[108] Ibid., 1055. We assume that this is so because the *mukta* was still *in potentia* at that time.

[109] *Śrībhāṣya* 4.4.16, in Karmarkar, 1052.

[110] Ibid., 4.4.18, in Karmarkar, 1055–1056.

[111] Ibid., 4.4.19, in Karmarkar, 1056.

[112] Ibid., 4.4.20, in Karmarkar, 1058.

[113] Ibid., 1058.

> it is known from the Word *[Śruti]* itself, that he does not cause the worshippers to return [to this *Saṃsāra*], pleased with the propitiation in the form of his worship fortified by the [proper observance of the] duties of the *Varṇas* and *Āśramas* ... , having turned away the *Avidyā* in the form of the heap of *Karmans* ..., and having made them attain to excessive bliss of the form of the realisation of himself as he is .... Not again should there be any fear about his returning again on account of the impossibility of dependence on anything else and working for its sake in the case of the one whose bond of *Karman* has snapped asunder, whose knowledge knows no contraction, who has the one nature of the realisation of the Highest Brahman alone, who alone is dear to it, who realizes Brahman which is limitless excessive *Ānanda*.—Not again would the *Paramapuruṣa* who has his thoughts fulfilled, having secured the knower who is exceedingly dear to him, make him return at any time ... .[115]

The proper form of the soul is such that it is essentially knowledge and bliss. From the viewpoint of the proper form of the soul, it is evident that sorrow, ignorance and impurity result from the soul's association with matter as a result of beginningless karman and do not properly belong to the soul. Souls that are released from association with the differentiated forms of *prakṛti* (such as gods, humans, and so forth) are equal to one another, since they all have "the common form of knowledge as *nirvāṇa*."[116] Release from *samsāra*, however, is impossible "without resorting to the Lord."[117] The Lord is described as one who has a diversity of forms due to his omnipotence: Kṛṣṇa the *avatāra* declares that he is the *antaryāmin*, he has a supernal manifestation, and he is the abode of boundless perfect qualities, all of which comprise objects of meditation prescribed in the various *vidyās*. It is significant that the knowledge that the soul gains of Brahman pertains to a qualified supreme being. Rāmānuja interprets the *sadvidyā (tat tvam asi)* to assert: "He [Brahman] is actually worshipped as being distinguished by all the beautiful qualities inherent in His proper form: therefore in the *sadvidyā*, too, the end to be attained is the qualified Brahman."[118] Rāmānuja's discussion on the various stages of the soul clearly indicates his view that the soul is bound by ignorance when it appears in the phenomenal world of names and forms. The antidote to this ignorance is twofold: (i) knowledge[119] of its proper nature that "it is subservient to Another"[120] and that this proper form has "knowledge for its one and only form, and is essentially different from the body",[121] and (ii) having realized that release of the soul from *saṃsāra* "which is due to *karman* and consists in various *guṇas*, is impossible without resorting to the Lord"[122] through *bhakti*: "which is furthered by the performance of one's proper acts preceded by knowledge of the orders of reality as learnt from the *śāstra*. The word ***bhakti*** has the sense of a kind of love, and this love again that of a certain kind of knowledge."[123] In the next chapter, Rāmānuja's views on epistemology will be discussed.

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[114] *Gītā* 8:15–16; 7:17–19.

[115] *Śrībhāṣya* 4.4.22, in Karmarkar, 1061–1061.

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[116] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #79, in van Buitenen, 239.
[117] Ibid., #81, 239.
[118] Ibid., #88, 246.
[119] As will be seen in the next chapter, worship is concomitant with knowledge.
[120] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #143, in van Buitenen, 298.
[121] Ibid., 297.
[122] Ibid., #81, 239.

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[123] Ibid., # 141, 296. Rāmānuja explains: "He that has Brahman as the object of his knowledge becomes happy. When it is realized that ... Brahman ... is the Principal to which the soul is accessory or subservient, then the Supreme Brahman who is thus an object of absolute love leads the soul to Himself." See #142, 297.

CHAPTER 3

Seeing With a Divine Eye: Battling the *Karmic* Legacy

In the previous chapter attention was drawn to the fact that the soul, in its proper form, is essentially a knower *(jñātṛ)* with consciousness *(vijñāna)* as its eternal quality. In this chapter, the notion of the soul as a knower will be further examined with respect to epistemology. Then, the effect of *karman* on the soul will be examined, with specific reference to the notion that individual souls "are enveloped by ignorance in the form of *karman* [and] (s)o they are subject to contraction of knowledge proportionate to their *karman*."[1] Rāmānuja's recommendations on how to overcome this ignorance *(avidyā)* so as to return to the soul's original state of blissful, omniscient knowledge will then be examined.

The Soul as a Knowing Subject *(Jñātṛ)*

Rāmānuja concurs with the notion that the *ātman* can be referred to as *jñāna* (knowledge) only because it has *vijñāna* (consciousness) as its attribute eternally.[2] However, this must be distinguished from the Advaitic notion that the proper form of the soul is pure, unconditioned knowledge, or consciousness.[3] For Rāmānuja, this is an important distinction to be made on several counts, not all of which will be explored here for reasons of brevity and clarity. Firstly, if the soul, in its proper form, were to be accepted as being consciousness or knowledge *(jñāna)* only, then the effects of *karman* —understood by the Advaitavādin to be obscuring nescience—would strike into the very heart of the soul, resulting in the very annihilation of the illumination that characterizes the soul.[4] Further, it would cause that which is not originated—the soul—to be susceptible to destruction in the form of dimming or destroying its illumination. Secondly, if the soul's proper existence is in the form of pure intelligence, then this raises several problems. For example, for whom does this pure intelligence illuminate, since no knower is postulated, and what does it illuminate, given the Advaitavādin's position that "the consciousness is destitute of all distinctions and alternations, which is destitute of attributes and is pure intelligence, which is homogeneous and eternally unchangeable, manifests itself, through illusion, as wonderfully and variedly manifold in the forms of the knower, the known and knowledge"?[5] Rāmānuja's position is summed up thus:

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[1] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #78, in van Buitenen, 237.
[2] *Śrībhāṣya* 2.3.30, in Karmarkar, 732.
[3] Reported in *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #43, in van Buitenen, 215.
[4] Ibid.

> it is not possible for ignorance to have consciousness for its basis, because it would then have the same basis for itself as knowledge has, and because also its objects would then be the same as those of that [knowledge]. Ignorance cannot exist in the witness who is pure unqualified consciousness, and is free from the condition of being the knower as well as that of being the object [of knowledge]. Just as jars and other similar objects cannot form the seat of ignorance, because they are not, even in the least, the seat of knowledge, so also pure unqualified consciousness cannot be the seat of ignorance, for the reason that it too is not the seat of knowledge. Even if consciousness be taken to be the seat of ignorance, that same [consciousness], which is [also] taken to be the self, cannot form the object of knowledge; therefore the cessation of the ignorance which is found in it [viz., in this consciousness] cannot be brought about by means of knowledge. ... Hence, the ignorance which has consciousness for its basis can never by destroyed by anything whatsoever.[6]

The objections raised by Rāmānuja are mentioned only briefly here in order to illustrate his departure from the fundamental conceptions held by the major school of his day, the Advaitavādins. As has already been stated, unlike the Advaitavādins, Rāmānuja held the notion that Brahman, the supreme object of enquiry, was not without attributes for the purpose of scripture is precisely to inform us about a supreme being who has attributes and is, therefore, the true object of human enquiry. Something which is without attributes cannot fall within the purview of any means of knowledge, that is, such an entity would be outside the scope of the *pramāṇas.* Scripture would be nullified if its true purport—to give information about Brahman—was considered illusory, as would be the case if Brahman had no attributes through which he could be known.

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[5] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1., in Rangachar and Aiyangar, 40.
[6] Ibid., 69–70.

Similarly, the soul, akin as it was to Brahman in every aspect save that of directing and controlling the affairs of the world, was not an entity that was simply consciousness. Rather, it was a being, conceived of as a knower, that possessed the character of intelligence. Rāmānuja defines the soul as being self-luminous.[7] As a self-luminous being, the soul has the eternal attribute *(dharma)* of consciousness, which is defined thus:

> To consciousness belongs the quality of illuminating external objects as well as the quality of self-luminousness, because perception becomes possible to the knower [only] in the way of bringing external objects to the light [of consciousness].[8] Indeed, consciousness is that which, solely by means of its own existence, makes intelligible, to that which constitutes its foundation [the soul], any external object whatsoever.[9]

Thus the triad of knower, knowing and thing to be known are clearly required in order for the notion of consciousness to have any meaning. The very nature of consciousness is such that it is expressed as experience of something for someone else. Knowership is not admissible to consciousness; the latter can not have the quality of being the knower because this would presuppose that consciousness has the essential character of intelligence, which it does not, because intelligence is the attribute of a being.[10] Rāmānuja elaborates upon the idea that consciousness acts for a knower in the following manner:

> Experience is that which, solely by means of its own existence, possesses the quality of making a thing fit to be realized in relation to what constitutes the basis of that [experience] itself; it has other names, such as knowledge *[jñāna]*, comprehension *[avagati]*, consciousness *[saṃvid]*, and the like; it always relates to an object and is a particular attribute of the experiencing self: and again it is well-known to all as possessing the qualification of

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[7] Ibid., 61.
[8] Ibid., 42.
[9] Ibid., 56.
[10] Ibid., 66.

> being witness by the self, as when [one says], 'I know a jar,' 'I understand this thing,' 'I am conscious of a cloth,' etc.[11]

What Rāmānuja is leading up to is that although the subject—to whom knowing is predicated—is eternal and has the permanent character of being the knowing subject, consciousness, which is its tool, and its attribute, is capable of change depending on the object it experiences. For example, in the case of prior experience, or the ephemeral experience of pleasure and pain, it is possible to say: 'I know', 'I had known' and 'The knowledge which I, the knower, had, is now lost.' Consciousness, therefore, can be altered depending on the experience one has. If, however, it was identified as permanent and unchanging as the form of the soul, then there would be no possibility of acknowledging a memory of something seen or experienced before, nor of experiencing something anew. For this reason, Rāmānuja declares: "origination, existence, and destruction, in relation to that attribute which belongs to this subject and is called consciousness, are also ascertained to be true".[12] For consciousness to operate, it must have both an object of knowledge as well as an agent that witnesses it.[13]

In other words, while the permanent character of the soul as Knower *(jñātṛ)* remains intact, the consciousness of the soul, which is a quality of a substance that is knowing, is susceptible to change in the form of origination, existence and destruction. This conception is of crucial importance as it provides for the contraction and expansion of consciousness resulting from *karman* , to be explored under.

The knowing self, with illuminating consciousness as its tool, discerns objects of experience. The question is, who is this knower? In Rāmānuja's view, it is the thing, 'I', that is, the ego (not to be confused with the material principle of egoity, *ahaṃkāra)* in the cognition 'I know', which is the *ātman.*[14] The idea of the ego is essential, for otherwise, the person who, desiring final release, takes to hearing the scripture, will run from such activity if it is thought that the ego will be destroyed once final release is obtained. After all, is not the whole point of final release to secure bliss and freedom from misery? But if there is no 'I' to enjoy this beatific state, then what is the point? Any notion that a consciousness, separate from the self, will continue on to experience this beatitude is meaningless, for consciousness only has existence by virtue of its association with the self. Should this association be terminated, then consciousness itself would terminate.[15] That is, there is no such thing as a self that is pure and unqualified consciousness; the thing has to have the notion of ego in order for its consciousness to be rendered meaningful.

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[11] Ibid., 57.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 62.

This knower, however, is not the same as the material principle of egoity *(ahaṃkāra). Ahaṃkāra* is "capable of modifications and is itself a modification of *prakṛti*"[16] constituting an internal, non-intelligent organ of the embodied self. Thus, it cannot be the knower, "for the quality of being the knower has the peculiar character of belonging always to an intelligent thing",[17] which the *ahaṃkāra* is not. In fact, like the body, it is perceptible to the knower as it is the object of consciousness.[18] Nor does the *ahaṃkāra* reveal experience to the knower, for as a non-intelligent (hence, non-luminous) material thing, it cannot illuminate anything else. Rāmānuja cites his predecessor Yāmunācārya's analogy in this regard: just as a dead ember cannot reveal the sun [so too the *ahaṃkāra* cannot reveal the *ātman].*[19]

What, then, is the *ahaṃkāra?* Rāmānuja defines it thus: "it is called the principle of egoity [or *ahaṃkāra],* because it forms the cause of the imposition of the idea of the ego upon the body, which is other than the self."[20] Indeed, it is otherwise also named pride, and is thus considered in scripture to be worthy of rejection.[21] Further, it is linked to ignorance, as taught by the revered Parāśara in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 6.7.10: "listen also to the teaching regarding the true nature of ignorance... . It is the imposition of the idea of the self on that which is no self [the body]."[22]

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[14] Ibid., 63.
[15] Ibid., 59.
[16] Ibid., 64.
[17] Ibid., 64.
[18] Ibid., 65.
[19] Ibid., cited on 67.

In contrast to *ahaṃkāra*, which considers the body to be itself, the real knower, that is, the 'I' that shines forth during both the embodied and the liberated states, does not depend on anything for its luminosity. Here Rāmānuja introduces his analogy of the soul with *tejas*, light. Just as tejas exists "in the form of luminosity as well as in the form of that which is luminous",[23] so, too, the soul is self-luminous in that it possesses the character of intelligence. A thing is said to possess luminosity when it illuminates other things as well as its own nature. Further, this luminosity can not be found apart from the object which is the source of luminosity; a gem has lustre that can not be found apart from it, for if it could, then the gem's lustre might be conceived of something which the gem loses in the act of radiating light. In other words, the luminosity has the luminous substance for its basis, and it is a dependent constituent of that basis, just as the sun's rays, although they illumine other objects, have the sun for their basis and form a dependent constituent of that basis.[24]

For this reason, scripture declares that "there is no disappearance of the knowledge of the knower."[25] The soul is, therefore, the substratum of knowledge in its capacity as knower, and likened in that context to light as a substance. Just as light radiates luminosity—that is, illumines other things—through its rays or flames or lustre, so too, the knower knows objects of experience through the activity of the consciousness, which is wholly dependent upon the knower for both its existence and its operation. In this regard, the soul is both of the nature of intelligence while simultaneously the seat of intelligence, just as light is both its own substrate and the source of illumination.[26] The distinction Rāmānuja draws is between the soul's character as knower and the content of the knowledge provided by the consciousness or illumination. The sun does not change with respect to its being a source of light; however, the objects brought into view, that is, the experience of the knower, change depending upon the objects with which the rays come into contact and the ability of the rays to illumine them. In order to explore this notion, *karman* in the form of *avidyā* or ignorance must be examined.

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[20] Ibid., 76.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 60.
[24] Ibid., 60.
[25] *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.3.30.

Beginningless *Karman* as *Avidyā*

From the above, it is clear that neither the soul *(ātman)*, the knower, nor consciousness, by itself, can be the seat of *avidyā.* In his commentary on *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 1.22.55–57, Rāmānuja describes *avidyā* thus:

> [The self], which forms the glory of that [Brahman], is said to exist in its own essential nature, and also in the form of the *kṣetrajña* owing to its association with non-intelligent matter; and, it is laid down that in the condition of the *kṣetrajña* it [viz., the self] is veiled by the *avidyā* which is of the nature of meritorious and sinful actions, and that it has, in consequence, no unbroken remembrance of its own natural condition as intelligence, but continuously thinks [of itself] as existing in the form of things which possess a non-intelligent nature.[27]

The scriptural passage refers to the three powers of Viṣṇu: (i) *Viṣṇu-śakti,* which is the highest power; (ii) *kṣetrajña-śakti,* which is a lower power, and finally, (iii) a third power, named *avidyā* and *karman*, "by which ... the all-pervading power known as the *kṣetrajña* is completely enveloped."[28] On account of this third power, the *kṣetrajña* is deemed unworthy as a point of focus for meditation because it is now connected with the three undesirable

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[26] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 65.
[27] Ibid., 98.
[28] Ibid., 97.

bhāvanas.[29] In thinking of itself as the *ahaṃkāra*, the material principle of egoity, which is one of the modifications of *prakṛti,* the consciousness views the body as the self.[30]

The notion that *avidyā* or *karman* constitutes a power of Viṣṇu—no matter how lowly—could have serious ramifications for Rāmānuja's concept of supreme being. Clearly, Rāmānuja was not unaware that citing a text that identified *karman /avidyā* as a power of Viṣṇu would implicate the latter as causing misery to the embodied soul and make him responsible for the soul's state of ignorance, hence for its engagement with evil. At the same time, Rāmānuja had to attempt to explain what was meant by such a scriptural text. In the context of the discussion, it is clear that Rāmānuja wishes to draw a distinction between the objects worthy of meditation by the *yogins.* It is only the first power that is worthy of meditation; the second two are not. The *kṣetrajña*, which is the embodied state of the supreme being, is not worthy as an object of meditation, because its purity is not uncaused; it establishes its purity through its meditation, having first been enveloped by ignorance *(avidyā)* in the state of *saṃsāra*. The bonded self is not a suitable object of meditation either, because it is enveloped by *karman* in the form of *avidyā* that leads it to the ignorance caused by the three *bhāvanas.*[31] This is one key point that Rāmānuja seeks to establish.

Another issue that Rāmānuja seeks to address in the context of this discussion concerns the manner in which supreme being is to be regarded as the one Reality. He is concerned with addressing the Advaitin stance that only Brahman is real, and nothing else. According to Rāmānuja, the proper query should be: How can Brahman be considered to be the agent for creation, considering that he is bereft of qualities such as *sattva* and others, he is perfect, not subject to *karman*, while some others, who do have qualities such as *sattva*, are not perfect, and are subject to *karman* can perform acts such as origination (that is, some others like Brahmā)?[32] His response is that, unlike the Advaitin, who would respond with the view that in that case it is established that Brahman alone is the highest Reality and everything (and everyone) else is unreal, the truth is that Brahman establishes his power by being great on account of his all-pervasiveness: all is real because all has (i) Brahman as its inner controller *(antaryāmin)*; and (ii) when *karman*, which has the form of ignorance at its root has been caused to disappear completely owing to meditation upon the Highest Brahman, then one becomes non-different from Brahman. It is in this manner that *avidyā* and *karman* are named as being the third power of Viṣṇu, for their removal is made possible by meditation upon him. The removal of *karman*, which has *avidyā* at its root, removes the distinctions god, man, etc. that obtain between beings and make them non-different from him. Hence *avidyā* is not to be construed as establishing that only Brahman is real and the world unreal; rather, it is to be seen as being within Viṣṇu's power to remove. Both *ksetrajña* and *avidyā* are brought into manifestation by the process of creation, that is, of transformation of the two eternal *tattvas*, *cit* and *acit*, from a state of subtle existence to that of gross existence. The process of creation has only made that which was inherent come into manifestation. However, as *antaryāmin* and as the focus of meditation, the second and third powers of Viṣṇu established him as he for whom all else is a mode—and not unreal—and he who alone can cause *karman* and *avidyā* to disappear, thus making beings non-different from him.[33]

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[29] The *bhāvanas* are considered states of mind that fall under the category of *saṃskāras* or innate tendencies. Rangacharya and Aiyangar identify these three *bhāvanas* as the erroneous conceptions that (i) we merely do the work; (ii) we become Brahman; and (iii) we do the work and we become Brahman. See 115, n.3.

[30] Ibid., 76.

[31] Ibid., 99.

In his long discussion on *karman* and *avidyā*, Rāmānuja takes issue with several Advaitin notions. The Advaitavādins claim, according to Rāmānuja, that *avidyā* is "not capable of being described either as an entity or as a non entity, [it] is altogether difficult of definition."[34] Further, they claim that Brahman is without attributes, the soul is pure consciousness and the two are identical, as declared in the ***mahāvākya, tat tvam asi.*** The entire phenomenal world is the result of divine *māyā* (magic, hence the world is illusory), whereby the soul is led to believe that it has differentiation and that the supreme being has attributes. Indeed, it "is the result of the superimposition of error on an attributeless and self-luminous thing. And that error is ... the cause of those varied and wonderful illusory projections that conceal the true nature of things."[35] Through knowledge *(jñāna)*, it will become clear to the soul that all differentiations arise as the result of illusion and that, in reality, it is non-different from Brahman.

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[32] Paraphrase of *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Karmarkar, 112.
[33] For this see *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Karmarkar, 112ff.
[34] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 70.

Rāmānuja spends almost his entire discussion disputing these views in an attempt to show that they are both illogical and contrary to the teachings of scripture. He explains that there can be no entity or thing that is neither an entity nor a non-entity.[36] The abode of such an *avidyā* cannot be defined, and therefore, it can not exist as an entity.[37] If it were an entity that screens Brahman, then it could not be destructible by knowledge, since knowledge cannot destroy an entity, for knowledge can only destroy antecedent non-knowledge.[38] The illustrative example in this case is that if the lining in the oyster shell is considered to be silver, that is so because silver and the mother-of-pearl bear a certain resemblance. It is only when additional factors are seen to be present, that is, more attributes, that it is ascertained that the thing is not silver but is in fact mother-of-pearl.[39] Now, since the Brahman of the Advaitavādins is without attributes, then what is it of him that is hidden by *avidyā* (which is understood as the non-perception of some attributes, as in the illustrative example)?[40] Since this *avidyā* is by nature indistinct, then there can be no perception of it, for in order to perceive something, it must have attributes.[41]

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[35] Ibid., 119.
[36] Ibid., 124ff.
[37] Ibid., 132.
[38] Ibid., 134–135.
[39] Ibid., 137–139, 141.
[40] Ibid., 131–132.
[41] Ibid., 137.

Rāmānuja then shows that Brahman has attributes and cannot be the source of *avidyā* through his *māyā*, which does not denote unreality in all cases but also refers to weapons—that are wondrously created—in one scriptural context. In fact, *prakṛti* is also called *māyā* because it has the power of creating wonderful things. Therefore, *māyā* may also be understood as a magical power that can produce wonderful things.[42] Moreover, souls are distinct from one another, and in their essential, non-bound states exist as eternally separate from Brahman but in an eternal relationship with him as his body.[43] It is in this way that the *mahāvākya* must be understood, not that the soul and Brahman become identical through the dissolution of the soul into Brahman. Neither is the soul the seat of ignorance, for if it were, then no knowledge would be capable of destroying it, for it would have to be a kind of ignorance that could not be destroyed by the soul's knowledge of its true nature (which the Advaitavādins claim it is).[44] Further, the phenomenal world is not an illusion but very much real, as it is the creation of Brahman. Indeed, all experiences in this world are real, whether they occur in the waking state, the dream state or in the state of deep sleep. An erroneous perception, too, does not need to be attributed to the kind of ignorance or *avidyā* the Advaitavādins proclaim since it can be stultified by later experiences (as when the snake is identified, in fact, to be a rope) or when the obscuring cause is removed (as jaundice in the eye that causes things to appear yellow in colour), or by experience that is common to all and shown to be the truth in cases where to a certain few something else is experienced (as when persons suffering from a certain condition of the eye observe there to be two moons when common experience affirms that there is only one).[45] When the scriptures refer to the phenomenal world as unreal, what they really mean is that material and non-sentient entities are capable of destruction since they are the substratum of transformation, and not that they are an illusion.[46] Finally, how can *avidyā* be said to be removable by knowledge if it veils Brahman, for who is there that would be powerful enough to do so? If it be argued that knowledge of Brahman as pure, attributeless intelligence is what will remove *avidyā*, then it may be counter-argued that this same knowledge in fact reveals Brahman to be luminous, that is, intelligible (and hence with attributes). To argue that the knowledge of Brahman that reveals at one and the same time that he is both attributeless and with attributes is contradictory, and hence cannot be considered effective in removing the kind of ignorance the Advaitavādins hold.[47]

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[42] Ibid., 148–149.
[43] Ibid., 153; 161–163.
[44] Ibid., 127–128.
[45] Ibid., 141–146.

It is outside the scope of this study to investigate in full Rāmānuja's arguments against the Advaitavādin position, interesting though they are. Suffice it here to note that in his discussion on *karman* and *avidyā*, Rāmānuja once more lays bare the essential elements of his thought, as described in previous chapters. Because so much of his discussion is taken up with combatting the Advaitavādin position, it is difficult to pin down Rāmānuja's own position regarding *karman* and *avidyā*. The points that emerge are as follows: (i) the beginningless *karman* that accompanies the soul in its subtle state is what determines the kind of body that will be conjoined to a particular soul; (ii) having been conjoined with that body, the range of the soul's consciousness is altered to correspond with the body it inhabits (hence the consciousness, "I am a god; I am a man"); (iii) the *jīvātman* forgets its eternal, blissful, omniscient state, erroneously supposing that the *ahaṃkāra*, or material principle of egoity, is the self; (iii) this erroneous supposition leads the *jīvātman* to perceive distinctions between gods, humans, animals and inanimate beings; (iv) consequently, the *jīvātman* engages in actions that further its *karmic* store, thereby keeping it bound to the realm of *saṃsāra* in which it experiences both the consequences of its residual *karman* and the consequences of newly-created *karman*. Nowhere is this erroneous supposition, termed

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[46] Ibid., 152.
[47] Ibid., 120–121.

avidyā or ignorance by Rāmānuja, admitted to be the undefinable, indistinct entity (or non-entity) that the Advaitavādins say it is.

Rather, it appears that for Rāmānuja, *avidyā* is simply that which is accepted by all being ignorance: the antecedent non-existence of knowledge of a thing.[48] He argues that, in fact, the ignorance admitted to by the Advaitavādins "is never realized as it is in itself, but is merely realized as that which is not knowledge."[49] There really is no need to put forward the notion of ignorance as a positive entity because, like darkness, there is no need of light in order to prove the true nature of darkness. However, if darkness has to be proved as that which is the same as the opposite of light, then the knowledge of light is needed.[50] Rāmānuja appears to be saying here that just as darkness is merely the state of the antecedent non-existence of light so, too, ignorance is merely the antecedent non-existence of knowledge. He states this in another way:

> Ignorance, otherwise called *karma*, forms, in regard to the individual self which is of the nature of intelligence, the cause of the various kinds of distinctions, such as gods, etc., and when it is totally destroyed by means of the meditation of the Highest Brahman, then who is there that will perceive, between the individual self and the Highest Brahman, the distinction that consists in having the forms of gods, etc., which, owing to the non-existence of the cause thereof, has itself become non-existent?[51]

Ignorance (darkness) is antecedent non-existence of knowledge (absence of light), as a result of which distinctions such as prevail between gods, humans and so forth are maintained. When the cause of darkness, that is, absence of light is removed, by introducing light, then the darkness is removed. Similarly, when the cause of ignorance, that is, absence of knowledge is removed, by meditation on Brahman, then the ignorance (that there are distinctions between gods, humans and so forth) is removed.

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[48] Ibid., 128.
[49] Ibid., 128.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 117–118.

Karman, then, is simply identified as the cause of differentiation between different kinds of embodied beings (viz. gods, humans, animals and so forth), while *avidyā* is that which maintains these distinctions. Once, however, the soul comes to know its proper state, it will realize that all sentient bodies are associated with a soul, an *ātman*, that is distinct from other selves but not different from them in its state of eternal bliss and omniscience. For this reason, the wise look upon all living beings alike, for they are aware of the true nature of the soul within and recognize that the differentiations between gods, humans and so forth are merely what are perceived as reality by the contracted consciousness of the *jīvātman*. Further, awareness of the true nature of the self will lead to the realization also that the soul itself is the mode of Brahman; that it is, in relation to Brahman, the body, and that Brahman is like soul to it. Here, it may be reiterated that for Rāmānuja, the body is considered to be that which is subservient to the soul and for whose purpose it exists. In all of this, however, Rāmānuja holds firmly to the notion that the phenomenal world and the experiences it affords are not unreal; rather, they are made possible by Brahman in order that souls may experience their *karman*, whether they are awake, dreaming, or in the state of deep sleep.

What, then, is *avidyā*? Rāmānuja identifies it as "the cause of the various kinds of distinctions, such as gods, etc."[52] It does not reside in the individual self, "because the selfhood [of the individual self] is itself projected by *avidyā*".[53] Rāmānuja's statements indicate time and again that *avidyā* is the cause of bondage to *saṃsāra*, and as has been explored above, this appears to mean only that the erroneous identification of the consciousness with the *ahaṃkāra* blinds the *jīvātman* from knowing that it is really the *ātman* and not the being that is embodied and says "I am Devadatta". This is not to say, of course, that Rāmānuja holds that Devadatta does not experience himself to be real, for he is. It only means that he, Devadatta, who experiences misery and joy, is, in reality—once he has freed himself from *karman* both past and present—the *ātman*, Devadatta, who should by all rights be experiencing bliss, one of the characteristics of the proper form of his soul. Moreover, as *ātman*, he is non-different from Brahman in that he is the body of Brahman.

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[52] Ibid., 118.
[53] Ibid., 120.

Karman and *Līlā*

Since nowhere does Rāmānuja explain the origin of *karman*—which is of the form of *avidyā*—, it may be extrapolated that what is termed "beginningless *karman*" for the current cycle is the residue that is left from the good and evil actions of the embodied soul *(jīvātman)* when the phenomenal universe was destroyed in a previous cycle. When Brahman decides, out of his sport, to re-create the world of name and form, this *karmic* residue, which accompanies the soul in its subtle state,[54] determines the type of body the soul enters in order to become embodied. It can only be a matter of speculation here that, in comparison with theologies of some other religions, since there is no notion of a primordial fall from grace, beginningless *karman* is the unknowable explanation for how souls came to have this *karmic* residue in the first place. This does not explain it, but merely identifies it as something that is beyond the reach of humans to explain.

For the current cycle, however, the reason given in the scripture for the soul's embodiment is the supreme's desire to be many, for the sake of his own sport *(līlā)*. This naturally leads us to ask whether *saṃsāra* is the outcome of divine *līlā*. Traditionally, *līlā* has been understood in the sense of a child's playfulness, that is, it is undertaken with no consequence in mind and no goal to achieve, that is, without a motive of gain or loss. In this respect, *līlā* is diametrically opposed to *karman*, as pointed out by van Buitenen, who explains that *līlā* "contains a free action ... performed to no purpose ... that of necessity would result in new

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[54] *Śrībhāṣya*, 1.4.27, in Karmarkar, 548; also 2.1.35 on 641.

phalas (fruits) for the agent to enjoy or suffer."[55] From the human point of view, however, it must be asked what the whole point of *līlā* is.

Rāmānuja specifies that *saṃsāra* "consists in the origination, subsistence and dissolution of the phenomenal world."[56] Why would the supreme being, known for his loving mercy, subject creatures to the experience of *saṃsāra* merely for the sake of his sport? In his commentary to *Gītā* 8:3, Rāmānuja states that both *akṣara*[57] and *adhyātmā*[58] have to be known by the seekers of *mokṣa (mumukṣu)*, and that *karman* is only that act of emission which results in the final state of embodiment during creation. This would imply that karman and the resulting *avidyā* that binds souls to the state of *saṃsāra* is simply a by-product of the act of creation or bringing the phenomenal world into a state of manifestation from its previously unconnected and subtle states. As mentioned previously, Rāmānuja makes clear that in his view individual souls are "as such essentially uncontracted *(asaṃkucita)*, unlimited and perfect knowledge." However, he notes:

> But they are enveloped by ignorance in the form of karman. So they are subject to contraction of knowledge proportionate to their *karman*, and they enter into bodies of various kinds and classes, from Brahmā to tuft of grass. Their range of knowledge is now confined to that which their various bodies encompass. So these souls are led to identify themselves with their various bodies and to perform acts that follow from this identification. Consequently they enter the continuous surge of *saṃsāra*, in this form that they experience the pleasure and pain correlated with these acts.[59]

Thus, when the soul enters into matter, that is, into an embodied state, its knowledge, which is one of its characteristic properties, contracts due to the limitations of that bodily state. This leads it to make the erroneous identification that the soul is its body, whether this body is one of god, human, or other sentient creature.[60] Further, it begins to distinguish between gods, humans, animals and inanimate things. As a result, it begins to act accordingly and remains bound in *saṃsāric* existence.[61] In sum, as soon as the soul enters a body—which is specified according to the soul's *karmic* legacy—it believes, through its mistaken notion *(abhimāna)* that it is identifiable with its body and therefore, in forgetting both its true nature as the body existing for the sake of the Lord, begins to pursue sensory pleasures that lead to the accumulation of good and evil *karman*.

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[55] In *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, van Buitenen, 192, n. 83.
[56] In *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #6, in van Buitenen, 187.
[57] "That which is not subject to decay, and is the collective name for *kśetrajñas*, that is, souls." Govindācharya, *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā*, 264.
[58] "Signifies nature=matter", worthy of rejection. Govindācharya, *Śrī Bhagavad Gītā*, 264.
[59] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* # 78, in van Buitenen, 237.

The body, indeed, is that which is the field of experience for the *ātman*; through the body, the *jīvātman* experiences the fruit of its *karman*, past and present, in the form of joy and suffering. Experiencing pleasure and pain are ways in which *karmic* residue is used up. However, the *jīvātman*, through its present acts, continues to fuel the stock of *karman*, thereby building up a further store that has to be experienced. Two points need to be made here. Firstly, the particular body that the soul enters is determined by its *karmic* legacy. Therefore, if it had a surfeit of good *karman*, it may end up as a god. If it had a preponderance of good over bad, then it may end up in a good Brāhmaṇa-womb. If it had too much bad *karman*, it may end up either in a Cāṇḍāla-womb or an animal-womb.[62] Whatever body it becomes associated with, the soul's consciousness is altered so that its range is limited to that body. That is, the material principle of egoity, which comes with that body, leads the consciousness to present to the knower—the *jīvātman*—the knowledge that "I am a god", "I am a Brāhmaṇa", "I am a Cāṇḍāla" and so forth. Instead of considering the *ātman* to be its true self, the *jīvātman* receives data that leads it to suppose that the *ahaṃkāra* is its true self. Secondly, the *jīvātman* is now, by virtue of possessing a certain body, subject to certain innate tendencies within that body. These are the three tendencies or *guṇas* that are associated with *prakṛti*—*sattva, rajas* and *tamas*, which may be loosely translated as tendencies to goodness *(sattva)*, to passion-driven action *(rajas)*, and to dullness and inertia *(tamas*, lit. "darkness").

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[60] Ibid, 215.
[61] Ibid., 237.
[62] *Śrībhāṣya* 3.1.8, in Karmarkar, 785.

A predisposition toward a certain tendency, however, need not bind an embodied being. We may suggest that in itself, entrance into a material form is not necessarily the cause of bondage even if the pull is rather strong. Rather, it is in the choice the soul makes to act in certain ways—viz., to engage in good or evil *karma*, action—that leads it to replenish its stock of *karman* and thereby continually experience *saṃsāra* through repeated births. And since it is at this juncture that the question of moral choice arises, it is still possible for all evil to be kept away from the supreme being, whose role is to put the two, matter and spirit, together, but not to determine how each soul would choose to act (even though, as discussed in the previous chapter, "permission" is granted to the soul to act). It was perhaps as part of Brahman's *līlā* or sport that he wanted to see what souls would choose to do under embodied conditions. That is, they could have simply chosen to commit good acts until they evolved through all the stages from tufts of grass to human—or *deva* (god)—until they attained liberation (possible through several means, as we shall see later, but still dependent, nonetheless, on divine grace, in Rāmānuja's view). Or, they could choose to commit evil acts and sink through all the various levels of being, say from having been born a Brāhmaṇa male to end up as a tuft of grass. In either case, the binding through *karma*—that is, acts—would occur, unless the soul was shown the means to break the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Assuming that the soul has free will, Brahman's *līlā* or sport could have simply consisted of experimenting with the entire process of giving souls material form to see whether any souls would actually choose to return to the original abode of Brahman-accompaniment, so as to enjoy with Him the bliss of having attained its own true form, that "is inseparable from the supreme Brahman," such that it "experiences Brahman thus: 'I am Brahman.'"[63]

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[63] *Śrībhāṣya* 4.4.4, in Karmarkar, 482.

However, there is a problem here. The free will of the soul is acknowledged, albeit with the permission of the Lord. However, the very process of the embodiment of the soul in order to bring the phenomenal world into being, that is, that world created for the soul's enjoyment, necessitates the contraction of the soul's consciousness such that it identifies itself with the body it inhabits. Under such circumstance, how could the soul be expected to behave in a manner that would return it to its blissful state? If creating the world was simply a means whereby Brahman—out of *līlā*—could afford the *ātman* an instrument—the body—through which to settle the score on pre-existent *karman*, then the creation of the world would have indeed been a boon to the *jīvātman*. It would have given the *jīvātman* the ability to experience the joy and suffering that would burn up this *karmic* residue. However, the opportunity of gaining access to a body also meant that the *jīvātman*—through the exercise of free will—was given the possibility of creating new *karman*, by virtue of its good and evil deeds. In this respect, although the initial creation of the world could be viewed as a boon to the *jīvātman*—in that it afforded the latter the possibility of destroying its *karmic* residue—the sustaining of that creation meant that the boon created the possibility of furthering the misery of the *jīvātman* through the buildup of more *karman*. The free will of the soul, however, is an encumbrance as it is unaccompanied by the knowledge of its true nature since embodiment results in its forgetting its original state. In such a view, Brahman may directly be implicated in creating the conditions for misery and evil to flourish. Since Brahman is himself free of all evil, it is also antithetical for a being of his supremely auspicious proportions to be implicated in this manner. It may be argued, therefore, that Brahman himself must, in some way, communicate to the *jīvātman* that there is a way to end the production of karman and to speed up its destruction, in order that the *jīvātman* may come to experience the bliss that is its natural state. Rāmānuja conceives of this "reaching out" in several ways: (i) the existence of scripture, that gives the qualified *jīvātman* access to knowledge of the supreme being, whereby it will be freed from the bonds of *saṃsāra* for once and for all; (ii) the entrance of Brahman into each individual as their inner ruler or *antaryāmin*, thereby directing the soul from within, and, (iii) as *avatāra*, directly perceptible to human sight, and in order to teach that he, as supreme being, is himself the means for attaining *mokṣa* or liberation from the cycle of *saṃsāra*.

The Forms of Divine Assistance

It is clear that for Rāmānuja, "by no means of knowledge can there be the establishment of the thing which is devoid of attributes."[64] The implications of this are clear: for an object to be perceptible by whatever means, it must have attributes; it cannot be an indeterminate thing or something devoid of attributes. Indeed, to be so, it would be unknowable.

This, however, poses the problem that if the supreme being is knowable, then does it still retain its omnipotency and omniscience and uniqueness? For Rāmānuja, the supreme being's uniqueness and omnipotency are retained. Omniscience, however, is shared with the released *ātman*. The *mukta–jīva* is capable of having Brahman as its object, because its range of perception allows it to witness it. However, it does not share the supreme's being control over the phenomenal world, thereby safeguarding the uniqueness of the supreme being.

The omniscience of the released soul, however, is a far cry from what falls within the range of the *saṃsāra*-bound soul's knowledge. The *jīvātman* exists, according to Rāmānuja, "owing to its past actions *[karman]*, in a contracted condition, varying in degree in accordance with the nature of those particular actions; and that [state] is regulated by means of the senses."[65] As a result, the soul's consciousness mistakenly accepts the *ahaṃkāra* to be the self. The *ahaṃkāra* perceives itself to be the doer[66] [and the knower]. The *ahaṃkāra*, however, cannot be the knower, since it is rooted in matter and cannot illuminate other things, as shown above, nor can it reveal the self to itself. However, in this contracted state, knowledge is gleaned through the passageway of the senses.[67] Sensual perception, however, is accompanied by the desire to enjoy, brought about by the *vāsanas* or predilections, impressions, left by previous *karman.* Hate or aversion, too, is generated when there is an obstruction to the object desired.[68] Hence, the binding of *karman* on the *jīvātman* results in making that knowledge which is attained through perception *(pratyakṣa)* via the senses and through inference *(anumāna)* suspect in that neither can reveal, unaided, the truth about Brahman, the supreme being. That is not to say that knowledge attained through sense-perception and inference is not real, for it is consonant with reality as it is in the phenomenal world of name and form. However, within this phenomenal world, the range of sense-perception and inference does not extend to things that are beyond the senses. Brahman is one such entity (the other being the *ātman)* and cannot be established through any means of proof such as perception (or inference)[69], since the working of the senses are dependent upon matter *(prakṛti).* Because the supreme being is without a material body—that is, a *guṇa*-bound body that is perceptible to the material senses—he cannot be seen to act: indeed, his actions are not actions in the sense of karmic fruit-producing action. Therefore, since he is bodiless and cannot be seen to perform any actions, it is impossible to infer—from lack of sense-derived data—that he exists, or that he is such and such.[70] True, some inferences can be made; however, these inferences are far too disparate and too dependent on *karmic* knowledge to be established as truthful. For instance, one might, drawing an analogy with the creation of things by Brahmā or others who have enhanced their *sattvic* component, be tempted to say that therefore, the creation of the world is out of

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[64] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 45.

[65] Ibid., 65–66.

[66] See *Gītābhāṣya* 3:27: "the man who is blinded by *ahaṃkāra* fancies that he is the doer" in Govindāchārya, 112.

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[67] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 66. See also *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #21, in van Buitenen, 197, which describes the supreme being as "beyond the empirical means of knowledge *(pratyakṣādyaparicchedya).*"

[68] *Gītābhāṣya* 3:33, in Govindāchārya, 120.

[69] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.3, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 202.

[70] Ibid., 211–215.

sattva.[71] Clearly, scripture establishes that this is not true, for the supreme being is not bound by any of the predispositions of matter—such as *sattva*—when he acts. The only true source of knowledge about the supreme being, then, is scripture, since scripture is *apauruṣeya*, that is, non-human in origin.[72]

In the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, Rāmānuja declares:

> In truth, all declarations of the Vedānta are meant to set forth the knowledge of the proper form and nature *(svarūpa)* of the individual soul which are different from the body; the proper form and nature of the Supreme Spirit who is the Inner Ruler *(antaryāmin)* of the soul; the worship of the Supreme Spirit; and the apprehension of Brahman as perfect boundless bliss which presupposes the revelation of the proper form of the soul that results from the worship of the Supreme Spirit. By setting forth all this the declarations of the Vedānta serve to remove the danger of rebirth which is inevitable since it results from the misconception *(abhimāna)* of the individual soul that it is identical with that one of the four types of bodies—sc. gods, from Brahmā onwards,—men—animals—inanimate beings—, into which it has entered by the impulsion of the continuous flow of good or evil *karman* amassed during ageless ignorance.[73]

Rāmānuja indicates here that scripture actually provides information about two entities, both of which are beyond the reach of sense-derived means of knowledge: viz., the proper form of the soul; the proper form of the inner ruler. This is a very important point to be made, for it is clear that the *jīvātman* must awaken to its true nature, that it is an eternal, blissful, omniscient, *ātman* in order to know what the ātman knows: that its own *ātman* is the supreme being, the inner ruler, to whom it is as a body. Scripture identifies the fundamental error of the *jīvātman*, that is, it identifies the body with the self, and points the way out of that error: worship of the supreme spirit, apprehended as perfect boundless bliss.

The inner ruler is defined thus:

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[71] Ibid.

[72] For a discussion of this, see van Buitenen's introduction to the *Vedārthsaṃgraha*, 50ff, and Chapter 1 above.

[73] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #4, in van Buitenen, 184–185.

> He is the sole cause of the cessation of *saṃsāra*, which itself consists in the origination, subsistence and dissolution of the phenomenal world *(prapañca)* constituted by the above spiritual and non-spiritual entities. His proper form is therefore distinct from all entities other than Himself, since He is absolutely opposed to all evil and comprises solely infinite perfection. His beautiful qualities are immeasurable, perfect and innumerable. He is known in the entire Veda under the various designations of Soul of all *(sarvātmā)*, the Supreme Brahman *(parabrahma)*, Supreme Glory *(parajyotiḥ)*, Supreme Principle *(paratattva)*, Supreme Spirit *(paramātmā)*, Real Being *(sat)*, etc.,—all of which denote the Venerable Lord *(Bhagavān)* Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme Person *(puruṣottama)*. The śrutis are meant to set forth his manifestation *(vaibhava)*, so they expound the universal dominion of the Supreme Spirit as the inner Soul of the totality of spiritual and non-spiritual entities by expression like His power *(śakti)*, His portion *(aṃśa)*, His manifestation *(vibhūti)*, His form *(rūpa)*, His body *(śarīra)*, His shape *(tanu)*, etc., and by *sāmānādhikaraṇya* constructions.[74]

In the commentary to the opening verse of the *Brahma Sūtras* in his *Śrībhāṣya*, Rāmānuja states: "He [the Lord] alone is fit to be desired to be known for [the acquisition of] immortality by those [that are] afflicted by the triad of torments."[75] However, he adds, an inquiry into the knowledge of Brahman—by those qualified to do so—must necessarily be preceded by the knowledge of the work-portion of the Vedas, that is, the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā. He adds:

> A Brāhmaṇa, i.e. one who is devoted to the study of the Vedas, having examined, scrutinized, with the help of the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā, the true nature of work, and coming to know that the results of work are ephemeral and therefore work cannot help him to attain the eternal supreme Person, gets dispassionate, and to know that supreme Person, he approaches a *guru* in all humility. It is the knowledge of the ephemeral nature of the results of work that necessitates an inquiry into Brahman.[76]

Here, then, for Rāmānuja works *(karma)*, and the recognition that the consequences or fruits of work are ephemeral, are a necessary prerequisite to the liberating knowledge of Brahman. We may add that Rāmānuja here holds the view that *jñāna*, or more specifically, meditation on Brahman, that is, *Brahmavidyā*, is an essential task for a member of the Brāhmaṇa caste.

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[74] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #6, in van Buitenen, 187.
[75] *Śrībhāṣya*, 1.1.1, in Karmarkar, 3.
[76] Ibid., in Vireswarananda, 2.

Here we may note that (i) the study of the Vedas is essential, and that study of the work-portion of the Vedas is preparatory for the study of the portions dealing with knowledge of Brahman, that is, the Uttara Mīmāṃsā, and (ii) that an enquiry into Brahman can only be taken up after the recognition that the results of works are ephemeral, and finally, (iii) that to attain the knowledge of Brahman, the teachings of a *guru* must be sought.

The purpose of the enquiry into Brahman, however, is twofold. Firstly, it is taken up "in order to make his [that is, the Brāhmaṇa's] knowledge precise and beyond doubt and also to preclude all wrong notions ... ."[77] Secondly, if knowledge is to be construed as meaning "the sense of Vedic texts as conveyed by the sentences,"[78] then such knowledge will not lead to liberation. Rather, it is that knowledge "which is different from the knowledge of the syntactical meaning of sentences, and is imported by words such as *dhyāna* (meditation), *upāsanā* (worship), etc., is what it is desired to enjoin by means of Vedāntic passages."[79] This is because the *vāsanās*—the innate impression of distinctions left by ageless *karman* are so strong that they cannot simply be removed by a (weak) mental conception *(bhāvanā)* that is hostile to distinctions (as formed by a mere syntactical understanding).[80] Rather, Rāmānuja asserts, the strength of that knowledge conveyed by words such as *dhyāna* (meditation) and *upāsanā* (worship) is what will lead to liberation. Citing the Vākyakārin (i.e., Ṭaṇka): "*Vedanā* (or knowledge) is *upāsanā* (or worship)", Rāmānuja concludes: "the *vedanā* which is enjoined in all the Upanishads, as the means of attaining final release, is *upāsanā*."[81] Further, *upāsanā* has the character of firm memory, which is the same as seeing, "and to possess the nature of seeing is the same as to have the character of direct perception."[82]

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[77] Ibid., 3.
[78] Ibid., 5.
[79] Ibid., in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 13.
[80] Ibid., 13.
[81] Ibid., 15–16.
[82] Ibid., 16.

For firm memory to be established, the Vākyakārin outlines that it results from *viveka* (discrimination), *vimoka* (freedom), *abhyāsa* (practice), *kriyā* (works or ritual actions), *kalyāṇa* (auspiciousness), *anāsāda* (absence of weakness), and *anuddharṣa* (absence of excessive merriment). After detailing these through scriptural references, Rāmānuja draws the conclusion: "to him, who is thus given to observe scriptural regulations, the genesis of knowledge comes altogether through the performance of works enjoined in connection with the *āśramas*."[83] In his interpretation of *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad* II[84] Rāmānuja glosses the word *avidyā* to mean "the work which is enjoined in connection with the castes and the *āśramas*"[85] It is necessary for him to gloss *avidyā* thus (rather than as ignorance) in order to reinforce his point that the duties of caste and stage in life are essential in order to destroy past *karman*, that is, in order to put a stop to the consequences of past *karman*. His view is that regardless of whether past *karman* have the form of evil or meritorious deeds, they have the similar effect of obstructing the origination of knowledge of Brahman because they increase *rajas* and *tamas*, two of the *guṇas* associated with matter. It is only when sattva, the third *guṇa* is increased—through stopping the consequences of previous karman—that the knowledge requisite for *mokṣa* is allowed to come into being. Further, engagement in works prescribed for caste and stage in life *(varṇāśramadharma)* must be undertaken without desire for fruit, for fruits, whatever they may be, are only transitory in nature. Rāmānuja cannot underscore the importance of *varṇāśramadharma* enough; indeed, for him, it forms the basis of all *vidyā*, that is, of all meditations on Brahman.[86]

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[83] Ibid., 19.

[84] *Vidyām cāvidyam ca yas tad vedobhayam saha avidyayā mṛtyum tīrtvā vidyayāmṛtam aśnute:* He who knows both *vidyā* and *avidyā* together, first destroys by means of [present] *avidyā* the effects of the past avidyā which is obstructive to the genesis of knowledge and then attains ambrosia [=Brahman]. R.'s gloss: *avidyā* = work enjoined in connections with castes and stages of life; *avidyayā* = means of work; *mṛtyum* (death) = effects of the past work which is obstructive to the genesis of knowledge; *tīrtvā* = having destroyed; *vidyayā* = by means of the knowledge (of Brahman); *amṛtam* denotes Brahman; and *aśnute* = he attains. See ibid., 19.

[85] Ibid., 19.

[86] Ibid., 20–21.

> such *vedana* as is of the form of meditation, and is practised every day, and acquires increased excellence through repeated practice, and is continued up to the time of departure from this life, is of itself the means of attaining the Brahman; for the production of that *[vedana]*, all the works appertaining to the *āśramas* have to be gone through as long as life lasts.[87]

Citing the authority of Parāśara, Rāmānuja cautions that those who merely follow *varṇāśramadharma* only attain Brahmaloka, implying that once their accumulated merit is used up, they will return to embodied existence for yet another round in *saṃsāra*.[88] This having been said, Rāmānuja stresses throughout his discussion on the *vidyā* section in the *Śrībhāṣya* the importance of meditations on Brahman. Since there are many different meditations in the different recensions of the scriptural texts, including differences in format, goals to be attained, attributes to be meditated upon, and details mentioned, the question is posed whether all *vidyās* are the same or not, since all the *Brahmavidyās* have salvation as their goal. Rāmānuja comes to the conclusion that they are all different, even though the words to know and to worship and so forth denote repetitive meditation and the meditations refer to Brahman alone. The distinction between the *vidyās* lies in this:

> And all the *Vidyās* have for their fruit the acquisition of Brahman through eradicating the beginningless *Karman* and *Avidyā* opposed to Brahman-realisation; and so there is option itself in the case of all these, owing to their fruit being an unqualified one. But the *Vidyās* having the fruit other than the acquisition of Brahman, like the sacrificial rites having for their fruit heaven etc., may be taken optionally or combined in accordance with one's will, because they have a limited fruit, there cannot be the expectation of abundance.[89]

The significance of this lies in the fact that when Brahman-realization is the aim, any one of the *vidyās* with that specified aim will do. However, since many of the *vidyās* contain instructions for actions to be carried out for the sake of acquiring heaven and so forth, then, in that case, since the fruit is limited, it is up to the will of the doer in determining whether they should be carried out or not. Works in this respect are auxiliary to the main aim, and *vidyās* that outline meditation on Brahman should never be considered to be subsidiary to those portions of them that specify action. Rather, they supersede action, since their whole intent is to give rise to knowledge of Brahman.

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[87] Ibid., 17.
[88] *Śrībhāṣya* 3.4.19, in Karmarkar, 946.
[89] Ibid., 3.3.57, 925.

Rāmānuja treads carefully here. What he means is that *vidyā* is never subsidiary to the acts enjoined in the *vidyā* portions because liberation is from *vidyā*, that is, the meditation, and not from the performance of acts. Now, this does not mean that acts are to be given up. Rather, their fruit is to be given up. The acts are still to be performed, but without consideration of the fruit they may bring.[90]

With respect to the direct apprehension of Brahman, the question is posed whether this apprehension is to be repeated more than once. Rāmānuja employs this verse to clarify his own views regarding the importance of *vidyā*, that is, repeated meditation on Brahman. Citing a scriptural passage, the opponent declares that apprehension of Brahman occurs only once. In fact, claims the opponent, apprehension is not the means for reaching Brahman but is, along with sacrificial rites, the means of propitiating the highest *puruṣa* who then assures the seeker the four goals *(dharma, artha, kāma* and *mokṣa).* Rāmānuja disagrees with this view, since for him, both *varṇāśramadharma* and *vedana* must be continued to the time of death.[91] *Vedana* is, according to him, a synonym for *dhyāna* (meditation) and *upāsana* (worship):

> And its being a synonym of them is apprehended by the use in the passages instructing the *Vedanā*, of *Vid* (to know), *Upās* (to worship), *Dhyai* (to meditate), referring to one and the same thing. ... *Vedana* is denoted by *Dhyāyati.* And *Dhyāna* is meditation and meditation is of the form of a continuity of remembrance, not merely remembrance. And *Upās* also has the same sense as that, on account of its use being seen to denote the constant nature of the concentrated mental course. So, both having one and the same

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[90] See 3.4.1–10.
[91] See 4.1.12, 986.

> sense, the continuous remembrance repeated more than once is ascertained as being denoted by the words *Vedana* etc.[92]

It is clear that the objector and Rāmānuja mean different things when they talk about apprehension. The objector seems to believe that apprehension means that Brahman is apprehended by the seeker. Rāmānuja is not so clear on this point. It is not immediately evident whether Rāmānuja considers direct perception of Brahman to be possible before death or not, as mentioned in the previous chapter. In any case, that is not the issue here. In the present context, Rāmānuja indicates that by apprehension he understands the particular meditation upon Brahman outlined in any given *vidyā*, and it is this meditative focus that is the apprehension under discussion. Understood in this manner, he states that such meditative "apprehension" must be repeated continually until the time of death. Meditating or hearing the scriptures once is not sufficient. This meditation upon Brahman is such that it is not the mind that is superimposed on Brahman, but the other way around. For the mind, which is non-sentient and of little power, cannot be the resort of the object of worship.[93]

What is the result of *vidyā?* According to Rāmānuja, through *vidyā*—by which it is clear he means both meditation *(dhyāna)* and worship *(upāsana)*, that is, continuous remembrance accompanied by actions undertaken without consideration of fruit—is produced:

> the power to destroy the capacity of producing the fruit of sins done before, and also the power to put forth obstacles in the production of the capacity to produce fruit in the case of sins that are yet to come into being... .[94]

It is, Rāmānuja asserts, *karman*, or, the power that has the capacity to produce the fruit of sins *(pāpa[95])* that leads to non-gratification of the highest *puruṣa.* When this power is destroyed through the destruction of its capacity to produce fruit past and present, then, at the same time, non-gratification of the highest *puruṣa* is destroyed:

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[92] Ibid., 4.1.1, 977–978.

[93] Ibid., 4.1.4, 983.

[94] Ibid., 4.1.13, 989.

[95] Described in 1.1. as both meritorious and evil actions, since both cause the production of fruit (and hence keep the *jīvātman* bound in *saṃsāra*) which obstructs the origination of Brahman-knowledge. See *Śrībhāṣya*, Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 19.

> *Vidyā* being itself unsurpassingly dear to the knower owing to its being exceedingly dear to the object of knowledge, being of the form of the worship of the highest *Puruṣa* who is to be known, destroys non-gratification of the highest *Puruṣa,* caused by the collection of sins done in the past.[96]

This statement appears to imply that removal of *karman* from the scene—through continual remembrance of the highest *puruṣa,* that is, Brahman, renders the devotee dear to the Lord, while itself a proof of the meditator's devotion to the Lord. The removal of *karman* also paves the way for the gratification of the Lord. Before turning to this, however, it is to be noted that Rāmānuja contends that both *vidyā* and the *varṇāśramadharma* must be continued till death, in order to strengthen the *vidyā* and to continue to obstruct the fruits of *karman.* For, there may be *karman* that has already begun to give fruit, and in the case of the wise one *(vidvāt),* the performance of duties is for the sake of *vidyā.*[97] At the time of death, should there be any residue left, then the fruits of the good will go to the friends and relatives of the *vidvāt,* while his enemies will inherit the consequences of any bad residue.[98] His path after death has already been detailed in the previous chapter.

To return now to the connection between the destruction of the capacity of *karman* to exert any influence and the gratification of the highest *puruṣa,* it is clear that, for Rāmānuja, this is the objective of meditation combined with works performed without consideration or desire for fruits. It has already been noted that Rāmānuja considers study of the scripture, regular performance of works associated with caste and stage of life, without consideration of fruits to be attained, and constant meditation (or *vedana,* "knowing") in accordance with the *Brahmavidyās* essential to the attainment of Brahman-knowledge, resulting in *mokṣa.*

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[96] *Śrībhāṣya* 4.1.13, in Karmarkar, 989.
[97] Ibid., 4.1.16, 992.
[98] Ibid., 4.1.19, 995.

However, these are only the things that the *jīvātman* can do. Important and essential though they are, in the final analysis, Rāmānuja makes the case that the highest self, that is, the *puruṣottama*, Brahman, is attained only by that person who is chosen by the Lord. Complementing the utmost in human endeavour must be the grace of the Lord, for without it, all human endeavour is in vain with respect to *mokṣa*, although other benefits may accrue to the effort (such as heaven and so forth).

Who is the person worthy of being chosen by the Lord for this favour?

> It is indeed the dearest one that becomes worthy to be chosen. To whomsoever He is unsurpassingly dear, he alone is the dearest to Him. It is stated by the Lord Himself, in the following manner, that the Lord Himself, of His own accord, so acts as to cause His dearest one to attain Himself—"To those who are desirous of an eternal union with Me, and, accordingly, worship Me, I give with love that faculty of understanding by which they come unto Me."[99] He has also said—"Indeed, I am inexpressibly dear to him who has knowledge of Me, and he is dear to Me."[100] Hence what is said is this—He alone, to whom this memory of the form of direct perception is of itself inexpressibly dear, by reason of the inexpressible dearness of the object of that memory—is fit to be chosen by the Highest Self; and so, by him alone is the Highest Self attainable.[101]

This firm memory, described as "like a continuous stream of oil,"[102] is "denoted by the word *bhakti* (devotion)—because the word *bhakti* is synonymous with *upāsanā* (worship)."[103] Drawing upon the support of both *śruti* and *smṛti* texts for his view, some of which would appear to indicate that bhakti alone will result in vision of the divine and not religious austerity *(tapas)* or giving of gifts *(dāna)* or performance of sacrifice,[104] Rāmānuja is quick to point out that *bhakti* includes all these in its inclusion of *varṇāśramadharma.*[105] Further, he adds, "all duties prescribed for the various stages of life *(āśramas)* have to be observed only for the origination of knowledge" and that through this "all previous sins which obstruct the origination of knowledge are destroyed."[106] This, as has been seen, is essential in removing non-gratification of the supreme person or being.

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[99] *Gītā* 10:10.
[100] Ibid., 7:17.
[101] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 16–17.
[102] Ibid., 6.
[103] Ibid., 17.
[104] For example, *Gītā* 8:22; ibid., 17.
[105] Ibid., 17.

In his Proem to the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Rāmānuja declares the purpose of the text as follows:

> Under the pretext of having to persuade Arjuna to fight, Śrī Kṛṣṇa promulgated the doctrine of *Bhakti-Yoga*—led up to by *Jñāna* and *Karma*—or that Path of Loving-Devotion which is the burthen of all the Vedānta-teaching, and by which He is indicated as The Only Object of Love, and that, loved, He Himself is The Means to lead man to the climax of his ambition, viz. *Moksha* (salvation or the final liberation from all ephemeral and conditioned existences).[107]

Here *jñāna* (knowledge) and *karma* (action) are seen as preparatory toward the final release, *mokṣa*, through *bhakti* (devotion). The three key elements to be noted here are that the Supreme Being is (i) indicated by all the teachings of the Vedānta (ii) to be the only object of devotion *(bhakti)*, whereby (iii) He is Himself the means *(upāya)* to attaining *mokṣa*. We may observe here that the teachings of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* are directed toward a member of the Kṣatriya caste, Arjuna, and that Kṛṣṇa is adamant that *varṇāśramadharma*, that is, the duties enjoined upon each caste, be carried to the fullest, as they are ultimately preparatory for *mokṣa*.[108]

The purpose of the discussion hitherto has been to show how, for Rāmānuja, the notion of attaining Brahman, which includes direct realization of Brahman, knowing the proper form of the *ātman*, and knowing the difference and the identity between the two, resulting in a state of eternal bliss and omniscience for the *ātman* and liberation *(mokṣa)* from the wheel of *saṃsāra*, never to have to enter it again, is consequent upon the destruction of beginningless *karman* in the form of ignorance *(avidyā)*. The discussion also shows that this destruction has two components: human endeavour and divine grace. The human endeavour is such that it affects the very consciousness of the *jīvātman*, for works pertaining to *varṇāśramadharma*—and which involve all the senses in their performance—are understood in the context of *vidyā*, knowledge of Brahman. This knowledge of Brahman is to be prepared for by withdrawing the mind from all sense-perception derived data,[109] through meditation upon the particular attributes of Brahman detailed in the specific *vidyā* being made the focus of undivided attention. Now, the question arises, is not the particular form to be concentrated upon itself posited in sensual terms? The answer is yes, because the *vidyā* details the attributes of Brahman that are to be meditated upon, for example, the divine supernal form in Vaikuṇṭha or the form revealed to Arjuna in the *Gītā*, or the *antaryāmin* and so forth. It is crucial to the understanding of Rāmānuja's epistemology that, for him, no thing is capable of being perceived unless it has attributes. Rāmānuja declares in the proem to his commentary on the *Gītā:*

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[106] Ibid., 7.
[107] See *Gītābhāṣya*, Rāmānuja's Proem, in Govindāchārya, 10.
[108] Ibid. 3:21, in Govindāchārya, 107.

> But He, being the vast Ocean of infinite Mercy and Condescension, Love and Bounty, willed to assume forms similar to those of His creatures, without abandoning His own essential divine nature, and repeatedly made descents as Incarnations in the several spheres. To those by whom He was worshipped, He granted their desires, to wit, any of the four-fold aspirations of man, *dharma, artha, kāma, moksha.* The object of Incarnations is to relieve the earth of its burden, but at the same time no less is the Lord's intention thereof that He should be within reach of even people of our description. To fulfil this purpose, He manifested himself on earth so as to be actually an Object for all men's sights to see, and performed such other wonderful acts as to captivate the hearts and the eyes of all creatures high and low.[110]

However, the distinction to be made here is that the forms of Brahman that are to be meditated upon are derived from a source that is not within the realm of the five external senses—which are *guṇa*-bound, but rather, is to be derived from scripture, a source that is *apauruṣeya* and therefore non-*guṇa*-bound. The words in the scriptures derive their meaning from the referential termination in Brahman, rather than in the form they allude to, which is only the body of Brahman and not Brahman itself, as outlined in the first chapter. Scripture therefore serves as a kind of bridge, which through making accessible to the student knowledge about Brahman, exhorts him to worship, in its widest sense, as understood by Rāmānuja. Through this worship, the effects of *karman* are seared away, leaving the consciousness room to expand so that the *jīvātman* no longer makes the erroneous identification of itself with *ahaṃkāra* and recognizes that the knower, indeed, is *ātman* and that the distinctions god, human, animal and so forth are actually produced by *avidyā.* In meditation, without the distractions of sense-perceived data that continually tempt it to partake of sensual enjoyment, it attains to the right knowledge of itself, preparatory for right knowledge of Brahman. In order to see the object, Brahman—which is not without the attributes necessary for perception to take place—the seeker is graced by the lord with a divine eye, mentioned in *Bhagavad Gītā,* for the human eye is not capable of perceiving that which is beyond the physical sense-organ, the eye. Indeed, one may argue that this divine eye is in actuality the conferring of divine grace upon the devotee, through which the devotee undergoes an epistemological transformation in that it is no longer blinded by the false assumption that it is the same as its body. Then, the truth that was veiled to it becomes unveiled: it can look upon the highest person, the supreme being, in the form that seeker has been preparing himself to see and the Lord is gracious enough to grant.

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[109] *Śrībhāṣya* 4.1.7–10 in Karmarkar, 984–985. See also 1.4.1, 482.
[110] See *Gītābhāṣya*, Rāmānuja's Proem, in Govindāchārya, 8–9.

As alluded to in our discussion above, the final goal of the embodied soul *(jivātman)* is to achieve liberation *(mokṣa)* from the cycle of ephemeral existence *(saṃsāra)* that is characterized by birth, death and rebirth. Having explored the notions of knowledge and ignorance, and the connection between these and liberation *(mokṣa),* we now turn to a brief discussion on various issues regarding salvation in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Salvation: Omniscience and Blissful Fulfilment

The four goals of human pursuit—*dharma, artha, kāma,* and *mokṣa*[1]—are all identified in the scripture as the fruits that can be won through adherance to *varṇāśramadharma,* the duties pertaining to one's caste *(varṇa)* and stage in life *(āśrama).* The four castes comprise the three twice-born castes, viz. the Brāhmaṇa, the Kṣatriya, the Vaiśya, while the fourth, the "once-born", is the Śūdra caste. The four stages in life are identified as that of the student, the *brahmacārin;* that of the householder, the *gṛhaspatin;* that of the forest dweller, the *vānaprasthin,* and finally, that of the renunciator, the *saṃnyāsin.* Duties are enjoined on each of the castes for each of the stages of life, including actions to be performed that are obligatory *(nitya),* occasional *(naimittika)* and fruit-bearing *(kāmya).* The study of the Vedas is restricted to males of the twice-born castes; Śūdras are not eligible to study the Vedas.[2]

According to Rāmānuja, the knowledge contained within the scriptures does not give rise to Brahman (that is, direct knowledge of Brahman) merely through ratiocination *(tarka)* or learning of scriptures. Rather, the role of *tarka* is to support the scriptures. In his introduction or proem to his commentary on the *Gītā,* Rāmānuja iterates his view that once the phenomenal world of name and form is brought into being, Brahman retires into himself and remains incognizant to all, until out of grace the devotee is granted a vision of Brahman, by Brahman. Concommitant with the soul's vision of Brahman is the soul's awareness of its own true nature. Devout meditation *(bhakti* or *upāsana)* predisposes the devotee to receiving the grace of God, through which the devotee may be granted vouchsafed knowledge of Brahman.[3]

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[1] Translated by Lipner as "virtue, wealth, desired objects and liberation", in *The Face of Truth,* 103.

[2] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.3.39, in Karmarkar, 463 on the authority of Manu, 4.80.

[3] Yamunacharya, *Ramanuja's Teachings,* pp. 63–64.

As explored in the previous chapter, *karman* is the net result of the merit and demerit accumulated by each individual soul through its actions in each of its embodied phases. Evil *karman* necessitates a departure from divinely revealed—if not decreed—*varṇāśramadharma*. Here, too, revelation is key in showing the way through which the effects of *karman* can be annulled and the human soul may enter a realm of existence in which it is not bound by the strictures imposed on it by virtue of *karman*. In this respect, *mokṣa*—more closely translated as liberation—spells freedom from the misery of the human condition and requires the grace of the Lord in achieving this freedom.

Thus, freely-chosen human actions that take the form of departure from divinely revealed paths of action in previous existences have for their consequence a less than perfect human existence in the present phenomenal world. The path through which this existence may be remedied is outlined in revelation and calls upon both the effort of the devotee and the grace of the supreme being.

Thus, for Rāmānuja the present condition of humanity is not its true condition. Further, revelation shows the means through which this true condition may be attained; revelation itself is a proof of a supreme being to whom humans are answerable in ethical terms and to whom their devotion should be directed; and finally, this supreme being itself is the means through which humans may attain their true condition.

Strictly speaking, for Rāmānuja, salvation/liberation is achieving the state of *mokṣa*, which is accompanied by the concomitant direct perception of the soul's awareness of itself and of the supreme being by whom it is itself ensouled. This is a state characterized by knowledge of all other *ātmans* and of Brahman; by bliss by virtue of its having its every will realized—save that concerned with the operation of the world—; and by the knowledge that it will never re-enter the realm of *saṃsāra* in a condition that requires the kind of embodiment dictated by *karman*.

The soul may enter that realm for its own enjoyment in a body of its own choosing or one furnished for it by the Lord, but not in a body that affects its consciousness in the manner that the *jīvātman* is so affected. Just as milk cannot be a source of enjoyment for one who is affected by bile (which causes the milk to taste unpleasant), so, too, this world cannot be a source of enjoyment for one who is affected by *karman*. However, when freed from bile, milk becomes a source of happiness for one who drinks it. In a similar fashion, this world, which is the object and the result of Brahman's will, becomes conducive to happiness for the one who has become freed from the *avidyā* caused by *karman*. Such a person is then able to see the world as having Brahman for its soul, and the world as having been created for his sport (that is, enjoyment). Indeed, Brahman is experienced as qualified by his overlordship of the world, which is constituted of unlimited happiness and, therefore, the soul "does not behold anything else beyond that and beholds not misery."[4]

There are two issues to be explored in this chapter that will clarify Rāmānuja's views on salvation. First, given the fact that Śūdras are barred from Vedic study, is salvation possible for them? Second, given the distinction Rāmānuja makes in his commentary on the *Gītā* among three classes of men (to be mentioned below), how is salvation to be attained by these? With respect to other issues, it has already been seen that the question of when salvation is attained is not answered univocally by Rāmānuja: all indications point to the fact that the devotee "goes to the highest light"[5] after physical death, or separation of the soul from the body. It may be argued that during meditation, the soul may leave the body retaining only a slim connection with it. However, the significance of physical death for Rāmānuja may lie in the notion that once having reached the highest lights, there is no return for such a soul, except under conditions that the soul wishes, in a non-*guṇa*-bound body either provided by the Lord or constructed by the soul itself for its own enjoyment. Finally, the fate of those who do not achieve salvation is clear: they return to *saṃsāric* existence repeatedly until they can train their actions to propitiate the grace of the Lord. All these questions have been alluded to in previous chapters; moreover, they have been dealt with in some detail by almost every scholar on Rāmānuja. It is not the intention here to explore these in any great detail; rather, the point to be made here is that although Rāmānuja accepted the strictures of caste and stage in life and scriptural injunctions regarding *varṇāśramadharma*, he sought, at the same time, to give credence to his view that in the long run, salvation was available to all through the Lord's accessibility and grace, provided the seeker engaged in loving devotion of the Lord.

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[4] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.3.7, in Karmarkar, 408.

[5] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.12.3: "Thus, verily, this Saṃprasāda, having risen up from this body, having gone unto the highest Jyotis, he attains to his own form." For R.'s discussion of this, see *Śrībhāṣya* 4.4.1ff.

The Eligibility of Śūdras

In *Śrībhāṣya* 1.3.39, Rāmānuja clearly reiterates that the knowledge enjoined by the Vedānta passages as being the means for mokṣa is of the form of worship *(upāsana).* Further,

> that [worship] too, is the propitiation of the highest *Puruṣa*, that is the Highest Brahman and that too is to be known only from the *Śāstra*; and the *Śāstra* describing the worship accepts as its producing agency, knowledge which is purified by the sacraments like *Upanayana* etc. and produced by the study of one's own Vedic portion, only after being favoured by the means such as discrimination, non-attachment, etc. The *Puruṣottama* propitiated by the worship of this kind, destroying the ignorance produced by *Karman* by the gift of the natural and right knowledge of the *Ātman* frees the worshipper from bondage,—this view ... is quite appropriate in [establishing] the disqualification of Śūdras and others ... .[6]

This is in response to the question that how may a Śūdra, who is not qualified for performing sacrifices, whose responsibility is to serve the three twice-born castes, who has not studied the Vedas or heard the Vedānta, and who is therefore ignorant of the nature of Brahman and how he is to be worshipped—how may such a person worship Brahman?[7]

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[6] Ibid., 1.3.39, 467.
[7] Ibid., 1.3.33, 455.

Rāmānuja's response to this, quite clearly, is that he may not. The Śūdra is rendered incapable of doing so, not because of any inherent inability, but because of his ignorance of the proper methods and formulas that can be acquired only through sustained Vedic study under the guidance of a teacher. This is required in order to carry out sacrifices—which the Śūdra is unauthorized to partake of—and to engage in Vedic recitation as part of the sacrifice. "Therefore, because the knowledge alone, of his [that is, the caste member's] own Vedic portion fixed by the injunction regarding the study, is the means for the worship of Brahman, there is the impossibility in the case of Śūdra of the capacity for the worship of Brahman."[8]

Further, although permission is granted for the Śūdra to hear the Itihāsas and the Purāṇas, the knowledge that may be gleaned from such sources is relevant only for the purposes of the fruit it may bring, viz., the effacement of *karman*, and not for the purpose of worship *(upāsana).*[9] Those mentioned in the scriptures as Śūdras who became devoted to Brahman, such as Vidura and others, were so only because of the knowledge they had secured in other births.[10] Regarding Jānaśruti, who is addressed as a Śūdra and is accepted as a pupil by Raikva only after prior offers of goods have been rejected and finally a beautiful daughter is accepted, Rāmānuja offers the interpretation that the Jānaśruti is called a Śūdra only to indicate the large measure of grief within him at his deficiency with regard to knowledge of the scripture. By resorting to an etymological explanation of the term Śūdra as connoting *ś'uceḥ daśca*, "one who is overwhelmed with grief", he disabuses his audience of the notion that here the term Śūdra refers to a caste appelation.[11] Indeed, the very fact that Jānaśruti was able to offer Raikva large sums of money and goods shows that he was not a Śūdra but a Kṣatriya, since the text in question indicates, for Rāmānuja, that he was the chief of the region in whose villages he gave away much in charity. In this respect, Rāmānuja holds fast to the lawbook author Manu's views regarding Śūdras: that they are neither deserving of the sacramental rites nor are they to hear the Vedas, speak them or handle them; nor should they be taught religious duties or undertake any vows.[12]

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[8] Ibid., 456.
[9] Ibid., 456.
[10] Ibid., 456–457.
[11] Ibid., 457.

This rather rigid position concerning Śūdras—and, by extension, women and outcastes—is in contrast to the position held in the *Gītābhāṣya*, commentary on 11:28–34. In van Buitenen's view, the commentary on the *Gītā* was written later than the *Śrībhāṣya*, and if this be the case, then it is possible that Rāmānuja softened his position somewhat in keeping with the ecumenical nature of the highly popular and much revered *smṛti* text, the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Its importance to Rāmānuja has been noted by the fact that he devoted a full commentary to it, as indeed did the eminent Advaitin Śaṅkara. However, one must not reach this conclusion too quickly without first examining the commentary on the *Gītā*. In the context of the *Gītā* section under discussion, Rāmānuja is at pains to make two points: first, that the devotee's worship must consist of complete surrender of all acts, secular and scriptural, to the supreme being, in the knowledge that the soul is the vassal of the Lord, and second, that none has claim to him, regardless of distinction of class. The importance of the first is that through such devotion or worship, the devotee is freed from the consequences of karman, that acts as a barrier to attaining him. With respect to the second, the primacy of divine grace is established through the implication that no person has the right to attain him as this is solely his prerogative to grant.

It is in this context that *Gītā* 9:30[13] is to be understood. Although each caste has its duties ordained, if a person from any one of these castes were to depart from these duties, he may be considered righteous, only if he worships in the manner outlined. That is, only if that person considers all actions, whether secular *(laukika)* or scriptural *(vaidika)*, as worship,[14] and worship the Lord "as the Object of the most endearing love,"[15] and, it is implied by omission, not for the sake of attaining any fruit. Rāmānuja was well aware that such a position would raise objections based on the scriptural note that those who do not abide by caste laws cannot attain Brahman.[16] The next verse is viewed by Rāmānuja as offering an answer to this objection, viz., that such a person, who transgresses caste laws out of love for the supreme being, quickly becomes a holy soul. Rāmānuja interprets this to mean that such a person is soon freed from all sin and the two *guṇas, rajas* and *tamas*, are uprooted from him. He is careful not to specify that this happens in the same life while the person is in that caste. In the *Śrībhāṣya*, he has already specified that a person takes on a new birth in the womb appropriate to his previous *karman*,[17] and thus there is no conflict between his position in the *Gītābhāṣya* that a person becomes freed from sin and from *rajas* and *tamas* in order to quickly become a holy soul *(dharmātma)*. *Prima facie*, the next verse, 9.32, in the *Gītā* proffers the promise of attainment of the supreme being through loving devotion in this life. In his commentary, Rāmānuja does not disabuse the reader of this notion, briefly stating only that even women, Vaiṣyas and Śūdras, although born of sin, "do yet go to the supreme state." Rather subtly, he points out that it is not open to question that well-born brāhmaṇas and devoted warriors of the Kṣatriya caste—such as Arjuna—are firmly established in the supreme being's love. In this respect, in his commentary on the previous verses, Rāmānuja appears to be defending any caste law transgressions[18] on the part of those born of lower castes or those not entitled to Vedic knowledge provided these transgressions are undertaken in order to worship the supreme being. His commentary, however, makes it clear that he considers this devotion to result in effacing prior *karman*, which then leads speedily to that person becoming a holy soul *(dharmātma)* and thence, through divine grace, able to attain the supreme being and be assured of never returning to the world of *saṃsāra*. If taken alone, the commentary on the *Gītā* appears to open the doors of mokṣa to all who will undertake action in the spirit of devotion rather than in hankering after fruit, thus enabling Vaiṣṇavism to be a viable alternative to the more orthodox schools. Seen in conjunction with the *Śrībhāṣya*, however, Rāmānuja's brief comments in the *Gītā* underscore the point he makes there: that *smṛti* benefits the Śūdra only in effacing prior *karman*, thus allowing for a more fortuitous birth, although this latter point is not specified in the commentary on the *Gītā*. Certainly, this reading is to be favoured if one were to hold the view that Rāmānuja cannot have altered his stance regarding Śūdras too radically from one major commentary to the next. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that in both the *Śrībhāṣya* and the *Gītā*, Rāmānuja was not prejudiced against the Śūdra caste per se. Rather, his stance was simply to note that even though the Śūdra could be a supplicant, he was not qualified for *Brahmavidyā* on account of not knowing the nature *(svarūpa)* of Brahman, the mode *(prakāra)* of worship *(upāsana)*, and from the performance of sacrifices because he would not know the Vedic recitation required for them.[19] That is, even though "there may exist the state of a suppliant *(ārthitva)*, there cannot exist any qualification for one who is incapable and the incapacity is due to the absence of Vedic study."[20] The *Gītā*, of course, poignantly invites all devotees to make offerings in whatever manner they can:

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[12] Ibid., 462–463.
[13] "Even if one were of flagitiously wicked ways, if he but pay Me exclusive worship, he is to be esteemed as virtuous; for he has verily steered aright." In Govindāchārya, 312.

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[14] *Gītābhāṣya* 9: 28, in Govindāchārya, 310.
[15] Ibid., 9:29, in Govindāchārya, 311,
[16] Cited in *Gītābhāṣya* 9:30: *Kathopaniṣad* 2.24, in Govindāchārya, 313, n. 1.
[17] *Śrībhāṣya* 3.2.8, in Karmarkar, 784ff.
[18] For example, *Manusmṛti* 4.80 declares regarding the Śūdra: "Now, verily, if he were to listen to the Vedas, there should be the filling of his ears with (melted) lead and lac; in the case of his uttering the same (there should be) the cutting of the tongue; in the case of his handling (the same), the breaking of the body." "And one should not teach him religious duties, one should not direct him to any vow."

> Whoso, in love, proffers Me a leaf, a flower, a fruit, water;—what is so lovingly dedicated in purity of heart,—I do enjoy.[21]

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[19] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.3.33, in Karmarkar, 456.
[20] Ibid.
[21] *Gītā* 9.26, in Govindāchārya, 308.

Rāmānuja does not interpret this verse to draw attention to those of spare means who cannot afford costly sacrifices, including, one would assume, those of lower castes. Rather, he dwells on the nature of the devotee as one who is pure-minded, that is, one who is sattvic in nature. Such a person, of course, precludes the Śūdra, who by dint of birth is also associated with *rajas* and *tamas.* Further, Rāmānuja draws upon this verse to exhort Arjuna to become a *jñānin* (knower) who is continually engaged in *bhakti.* The connotations of this statement are clear: to become a *jñānin* entails participation in the various *Brahmavidyās* outlined in the *śruti* texts, closed to a Śūdra.

Nonetheless, Rāmānuja does not want to close off the way to *mokṣa* for Śūdras and the like. In a rather ironic twist, the advent of the *avatāra* in the form of Kṛṣṇa, the divine preceptor, serves to make the supreme being accessible to all who hear the text in that it enables them, through action, to embark on destroying the first and most difficult barrier to attainment of Brahman. That is, through the teachings of the *Gītā,* Śūdras may begin, despite their lack of qualification for studying the Vedas, to destroy their store of previous *karman.* In this respect, the *avatāra* form indeed does serve the purpose Rāmānuja highlights as being the most important: rendering the Lord accessible to his devotees. This is in contrast to the strictly *śruti* position regarding Śūdras that the most they can do is to dutifully carry out the actions pertaining to their class and perhaps, in a distant birth, they may be reborn as one of the twice-born. In the *Gītā,* this promise is presented as being almost immediate and were one not to have read Rāmānuja's *Śrībhāṣya,* one would not have thought otherwise from his commentary on the *Gītā.* In all fairness, Rāmānuja does not entirely deny Śūdras the ability to worship, for in the *Śrībhāṣya* there is mention of Śūdras such as Vidura and others, who "were possessed of knowledge due to their not being bereft of the knowledge secured in other births, and became associated with such a birth [that of the Śūdra] by virtue of the *Karman* that had started [giving its fruit]—and so, became devoted to Brahman."[22] In other words, a devoted Śūdra is not an anomaly, and perhaps this explains why, in his commentary on the *Gītā*, Rāmānuja is quick to point out that devoted Śūdras ought to be respected "as a *sādhu* or the most staunchly eminent Vaiṣṇava"[23] despite infractions of caste laws.

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[22] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.3.33, in Karmarkar, 456–457.

Aspirants and Means

In his study of the commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Stevenson[24] points out that for Rāmānuja, human beings are divided into two basic groups: (i) the lost, who are constituted of the fools *(muḍhāḥ)*, evil doers *(pāpakarmāṇaḥ)*, the demonic *(āsurāḥ)*, etc., and (ii) the good, who have good deeds to their credit, who are the doers of good *(sukṛtinaḥ, puṇyakarmāṇaḥ)*, etc. This latter category is further divided *(Gītā* 7:16) into four groups with regard to their objectives: (1 & 2) the first two are those who seek worldly wealth and an honourable position *(aiśvaryārthinaḥ)*; (3) those who seek to realize the true nature of the self as a state separate from association with *prakṛti (kaivalyārthinaḥ)*; and (4) those who seek self-realization in a state free of *prakṛti*, but in the joy of total dependence on the Lord *(jñāninaḥ)*.[25] The *aiśvaryārthins* attain material rewards, which include *svarga* (heaven) as the fruits of action, through adherence to *varṇāśramadharma*. However, since interested action begets further *karman*, and since all heavens are impermanent, even the successful *aiśvaryārthin* is doomed to rebirth. The knowledge of such a person is limited since knowledge of the true nature of the self as dissociated from *prakṛti* is not attained.

However, the *kaivalyārthin* learns from the *śāstras* that the soul is distinct from the body, and is eternal and untouched by the latter. For this reason, there is no point in rejoicing or grieving over what ensues in the material world, for the soul is untouched by it. As a result, such an aspirant must adhere to *varṇāśramadharma* without being attached to the fruits of action, maintaining equanimity in the face of both the ensuing pleasure or pain. The *kaivalyārthin* proceeds to put this learned mental attitude into practice, by performing action with a single-minded resolve to attain *mokṣa.*[26] Lipner identifies the goal of such aspirants to be a permanent *saṃsāra*-transcendent state "in which the liberated *ātman* reposes solipsistically in its intrinsic consciousness and bliss ... . For them the Lord is not the supreme and beloved personal goal and fulfillment of their being in this and the post-worldly existence ... ."[27] Lipner argues that although Rāmānuja is somewhat ambivalent on the *kaivalyārthin's* unloving method of self-realization, nonetheless, it is clear from textual evidence that he does not bar the *kaivalyārthin's* way to Brahman. The ambivalence is revealed when Rāmānuja remarks that such a sage "is liberated on the way *as if* he had reached his goal"[28] Indeed, the end of the fifth chapter (vs. 29) of the *Gītā* makes it clear that the discipline undertaken by such a sage is done with the full knowledge that Kṛṣṇa is the enjoyer *(bhoktā)* of sacrifices and penances, which Rāmānuja glosses to mean that if *karma-yoga*, which is the sum total of all duties is to be performed as acts of worship of the Lord, then this is the easiest method of attaining peace. Vs. 28 identifies such a person, who is exempt from desires, fear and hatred to be the *mokṣa-parāyaṇa*, one who is ever desirous of attaining *mokṣa*, as a *muni* (sage), and as one who is to be considered as liberated *(mukta).* In his commentary on these verses, Rāmānuja establishes a connection between the discipline of *yoga* undertaken by those who are solely trained toward *ātma*-realization, that is, the *kaivalyārthin*, and the need to acknowledge all action as devotion to the Lord. That is, in Rāmānuja's view, although the *kaivalyārthin's* methods are permissible, it is clear that he holds it necessary for the *kaivalyārthin* to recognize the supremacy of the Lord as the aim of all sacrifices and penances and, thereby, the connection of his individual soul with the Lord.

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[23] *Gītā* 9.30, in Govindacharya, 312.

[24] R.W. Stevenson, "Historical Change in Scriptural Interpretation: A Comparative Study of Classical and Contemporary Commentaries on the Bhagavadgītā" (Ph.D. thesis, Comparative Religion, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., March 1975).

[25] See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 107ff. in this regard.

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[26] Gītā 2:41.
[27] Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 107–108.
[28] *Gītābhāṣya* 5:28, quoted in Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 108.

The *Gītā* outlines three paths to the Lord: *karma* (works), *jñāna* (knowledge) and *bhakti* (devotion). As Stevenson shows, for Rāmānuja, either *karmayoga* or *jñānayoga* may be practiced according to the qualifications of the aspirant to achieve *kaivalya* or self-realization.[29] *Jñānayoga* may be practiced by those who are intellectually equipped to do so, such as the Sāṃkhyas, and *karmayoga* by those who are not so qualified, such as the *yogins*. However, for several reasons, Rāmānuja attempts to make a case for the superiority of the latter over the former, even for those qualified for *jñānayoga*. He goes so far as to say that the *karmayogin* does not need *jñānayoga* to realize the self,[30] and attempts to show that through *saṃnyāsa*, which is an element of *jñānayoga*, the latter is, indeed, karmayoga.[31] van Buitenen's comments are pertinent to Stevenson"s discussion:

> The essence of it is that Rāmānuja has tried to reconcile the ambiguity of the *Gītā* about the paths of knowledge and non-attached action. Rāmānuja preferred the latter, and introduced into it an element of knowledge. This is the theoretical starting point concerning the *ātman* .... Knowledge and action become increasingly integrated so that the former becomes concretized in action and the latter spiritualized, and both finally culminate in *yoga*, the realization of the self. Here action ends in knowledge and the initial theoretical knowledge becomes a matter of immediate experience.[32]

The view that the *kaivalyārthin* must recognize the supremacy of the Lord as the aim of all sacrifices and penances is further underscored by Lipner's citation of a text that reveals that for Rāmānuja both the kaivalyārthin and the *jñānin* are led to Brahman after death.[33] Although the text in question does not specify that the two kinds of souls led to Brahman are the *kaivalyārthin* and the *jñānin*, Lipner considers the reference to be to them. Lipner's own reading is that the *kaivalyārthin*, upon *ātma*-realization, must necessarily culminate in the *ātma*-realization of the *jñānin*, perhaps after death. The difference between the two is that for the *kaivalyārthin*, liberation is understood as self-realization without necessarily involving the understanding that the soul is in an inseparable relationship with the Lord as its possessor. Stevenson clarifies that the *kaivalyārthin* focuses on the difference between the *ātmā* and *prakṛti*, while the *jñānin* focuses on the relationship between the self and the Lord.[34] For the *jñānin*, liberation lies in attaining Brahman with *ātma*-realization as a secondary benefit, since the focus is on the knowledge that the Lord, as possessor of the soul, is worthy of worship. In Rāmānuja's view, it is implicitly understood that self-realization must necessarily result in understanding the true relationship that obtains between the self and the Lord; however, as Lipner points out, the most direct route to attainment of Brahman is by way of devotion focussed on the Lord. This is so because the *kaivalyārthin* must undergo the additional process of understanding the relationship between the soul and the Lord after attaining *ātma*-vision, while for the *jñānin* this is from the beginning his point of focus.[35] Indeed, in the *Vedārthasaṃgraha*, Rāmānuja notes that attainment of the Lord includes the realization "of the proper form of the soul as released from all bonds of *karman*",[36] thereby making it clear that for the *jñānin*, no additional step is required once the Lord is attained.

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[29] *Gītābhāṣya* 3:20.
[30] *Gītābhāṣya* 4:21.
[31] *Gītābhāṣya* 6:1–2.
[32] Quoted in Stevenson, "Historical Change", 125.
[33] *Śrībhāṣya* 4.3.14, cited in Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 109.

Lipner has already discussed the major points regarding the attainment of liberation by the *jñānin* in his discussion: (i) that the *jñānin* is the model devotee; (ii) one desirous of attaining Brahman must resort to two knowledges, an indirect one and a direct one. (a) The indirect one is correct understanding through study of the scriptures[37] under the guidance of a teacher. (b) The direct one is based on *yoga*, "takes on the nature of *bhakti*, also called 'meditation' *(upāsana)*, and [is] characterized by presentational experience of Brahman".[38] If the indirect one is considered to be an intellectual and contemplative knowledge *(jñāna-yoga)*, it must be accompanied by a regime of works *(karma-yoga)*, that is, the performance of all acts and duties pertaining to the *varṇāśramadharma.* (iii) The key difference between the *kaivalyārthin* and the *jñānin* is that of intention: the latter undertakes both knowledges in order to serve and worship the Lord, thereby making the *jñānin's* combined discipline of knowledge and action a way of devotion *(bhakti-yoga).*

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[34] Stevenson, "Historical Change," 131.
[35] See Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 109ff.
[36] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* # 129, in van Buitenen, 286.
[37] That is, the "Vedas, together with the six auxiliaries, the epics, the purāṇas, the law-books and the systematic inquiry into these". See next note.
[38] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.2.23, quoted in Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 113.

Lipner terms the knowledge of the self experienced by the *kaivalyārthin* "first-level *ātma*-vision." In stark contrast to this is the knowledge of the self experienced by the *jñānin*, the "second-level *ātma*-vision", in which the *jñānin* "takes sole delight in being entirely the Lord's accessory."[39] This experience is expressed thus by Rāmānuja in Lipner's translation:

> We know that the knowledge intended to be enjoined as the [direct] means to release is a [worshipful] contemplation *[upāsana]* because there are [scriptural] initial and concluding statements which do not differentiate between 'knowing' and '[worshipfully] contemplating'. For example, [in *ChāndUp*, III.18.1] we have 'Let him [worshipfully] contemplate *[upāsīta]* the mind as Brahman'; and [in *ChāndUp*, III.18.3] 'He who knows *[veda]* thus, shines and glows with glory, fame and the radiance of Brahman.' ... Now this meditation *[dhyāna]* is of the form of a stream of unbroken calling-to-mind *[=smṛti]*, like the flow of oil; that is, it is a steady calling-to-mind. ... This calling-to-mind is tantamount to seeing. ... it is like seeing because of the predominance of imaging *[bhāvanā]* in it. ... This kind of steady keeping-in-mind *[anusmṛti]* is designated by the word *bhakti.*[40]

Lipner describes this *bhakti par excellence* to be, "epistemically, a steady imaging of the divine [supernal] form, so clear and vivid as to be presentational in character."[41] This experience enables the devotee to make the transition, upon death, to final liberation when the soul proceeds to the highest lights. In this regard, important though this vision is in signifying that the devotee has been chosen by the Lord and is marked by his grace, it is not, according to Lipner, a direct vision of the Lord. Such a vision, Lipner remarks, is reserved for special occurrences such as the vision vouchsafed to Arjuna for which the latter was specially granted a divine eye with which to see the Lord in both his terrible and benign aspects. Lipner suggests that the direct vision of the Lord is rather to be reserved for final salvation or *mokṣa*, which occurs after the physical death of the devotee, when all prior *karman* has been effaced. He bases his case on Rāmānuja's usage of the term *anusmṛti* in the above quotation, offering the view that although the prefix *anu-* indicates continuity, it also indicates the sense of *saṃskāra*-based apprehension rather than direct perception. That is, the term *anusmṛti*

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[39] Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 114. The phrase capturing Rāmānuja's sentiment is *aśeṣaśeṣata-ikarati.*
[40] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 114–115.
[41] Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, 115.

> connotes remembering on the basis of a cognitive impression *(saṃskāra)* of some sort. Though the image-based *bhakti* experience of the Lord about which Rāmānuja speaks here is not an ordinary remembrance, it is to contrast its representational *(saṃskāra*-dependent) nature with the direct apprehension of the Lord that Rāmānuja refers to is as *(anu)smṛti.* Nevertheless, he insists that it is a steady (and extremely vivid) experience.[42]

From the above, it is clear that Lipner considers this bhakti experience or vision of the Lord to be "presentational in character", suggesting that it is really a representation of the actuality rather than the actuality itself. It can only be surmised, since Lipner does not elaborate here, that because this *bhakti* vision is *saṃskāra*-dependent, it is still not the full awareness or vision that the devotee is capable of having once he is shorn of all connection with the guṇas. For this reason, Lipner insists that the vision of the *avatāric* form is reserved for special occasions for which Kṛṣṇa provides Arjuna with the divine eye with which to perceive the Lord directly. Otherwise, this representational viewing of the divine consists of the Lord's divine supernal form. Above, in the chapter on Brahman, it has been noted that the divine supernal form is the prototype for the *avatāra* form, that the latter is indeed like a holographic image of the former. Therefore, it may be questioned whether the representation of the divine supernal form viewed in the *bhakti* experience is indeed different from the vision of the *avatāric* form granted by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna through the means of the "divine eye".

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[42] Lipner, *The Face of Truth,* n. 41, 171–172.

Indeed, there are two issues to be explored here. First, does Lipner mean that because the *bhakti* vision is *saṃskāra*-dependent, that therefore, the vision of the divine in its actuality is not? In other words, that the mind *(buddhi, manas)* percolates the vision in such a manner that it acts as a filter through which the "true" vision is somehow hidden? This would be at odds with Rāmānuja's notion that the supreme being must be known through attributes, on the one hand, and that the knower in all cases is the *ātma*, or soul, and that it is only ignorance in the form of antecedent *karman* that gives the soul an erroneous impression of what it is and what its relation to Brahman is, on the other. It is difficult to see Lipner's point about the *bhakti* vision being *saṃskāra*-dependent, especially if the assumption is to be made that one who is able to attain *bhakti* vision must have realized his *sattvic* nature and have risen above his *tamasic* and *rajasic* natures.

Second, does Lipner mean that even though the one who has been graced with *bhakti* vision has a representational perception of the Lord, because *mokṣa* is to be fully realized only after death, the living *bhakta* is unable to exercise all the privileges that come with *mokṣa*, such as having his every will realized and so forth? If this be the case, then Lipner's point is clear, for as has been seen above, Rāmānuja does appear to indicate that it is only with the separation of the soul from the physical, *guṇa*-bound body that it is able to be led to the highest lights. Only then can the soul view the Lord and actualize all the privileges that are its by right. That is, even though the vision of the Lord has been vouchsafed while the *bhakta* is still in the physical world, it does not attain *mokṣa* until after death. The issue, however, is whether the perception of the Lord while the *bhakta* is still attached to the body is any less that the perception it has once it has been freed from the body, that is, upon physical death.

It is difficult to find a clear answer from Rāmānuja. However, there are passages in his commentary on the *Gītā* that would appear to indicate that there are some *yogīs* who do, through the grace of the Lord, acquire the kind of divine eye favoured to Arjuna and are able to see the Lord. In his commentary on *Gītā* 6:47, Rāmānuja describes a type of *yogin* who, out of his overflowing love for Kṛṣṇa *(=avatāra*, =Brahman) has his mind *(manas)* merged in Kṛṣṇa. In his gloss on *antarātma*, "inmost", Rāmānuja identifies this mind as being the receptacle of all external and internal experiences. This *bhakta's* desire and longing for the divine being is so acute as to render him unable "to tolerate a moment's separation from Me."[43] Rāmānuja then goes on to describe this "Me", and in this description are included the Brahman for whom the universe is emanated, sustained and withdrawn for sport; the Brahman of *ṣaḍguṇa* description; the Brahman of countless auspicious attributes; the Lord *(bhagavān)*; the *avatāra* whereby the Lord became perceptible; and so forth. Another description is found in the commentary to *Gītā* 9:34: "Fix thy heart on Me", in which Rāmānuja describes the Lord primarily as the divine supernal being.[44] Since a being of such description is the focus of meditation for the *bhakta*, it may be assumed that, for Rāmānuja, the vision the *bhakta* has of the Lord will correspond to these qualities, to such an extent that indeed, the *bhakta* is unable to tolerate a moment without seeing the Lord. Indeed, in his commentary on *Gītā* 4:8, Rāmānuja clearly states one of the chief purposes for which the *avatāras* descend:

> They [the *sādhus]* are those who feel that without seeing Me—Whose names and wonderful works transcend the powers of speech and mind—they cannot live and move, cannot support their very being. They are those to whom a single moment of My absence from their memory, is as it were a *kalpa*.[45]

Earlier, mention has already been made of those times when the *avatāra* is not physically present in the world. In his commentary on *Gītā* 4:11, Rāmānuja clarifies that to the *bhakta*, the Lord makes himself available "By whatever conception they choose to seek Me",[46] which, as suggested earlier, is in all likelihood a reference to the temple image of the deity, the *arcā*. The vividness of the *bhakta's* vision is, no doubt, informed by the mental conception of the Lord formed by the *bhakta* in his preparatory learning and by the images surrounding him, whether textual or physical; however, if the vision is one granted by the Lord, then it may be argued that it is as veridical as the vision that the *bhakta* will experience in his state of *mokṣa*. Any difference is likely to be rooted in the *bhakta's* capacity to see, depending upon the degree of his prior *karmic* interference. In this respect, Lipner's comments are pertinent: that the full reality of the vision held by the released soul may differ in degree of fullness from the vivid vision experienced by the *bhakta* still in his physical body.

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[43] *Gītābhāṣya*, in Govindāchārya, 221.
[44] Ibid., 314–315.
[45] Ibid., 141.
[46] Ibid., 144.

In sum, then, it is crucial to Rāmānuja's theology that the devotee *par excellence* is one who gains liberation as part of his devotion to the Lord: his focus is not on gaining heaven or other fruits, nor entirely on escaping the wheel of *saṃsāra*. Rather, it is on training all his life's activity, mental, physical or otherwise, in serving the Lord. Within such a framework, a conception of the supreme being that is vivid, tangible, accessible and replete with attributes that the devotee can relate to is shown to be of paramount importance to Rāmānuja, for whom the culmination of the human experience is to be graced with a vision of the supreme being, imaged both in the ineffable plenitude of Brahman and in the specific attributes of Brahman as cause of the universe, inner ruler, divine supernal being, *avatāra*, and by extension, *arcā*.

Section IV

Conclusion

In the Introduction, I stated that my aim was to examine a key concept in two different religio-cultural traditions, the concept of the divinized human being (theanthropos), with a view to determining whether: (i) the study of two significantly different religious traditions with respect to the concept of theanthropos could contribute to the development of a general typology of divine–human configurations; and (ii) the identification made in the Satpanth *ginān* literature between *imām* and *avatāra* has any philosophical basis.

In the previous two sections an attempt has been made to examine the notions of *imām* and *avatāra* within the philosophical structures of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja, respectively. This task has been undertaken by investigating the thought of each thinker in terms of four philosophical categories, namely, ontology, psychology, epistemology and salvation. In my approach toward each thinker, I have been guided by Wilfred Cantwell Smith's commendation when speaking of the enterprise of comparative religion that:

> We must learn what precisely have been and are the doctrines ... of the world's various communities. We must further endeavour to know what these things have meant to the system's adherents. ... The purpose, then, is ... to understand with imaginative sympathy the significance of [the religious forms] in the religious life of those for whom they have been avenues of faith.[1]

What follows is a comparison and analysis of the two thinkers under study with respect to the four categories examined in the previous two sections. Proceeding from that I will attempt to address the Satpanth question. Then I will raise, on the basis of the research conducted in this study, some questions that may be asked when developing a typology of divine–humanconfigurations.

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[1] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972 (first published elsewhere 1962), 15–16.

I. Comparison and Analysis

Ontology

With respect to the ontologies of these two thinkers, there are several issues that are paramount for both of them. These can be identified as the following: the need to establish the supremacy of the divine, supreme being; reflections on the capacity of language to communicate information about that being; and the relationship of that being to the world broadly conceived both in its material and psychic aspects.

Divinity

Both Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja acknowledge that there is something omnipotent and omniscient that far surpasses anything in mundane existence and which, indeed, is the mainstay of existence itself. Ṭūsī draws upon the Qurʾānic formula, *Allāhu akbar*, God is great, to clarify his understanding of God. This phrase signifies for him that God is far beyond anything within human conception as He is above relationality, since relationality implies the notion of a dyad. Therefore, God cannot be spoken of in ways that would include oppositions such as existence/non-existence, cause/effect and the like. In his view, the philosophers concept of God as the First Cause is erroneous. For him, God is unique, the notion of uniqueness itself being understood as a human construct.

Rāmānuja takes recourse to the etymological meaning contained within the word Brahman, for "the word Brahman is seen to derive its meaning from the association of *bṛhattva*, i.e. greatness ... ."[2] He further elaborates that this association with greatness signifies that Brahman alone is "the Lord of All."[3] The point to be noted here is that both Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja express the supremacy of the divine supreme being—Allāh and Brahman, respectively—in associating the notion of greatness with it, and in clearly distinguishing such a being from creaturely properties. Ṭūsī establishes this point by declaring that Allāh is beyond any creaturely conception of him, while Rāmānuja expresses this by emphasizing that Brahman's greatness is such that he alone is the Lord of everything else.

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[2] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1 in Rangacharya and Aiyangar, 3.
[3] Ibid., 4.

Language

We have noted in the relevant sections above that in order to safeguard Allah's uniqueness and primacy, Ṭūsī follows the course, to be understood in the context of contemporaneous Muslim discussions, that God is above attributes. In his view, human language is such that it is confined to the limits of the human intellect, and it would be preposterous to entertain the view that Allāh could be understood by the limited human mind, since the notion of understanding connotes the idea of encompassing, and God cannot be encompassed by anything. Thus, the very concept of Allāh is such that it is beyond the reach of the human intellect. Ontologically, this is expressed in the notion that Allāh stands far above the Universal Intellect, of which the human intellect is merely a trace. The process by which the Universal Intellect *(ᶜAql-i Kull)* comes into being is through the mediation of God's divine Word *(Kalimah)* or the divine Command *(Amr)*, and the relationship between Allāh and his divine Command or Word remains a mystery unfathomable even to the Universal Intellect. As a Muslim, Ṭūsī has to affirm that God created the world, for to say that there was a time when God was not a creator would imply imperfection in his being. God's act of creation is termed *ibdāᶜ*, to bring something into being. However, he locates *ibdāᶜ* in the *Amr* or divine Command, leaving the relationship between God and his *Amr* in the realm of mystery, not amenable to any rational explanation or understanding. He specifies simply that this creation *ex nihilo—ibdāᶜ*—does not mean creation out of nothing, but creation out of something to which existence or other creaturely attributes cannot be applied. With respect to the actual mechanics of the creative process, humans must take recourse to metaphors and similes. Thus, existents are said to emanate from the divine Command or

Amr, and the simile most often used is that of light: the *Amr* radiates light. The first existent to come into being through *ibdāᶜ* is the Universal Intellect, which then proceeds, with the *Amr's* help *(taʾyīd)* and emanation *(fayḍ)* to initiate the processes by which the rest of creation comes into being. This involves another creative process known as *ikhtirāᶜ* (lit. "to split, break apart") through which the world of multiplicity is brought into being. Ṭūsī's intent in all of this is to establish Allāh's supremacy, not only with respect to humans, but with respect to the entirety of created existents. That is, God's position as creator, on the one hand, is maintained by the act of *ibdāᶜ*, which in itself is a divine mystery but which, nonetheless, affirms a connection, through the *fayḍ* (emanation) of the divine Command, with the remainder of creation. By locating *ibdāᶜ* within the sphere of the divine Command *(Amr)*, Ṭūsī attempts to maintain God's position as supreme by suggesting that he is outside any system. At the same time, God is connected to His creation in a mysterious way through His Command. It may be noted here, in passing, that the notion of *ibdāᶜ* has puzzled scholars, and Majid Fakhry even goes so far as to remark that it is not a satisfactory explanation at all. At the same time, it must be noted that Ṭūsī is probably following the notion of the unknowable God as a development of Plotinian conceptions in attempting to retain both his concern as a Muslim that God be safeguarded from anything that would compromise the notion of his uniqueness or *tawḥīd*, and his concern as a philosopher that the universe is an ordered entity that has come into being according to systematic laws.

Rāmānuja could, conceivably, have followed in his illustrious predecessor Śaṅkara's footsteps, and also argued that Brahman is above attributes by adopting the *nirguṇa* position the latter was famed for. However, he chose to deal with the notion of Brahman's supremacy in a different way, as we have seen above, largely because of his assertion that the whole point of sacred texts is to impart valid information about Brahman. In his view, language is preterhuman, and all words find their ultimate referent in Brahman. Rāmānuja wants to establish at one and the same time that Brahman is supreme, and also that scripture gives us valid information about Brahman. Thus, Rāmānuja argued that Brahman is the reservoir of all illustrious attributes, and he calls upon the evidence of *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* II.1.1., "The Brahman is Existence, Knowledge, Infinity", to declare that "Brahman, whose true nature is made out from the creation, etc., of the world, is defined as being different from all other things; and thus there is [here] not fallacy of reciprocal dependence."[4] (We may note here that it is this "reciprocal dependence" that Ṭūsī attempts to avert by declaring that God is above all creaturely attribution.) Further, in his view, the Advaitin *nirguṇa* Brahman necessarily implies that the source of the world is nescience *(avidyā)*, and this would imply that Brahman would have to be a witness to this *avidyā*. By this very assertion, it is clear that something without attributes cannot be established (as here we have the attribute of being a witness), nor is it logically tenable that Brahman would be witness to *avidyā*. Indeed, if anything, Brahman is a witness precisely because it has the character of luminosity, which distinguishes its possessor from non-intelligence, thereby endowing it with the "nature of what makes itself and other things fit to be realized".[5] However, Rāmānuja's view that Brahman can be known through scripture does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that Brahman is like his creatures. There is still an ontological distinction to be drawn between creatures and Brahman; at all times, whether in their subtle state or in their manifested state, creatures are nothing more than the body of Brahman, but never identifiable with his essence.

This discussion is not intended to imply that Ṭūsī's position was akin to Śaṅkara's, and that, therefore, Rāmānuja's dialectic against Śaṅkara's position should be levelled in entirety against Ṭūsī as well. We make this point because this example illustrates in small measure the immense difficulty of comparative work: a comparison undertaken without careful attention to the specifics of the history of the development of the idea can lead the investigator into drawing careless conclusions based on apparent similarity. Rather, the comparison undertaken here must be based on the intent of each of our two thinkers. Both Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja assert that there is a divine, supreme being; and both establish his supremacy in different ways, drawing upon their specific intellectual and scriptural traditions.

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[4] Ibid., 200.
[5] Ibid., 201.

Scripture and Interpretation

The issue remains, in Ṭūsī's case, how is God to be known? While this question will be taken up further in the comparison of epistemology, suffice it here to say that Allāh can only be known to the extent that the most noble of existents, the Universal Intellect, can know him. Ṭūsī maintains this view largely due to the Muslim assertion that God's oneness or *tawḥīd* must be maintained, as this is one of the central features of Qurʾānic theology. The question must be posed whether for Ṭūsī Qurʾānic language is held to be sacred language in the manner that scriptural language is held to be sacred by Rāmānuja. For Ṭūsī the answer is clearly yes, that Qurʾānic language is sacred; however, the many mysteries and meanings contained in the Qurʾān must be interpreted by one who is qualified to do so, and one who understands the divine mysteries encapsulated in that language. Moreover, for him revealed scripture stands in need of an authority that will continually interpret it for the community, from age to age, abrogating the interpretation of a former age if necessary. Moreover, the spiritual authority of the Prophet regarding the *tanzīl* is to be continued, after the Prophet's death, in the spiritual authority of the *imām* regarding the *taᶜwīl,* the symbolic meaning of that scripture. This symbolic meaning is to be communicated through divinely-assisted *(taʾyīdī)* instruction, viz. *taᶜlīm*. The notion of *taʾwīl* is central to Ṭūsī's understanding of how scripture is to be correctly understood, and also how correct knowledge of God is to be attained and articulated.

Rāmānuja is not unaware of the timeliness of scriptural interpretation. For him, too, although scripture affords knowledge about Brahman and lays down the duties that must be performed, it is clear that scripture must be interpreted in a manner that will integrate all the differing notions and commands that are found within it. He attempts to resolve the question of finding integrity, that is, homogeneity of meaning in scripture, by declaring, in his *Śrībhāṣya,* albeit briefly, that the Vedas must be memorized under the guidance of a teacher. Such a teacher "must be born of noble lineage, accustomed to pious observances, possessed of spiritual qualities, and also having a thorough knowledge of the Vedas."[6] Once the Vedas have been learnt through oral recitation, then the student must, of his own choosing, commence on the "hearing", that is, the study of the prior Mīmāṃsā, after which he will observe "the insignificant and impermanent character of the result of works."[7] Thereafter, he will become qualified for the study of the posterior Mīmāṃsā, which is an enquiry into Vedāntic texts. In this connection, Rāmānuja cites a scriptural passage[8] in which the importance of the role of the preceptor is outlined:

> Having examined the worlds secured by *Karman,* a Brahman-Knower should become disgusted; there is no 'unmade' [immortality] by the 'made' [*Karmans].* In order to know this, he should approach with the sacrificial fuel in hand [as a present] the teacher alone well-versed in the three Vedas [and] fully devoted to Brahman.
>
> That wise one [the teacher] explained to him who has come near [as a student] with his mind extremely well-pacified, endowed with tranquility—the Reality [Existent] by which he knows the indestructible *Puruṣa*—that knowledge of Brahman in its reality.[9]

Rāmānuja glosses here that "should speak" in the above passage means "to teach." Here, he clearly displays the importance of the interpretation of the Vedānta (largely Upaniṣādic) passages by someone who is both intellectually learned and spiritually experienced in Brahman. No doubt, his own preceptors were considered to be just such men, who were both learned and had tasted of the indestructible nature of the "changeless" mentioned in the quote above. The point being made here is that although Rāmānuja does not mention the preceptor or *guru* to any great extent in the *Śrībhāṣya*, this one mention is significant in belying the importance of correct interpretation of the scriptures to him. Indeed, the whole of the *Śrībhāṣya* is a testament to the importance of correct interpretation since it deals in large part with differing intellectual positions based on the same scripture.

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[6] Ibid., 6.
[7] Ibid., 6.
[8] *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.212–13; ibid., 7.
[9] Cited in *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1, in Karmarkar, 6.

Creator and Created—Perfection and Evil

Another set of issues that both authors have to deal with in their ontological frameworks are those concerning the relationship of the divine supreme being with the world of creation. How each thinker conceives of this relationship will have a bearing, firstly, on the question of evil, which is a feature of the created world. If the world is ontologically connected to the supreme being, then the supreme being becomes liable to being considered the source of evil, a position that would not be allowable in any theology that conceives of the supreme being as pure goodness. Secondly, this relationship will have an impact on the question of divine perfection as a state that necessitates immutability. That is, if the world is thought to be created by the supreme being, then the question may be raised regarding what change occurred in the divine being to cause it to create. The change from one state to another would indicate that if only one state is considered to be expressive of perfection, then any other state implies either greater perfection—in which case the first state was not perfect; or lesser perfection—in which case the creator aspect of divinity is less than perfect. Concomitant with the problem regarding the immutability of the divine is the idea that the world is eternal, for if it is eternal, then this avoids the problem of the change that brought about creation. However, this then raises the third problem of the uniqueness or oneness of the divine being. If the world is eternal, then the uniqueness of the divine being is compromised; if it is not, then the perfection of the divine being is compromised if perfection is thought of as being unique.

In order to safeguard Allāh from having any relationship with evil whatsoever, Ṭūsī first clearly establishes that God is ontologically distinct from the created world; indeed, his existence is a mystery that cannot be probed. However, through His Command, God is able to will creation into existence, and, as mentioned earlier, the notion of Word or Command is a simile that humans take recourse to concerning that which is beyond our ken. This command exerts a kind of existentiating influence over everything that is created, and the hierarchy in which things or existents are created determines the level of knowledge that thing has about the divine. He images evil as that which is incapable of accepting any divine influence whatsoever, a notion that we have identified as a philosophical rather than moral evil. Moral evil, for him, is brought about by the inability—unwillingness—of the human being to accept and obey the commandments of the prophets and those who are authorized to interpret the scripture. For Ṭūsī, then, evil does not have a substantive basis; rather it is the absence of something else, comparable perhaps to the absence of light that causes darkness.

Ṭūsī, then, is faced with the problem that although he has to assert an ontological connection between God and the world in order to maintain that God is a creator, he has to bear in mind that doing so would impute evil to God, even if that evil is conceived of as an absence of something. It is perhaps for this reason that he introduces the idea of the twofold aspects of creation, *ibdāᶜ* and *ikhtirāᶜ*, and concomitant with this, the notion of mediation. *Ibdāᶜ*, which he is careful to locate in the sphere of the divine command, for reasons outlined above, brings into existence something that can be conceived of as perfect, but nonetheless, something that is created, that is, the Universal Intellect. Existents that proceed from the Universal Intellect do so through the process of *ikhtirāᶜ*; moreover, each existent that comes into being now has mediaries that came into being prior to it. Thus, the degree of perfection attached to each existent is in conformity with its position in the hierarchy of existence. The last existent to be brought into being is, therefore, not only the least perfect, but is also, paradoxically, the end toward which the entire processes of creation were initiated in the first place. In the relevant discussions above, it has already been noted that Ṭūsī identifies the human being as the summation of all creation, and the last to enter the scene of creation.

Thus, although the human being actually is the least perfect of all the existents that have emanated into being through the agency of the various existents that came into being prior to it, nonetheless it has the potential to be perfect by virtue of the fact that it bears a trace of the first existent, the Universal Intellect, which, as mentioned above, is the most perfect of all created existents. The problem of evil, then, is not something that is directly attributable to God—whose creation is perfect. Rather, it is attributable to the potency contained within the Universal Intellect to create through *ikhtirāᶜ*: it is itself perfect, but as a creature, and because it is not God, it is unable to bring things into existence that would be perfect, even though they may contain the potential for perfection. In this way, God's power, manifested as the *taʾyīd* (assistance) and *fayḍ* (emanation) of his Command, the *Amr*, can be conceived of as a reservoir that is readily available to the Universal Intellect, which uses it to the best of its ability, but which is made increasingly less available to each existent as it proceeds into existence by virtue of that existent's own deficiency resulting from its place in the hierarchy of creation.

In viewing Ṭūsī's ontological structure, then, it becomes clear that the divine Command *(Amr)* plays a pivotal role. It is the only link between God and his creation, a link that is mysterious and not amenable to creaturely conceptions. It affirms, on the one hand, that there is something to which creaturely attributes cannot be applied, and on the other, that creatures owe their existence to God. Without the *Amr*, God's creative aspect cannot be made manifest, and with it, creatures are able to affirm that there is a God, without falling into the problems outlined above caused by the Qurʾānic assertion of God's uniqueness or *tawḥīd.*

Turning to Rāmānuja, then, how are the issues of the world's eternality and the problem of evil handled by him in his ontological framework? To a certain extent, the problem of the eternality of the world does not arise for Rāmānuja due to the manner in which the relationship between Brahman and the world is conceptualized. Brahman, *puruṣa (cit)* and *prakṛti (acit)* are envisioned as three eternal entities or *tattvas*; Brahman being that entity upon whom the subsistence of the remaining two entities depends. The relationship is understood as that of body–possessor of body *(śarīra–śarīrin)*; that is, Brahman is the possessor of his body, which is made up of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. In their subtle state, these latter two entities are so subtle as to be indistinguishable from Brahman to the extent that it can be said that Brahman is one. Creation is understood as the process by which Brahman brings these two entities into manifestation from their previously unmanifest or subtle state. Having brought these entities into manifestation, which necessarily involves a process by which *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* are joined, the relationship between the now manifest world of name and form and Brahman-as-*antaryāmin* continues to be imaged as that between body and possessor of body *(śarīra–śarīrin)*. Thus, the question of the eternality of the world does not arise; only the question of the eternality of the world of name and form. Approached differently, what is it that impelled Brahman to transform the psychic and material constituents of the world of name and form, from their previously unmanifest state? Rāmānuja finds the answer to this in a scriptural passage that indicates simply that sat, that is, Brahman, desired to be many, for the sake of his sport *(līlā)*. Since Brahman has *saṃkalpa*, the ability to have his every will or desire realized, the processes of transformation begin to take place. Again, this process is not viewed as creation *ex nihilo;* rather, it is a transformation of entities that are already present, albeit in a subtle state. This *saṃkalpa*, along with the cyclical nature of creation (or transformation) removes the problem of divine perfection being understood as a static mode of being that alone connotes perfection. The very idea of divine perfection with respect to Brahman entails that Brahman be viewed as dynamic, as indeed he must be in order to have his every will realized, for the notion of will itself suggests that different ends may be willed. Moreover, the notion of beginningless *karman* ensures that each time Brahman wills the transformation of subtle entities into the world of name and form, a diversity of forms will ensue; indeed, one may speculate that the same world will never be created twice.

The distinction between the body and the possessor of body also enables the locus of *karman* to be placed within the realm of the body. Ignorance, or *avidyā*, which leads a person to commit evil acts, is understood by Rāmānuja as the antecedent non-existence of knowledge, rather like the state of darkness that is dispelled when light is introduced. Rāmānuja does not accord this state of darkness the privilege of existence; that is, it has no substantive being. The *karmic* residue of the soul is what is made evident when the soul attaches to matter, in the manner outlined in the chapter on epistemology above. Inherent tendencies in matter (the three *guṇas)* impel the soul to act in a certain manner, by virtue of the permission granted to it by the *antaryāmin.* However, the soul is not bound to act in a mechanical manner according to the impulses directed toward it by its body; rather, it has access, through scripture, to acting in a manner that will free it from its bondage to matter. The soul has the capacity to act freely; however, this very freedom of action is granted to it by permission of the *antaryāmin*, the inner controller.

By locating the problem of evil within the body, Rāmānuja frees the possessor of the body—the *antaryāmin*, the divine being—from being the source of evil. He has already identified Brahman as being the antithesis of all evil, of being stainless *(amalatva);* and the *antaryāmin*, who is an infinitesimal portion of Brahman, retains these attributes. Indeed, Rāmānuja asserts in his discussions of the *avatāra* form of the divine that the supreme being goes so far as to take on, out of compassion for creatures, the generic form of creatures (whether as *avatāra* or as *arcā)* in order to enable worshippers to see him and to protect the good and destroy evil-doers. That is, this generic form serves as yet another way through which scriptural teaching may be communicated, with respect to what and how actions should be undertaken in order to break the soul's bondage to matter, ultimately resulting in the soul's freedom from the cycle of *saṃsāra.*

Thus, with respect to ontological dependence, it can be said that Ṭūsī conceives the world's ontological dependence to lie, ultimately, in the *Amr* or divine Command. For Rāmānuja, the world's ontological dependence lies on the *antaryāmin* form of Brahman, that is, that aspect described as an infinitesimal portion of himself with which he enters and sustains the transformed subtle entities that were previously absorbed into him. Both thinkers seek to establish the supreme being's lordship over creatures and affirm his disassociation with evil, or for that matter, any ontological link with creation that would place the phenomenal world within the ipseity of the supreme being. Within their cultural contexts, their approaches toward safeguarding the freedom of the supreme being from the world of creation differ; Ṭūsī denies the attribution of any creaturely conceptions to Allāh and views language as a metaphor by which humans can merely approximate divine reality, while Rāmānuja calls upon the metaphor of the body–possessor of body to distinguish Brahman from the remaining two eternal tattvas in their subtle state, and *antaryāmin* from the *karma*-bound entities in their gross state. In other words, both thinkers strive to maintain the ontological otherness of the divine supreme being, while simultaneously affirming that, nonetheless, the world of creation—bearing in mind the nuances that the term "creation" has in each context—is ontologically dependent on the divine supreme being. For Ṭūsī, the referent for this ontological dependence is the *amr*, while for Rāmānuja, it is the *antaryāmin*. Although both *amr* and *antaryāmin* are non-distinguishable from Allāh and Brahman, respectively, with respect to divine ipseity and from the point of view of the human, they must be distinguished, since Allāh is far above or removed *(munazzah)* from what creatures can attribute to him, and Brahman extends far beyond the *antaryāmin*, who constitutes only an infinitesimal portion of him even if he is not qualitatively different.

Imām and *Avatāra*—Ontic Status

The question remains, though, regarding the ontic status of the *imām* and the *avatāra*. How do each of our thinkers conceive of these figures? Ṭūsī conceives of the divine pleroma or macrocosm as consisting of the *Amr*, the *ᶜAql-i Kull*, and the *Nafs-i Kull* (the divine Command, the Universal Intellect, and the Universal Soul, respectively). In his view, the macrocosm must find manifestation in the microcosm, that is, the world of humans. Accordingly, among human beings, there is a representative of each of these spiritual personages constituting the macrocosm. The Universal Soul is represented by the Prophet, the Universal Intellect by the *ḥujjat* ("Proof"), and the divine Command, *Amr,* by the *imām.* However, the *Amr* is not considered an existent by Ṭūsī; rather, the *Amr* is what gives the first existent its being; that is, it is the instaurator of that first, perfect existent, the Universal Intellect. In this respect, the *Amr* is beyond attribution, for what can be said of it is beyond the purview of the Intellect. The Intellect can say or do nothing more than affirm through submission to the *Amr* that it knows that there is something beyond itself without being able to specify what that something is. At the same time, however, the Universal Intellect receives its powers from the *Amr* and is able, thereby, to conceive of the entirety of created existents, a conception that initiates the coming into existence of all that follows and ultimately makes up the world of phenomena.

Similarly, although in this realm of dissemblance and dissimulation the *imām* appears as a human being, in reality, according to Ṭūsī, the *imām* never has come to this world and never will. In other words, although the Universal Intellect affirms that beyond itself there is the *Amr* (since the *Amr* is responsible for its instauration), it is unable to attribute existence to it, since the Amr is beyond attribution. Similarly, although the *ḥujjah*—and other mortals—may affirm that there is an *imām*, in reality, it is impossible to attribute any characteristic, including existence, to him because only the *imām* knows the truth about his own essence. At the same time, however, it must be kept in mind that just as without the *Amr* the whole macrocosm would have been non-existent, so too, without the *imām*, the category of every form of existence in which the *imām* appears would not exist. That is, although the *imām* has no connection with this relative world, at the same time, he takes on manifestation *(taẓāhurī dārad)* in every category of existence in order to enable the existence of such categories. What is being established here is that although the *imām* is ontologically other than the world of created being, nonetheless that world is ontologically dependent upon him and has access to his manifested form, which albeit human in appearance must not be mistaken as human—or this-worldly—in reality.

Rāmānuja is equally concerned with differentiating the *avatāra* from the *karman* and *guṇa*-bound world of name and form, even though to this world the *avatāra* appears human and, indeed, as reported in the *Gītā*, is mistaken by fools to be so. The *avatāra* is the manifestation in the world of name and form of the eternal supernal manifestation of Brahman in the highest heaven, a form in which Brahman is eternally worshipped by countless hosts as Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. Why does Rāmānuja have this duality of divinity in each of two spheres, eternal and transient, respectively? As outlined in the section III, chapter 1 above, Rāmānuja speaks of Brahman as having an eternal manifestation—*divya rūpa*—as a golden-hued Person who is the object of worship. In the temporal realm of name and form, Brahman is present in the world as *antaryāmin*, the Inner Ruler and, as Lipner has pointed out, structurally, this aspect of Brahman is *saṃsāra*-contingent. That is, there is no need for this form when the world of name and form is collapsed. Alongside this aspect, there is the manifestation of the *divya rūpa* in the temporal realm as *avatāra*, a form taken on by the *divya rūpa* out of compassion for the reasons already discussed earlier, one of which is to provide access to the divine to those humans who cannot remain without sight of him for even an instant. While the *avatāra*—whatever its form, whether fish, man-lion or human—descends and withdraws at will, our discussion has shown that Rāmānuja, in his discussion of Kṛṣṇa, the *avatāra* in human form, does obliquely address the concern that at his withdrawal humans would be deprived of "an object for men's sights to see." His resolution is to point the way toward the *arcā* form or consecrated image of the deity that is the focal point of temple worship, and his successors did, in fact, accept the *arcā* form as constituting one of the five legitimate forms of the supreme being. The multiple manifestations of the supreme being were not, for Rāmānuja, implausible because he located authority for them in the scriptures, all of which, according to him, constituted one scripture. Hence, differing descriptions of the supreme being were all to be understood as referring to the same stainless supreme being. Further, he located the source of multiplicity of manifestation in Brahman's power to have his every will realized, *satyasaṃkalpa.* In addition, the grammatical rule of *sāmānādhikaraṇya,* correlative predication, applied to all the multiple manifestations of Brahman, that is, the rule of applying several terms to the same object. The five essential attributes of Brahman are such that they are defined only with respect to himself, rendering the notion of Brahman inviolable from human conceptions of him, thereby underscoring his greatness.

As a religious philosopher, it would also not have escaped his notice that the *divya rūpa* served to put a face on an otherwise faceless Brahman, especially given the competing Advaitin emphasis on Brahman as *neti neti,* "not this, nor this". Although Rāmānuja interprets this emphasis on *nirguṇa* Brahman as meaning that Brahman is stainless, since texts stating so "pertain to the negation of the defiling qualities of material nature",[10] nonetheless, the *divya rūpa* also served to give powerful expression to a deity that was eminently worthy of worship and accessible in human terms. Correspondingly, the *avatāra* and the *arcā* form make more readily available to the worshipper a vision of the divine that cannot be easily accessed in the *antaryāmin* form. It must be noted that Rāmānuja did not necessarily construct the architecture of divinity in such terms as are found here; rather, our point is that the divergent textual materials he tries to integrate into a univalent whole can cause philosophical problems, which Rāmānuja has attempted to deal with as best as he can. That is, the *divya rūpa* is the manifestation of something that by its very nature of greatness, cannot be manifested in any form that would limit it. As stated above, Rāmānuja calls to the defence of this and other manifestations the notions of *satyasaṃkalpa* and *sāmānādhikaraṇa.*

To return to the *avatāra,* then, Rāmānuja establishes that the *avatāra*—and by extension, *arcā*—is from the *divya rūpa* or supernal manifestation of Brahman. Further, the *avatāra* does not abandon his proper nature *(svakīyam-svabhāvam)* even though he takes on a generic form *(saṃsthāna)* resembling the human. In ontological terms, we take this to mean that the *avatāra* is still ontologically other than the human, in the same manner that Brahman is other than the world. This notion is further buttressed by the fact that the body inhabited by the *avatāra* is not made of the stuff common bodies are made of, that is, he is not *karman*-bound in any way. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa's assertions that he is beyond *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajña,* beyond *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, beyond *akṣara* and *kṣara* may be read as reminding the viewer of the *avatāra* what he really represents.

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[10] Carman, *The Theology,* 105.

Psychology

Ontic Status of the Human Soul

In the chain of existence, the human species occupies for Ṭūsī the position of being the apex of created entities; it marks the summation of the Universal Intellect's conception of the order of being. Indeed, the human being is identified as being "the main object of the forces of the *Nafs-i Kullī* (Universal Soul) ... ."[11] However, this high status is tempered by the equally strong notion found in Ṭūsī that the human being is the chief of creatures precisely because he or she is endowed with the potential for attaining perfection, imaged as an ability to be self-sufficient,[12] to see things clearly, and to experience blissfully a paradisiacal state. The body serves as a vehicle through which the soul may be manifested, while the soul itself constitutes the material out of which another form that may attain perfection under the mastery of the intellect may be constructed.

For Rāmānuja, human beings are embodied souls who are enmeshed in varying degrees of self-awareness and Brahman-awareness. All souls have, in their proper form, knowledge and beatitude. However, in their embodied states as *jīvātmans* in the phenomenal world of name and form, they become oblivious of their essential nature, due to the contraction of their consciousness. This is so because, as a result of their previous stock of *karman*, their souls entered forms of matter that are composite configurations of the three *guṇas, sattva, rajas*, and *tamas*. Each of the *guṇas* impels the human soul to behave in a certain manner; thus, *sattva* impels the soul to do good, *rajas*, to act in a passionate manner, while *tamas* exercises a pull toward performing evil acts. The level of *karmic* residue pertinent to each soul as it lay in its subtle state—that is, before "creation"—determines the kind of matter to which a particular soul will be conjoined. As a result, the human condition is such that souls are led—by their attachment to matter—into the erroneous perception that they are identified with their bodies, and, acting out of such ignorance, commit acts that will further bind them to *saṃsāra*, or the wheel of birth, death and rebirth.

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[11] T 34, P 14.
[12] T 54, P 41; B 165.

However, although attachment to the body is a sign of the human soul's bondage, it is at the same time, the means through which the soul may escape this bondage. For Rāmānuja, the highest human purpose in life is to attain to Brahman. This constitutes *mokṣa*, and the means to this is to know the real nature of both the soul and of Brahman. However, this knowledge has two facets: (a) preparation in the form of knowledge accessible through the study of the scriptures, bearing in mind that by knowledge Rāmānuja does not mean the syntactical meaning of the scriptures but, rather, *upāsana;* and (b) the knowledge vouchsafed to the devotee by the Lord himself. Those who are well-versed in the doctrines of the Vedas, in this case, the Viśiṣṭādvaitins, come to the realization that three modes of the supreme being must be distinguished—(i) that he is the object, *prakṛti*, the substratum of transformations; (ii) that he is the subject, *puruṣa*, that which enjoys; and (iii) that he is the inner ruler "of the above subject and object and, in essence, the abode of immeasurable virtues."[13] This threefold classification points to the relationship that obtains between the inner ruler, *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*; the inner ruler is the possessor of the body that is composed of the joining of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. This knowledge underpins the attitude with which the duties enjoined for one's caste and stage in life *(varṇāśramadharma)* are to be carried out, and by engaging in worship of the divine *(upāsana)*, the human soul may act so as to deplete the residue of evil *karman*. Having attempted to do so, the *jīvātman* is predisposed by the *antaryāmin* to act in a manner that pleases Him, and is now prepared to receive the Lord's grace, if He so chooses, and, thereby, escape from the coils of *saṃsāra*.

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[13] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #87, in van Buitenen, 245–246.

Thus, it is clear that both thinkers, Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja, view human existence as one stage in an ongoing process, although their formulations and the details of their views on the characteristics of the human soul are quite different. Ṭūsī, by and large, views the human being as the most noble of creations, although he sees the phenomenal world as one of dissemblance *(mushābahat)*, where good and evil are mixed together. He sees the human soul's attachment to matter as a positive expression of divine creative energy, for the body is essential to the manifestation of the soul. However, such a positive cast may be rendered negative if the soul uses its connection with the body to concern itself with corporeal things and becomes enchanted by them. Matter, after all, does not have the capacity to act, only to accept influence, and, as such, it is evil in the philosophic sense. Rather, Ṭūsī says it is imperative that the soul pay attention to the development of its intellect, which may then rule it and order its actions. Knowledge of the distinction between right and wrong will come from an acceptance of the prophetic law, and its natural conclusion, belief in the resurrection or *qiyāmah*. Both the development of the intellect and the belief in the *qiyāmah* require tutelage under a teacher qualified to impart knowledge. Thus, although the body is imaged positively in that it allows the human soul to gain expression, it can become a negative force if it detracts from the soul's inclination toward the intellect, and if the soul becomes preoccupied with serving it. Key to the soul's development is the notion that both knowledge and ethical action are necessary to enable the construction of a form from the material of the soul that will enable the human being to attain perfection. The source for divinely-guided instruction *(taᶜlīm)* and ethical action is ultimately the *imām*, albeit mediated by the *ḥujjah.* Thus, submission *(taslīm)* to the *imām* is necessarily of paramount and crucial importance. Indeed, the *imām* is the source of the correct manner in which God is to be worshipped, communicated to the *muʾmin* (believer) through *taʾwīl* (symbolic interpretation) and *taʿlīm* (instruction).

Rāmānuja views the body as *guṇa*-bound, and, as such, it exerts a pull upon the soul to act in a manner that will further bind it to *saṃsāra.* At the same time, however, since attachment to the body opens up the possibility for the soul to act, it, too, can be viewed as being an essential vehicle through which the soul may gain its freedom from *saṃsāra* and attain its true condition, characterized by knowledge and beatitude. Thus, for both thinkers, the body has value in that it enables the soul to express itself through its actions, while it is a source of potential danger for the soul in that the soul may choose to make itself subservient to bodily pleasures. Rāmānuja views the human condition as one in which the soul has yet to attain to its proper form, which is characterized by freedom from all the various differentiations brought about by the *karman* of the soul and caused by the evolution of *prakṛti* into the bodies of gods, men, animals and so forth. In this liberated state, the soul is characterized by knowledge and beatitude, and further, the differentiation that does exist in the proper form of the soul is something beyond the power of expression and, it is known only by the soul itself.[14] Attainment to this proper form, which appears to be synonymous with *mokṣa,* is through knowledge—understood in the manner specified as above, that is, *upāsana*—and action, the details of which are to be found in the scriptures as taught by those well-versed in them. This, however, is all the *jīvātman* can do. It will still take the grace of the Lord to release the *jīvātman* from the bonds of *saṃsāra.*

The Purpose of Existence

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[14] Ibid., 186, #5.

Although both thinkers view the human being as a stage in which the human soul has yet to develop further, their emphases on the soul's current status vary greatly. Ṭūsī uses the language of potentiality to describe the human soul's sojourn in the phenomenal world, while Rāmānuja uses the language of ignorance *(avidyā)* brought about by the soul's prior *karmic* residue in describing the human soul's state in the phenomenal world. In other words, Ṭūsī's human has to struggle to develop further to a state in which he or she will have clear vision and bliss, while Rāmānuja's human has to struggle to burn off both previous and present *karmic* residue. Ṭūsī's human has not yet reached the full extent of his or her potential, while Rāmānuja's human, in theory, already possesses that state of knowledge and bliss but is blind to it due to the erroneous perceptions caused by the ignorance brought about by prior *karmic* residue. As an aside, it must be noted in this connection that since freed souls never return to the cycle of *saṃsāra*[15] even though Rāmānuja speaks in terms of the soul reasserting its proper form, it is clear that at the start of this particular *yuga* the soul was not already in possession of knowledge and beatitude even in its subtle state. Interestingly, however, where the two thinkers meet is in their use of the notion of "return." For Ṭūsī, the human soul must return to its origin, a statement that would indicate that the human soul, in the form that is constructed from it by the intellect, is characterized by clear vision and bliss. However, he chooses not to begin with the premise that the human soul is originally in a state of clear vision and bliss, because to have done so would have entailed that he then have a theory as to how the human soul came to be in such a state that divine revelation became necessary. Rather than placing emphasis on Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden, which is something he interprets as a premature revealing of divine mysteries, he prefers to image this world, the realm of dissimulation or dissemblance *(kawn-i mushābahat)* as a faint copy of the original. This world, for him, is a result of the decreasing potency of the intermediaries between the Universal Intellect and the world's coming into being but the human being in it is nonetheless valuable precisely because it took so many intermediaries to set the conditions under which humans could come into existence. By drawing attention to the fact that human beings are endowed with the potential to attain perfection, he can make a case for revelation as a form of divine aid for the soul. The language of return both points to the inevitability of physical death for mortals and the opportunity that exists, while in the embodied state, for souls to assure themselves of continued existence after physical death.

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[15] That is, never again as embodied souls with all the limitations of a *karma*-bound existence. They may, if they so will, assume bodies and "visit" the world of mortals, but they are not bound by its limitations.

Rāmānuja does not explicitly use the language of return. However, the notion is implied through his emphasis on the idea that the soul, in its proper form, possesses knowledge and beatitude. The ignorance that characterizes its phenomenal state is brought about by beginningless *(anādi) karma* and is not something that is intrinsic to the soul as such. Were this *karmic* residue to be burnt off, then the soul would regain its original nature. However, this raises the question whether souls, in fact, are pure to begin with, that is, are free from *karmic* residue to begin with. On the one hand, Rāmānuja seems to indicate that they are, and that the origins of *karman* are unknown, since *karman* is beginningless. On the other hand, Rāmānuja is at pains to assure his readers and students that a liberated soul, by which one may understand to mean a soul that has attained its proper state or form, never returns to *saṃsāric* existence. The point may be made that only those souls that have *karmic* residue—since this attaches itself in a latent state to the soul in its subtle, pre-manifest state—ever come into existence in the world of name and form, or the phenomenal world. Given such a reading, it may be argued that human beings are also in a state of development while in the phenomenal world. The key difference between the views of Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja regarding the soul, then, is that while for Ṭūsī the soul is capable of attaining an exalted state, it does not start out that way; rather, it is a state toward which it must strive, despite his assertion that the point of return is dictated by the origin. Rāmānuja's view, on the other hand, is that although the soul is essentially possessed of knowledge and beatitude, neither in its subtle nor in its gross state can it be said to possess such. It has already been noted that Ṭūsī, too, presents somewhat of a problem when he states that the soul returns to its origin, suggesting that the soul has to "rediscover" what its origin is. The point we are trying to make here is that both thinkers strongly emphasize one aspect of the soul, while the other aspect, though pushed to the background, nonetheless has a shadowy presence. That is, Ṭūsī emphasizes that the soul must develop toward perfection, while at the same time hinting at an "original" state, while Rāmānuja emphasizes the original state, while at the same time hinting at the need for the soul to develop. The reasons for Ṭūsī's emphasis are clear: he does not want to introduce the idea of original sin or maintain the idea of the soul's fall as found in, say, Gnostic writings. Rāmānuja, however, is burdened at the outset with the theory of beginningless *karman*, and so for him the stage has already been set in which the soul may be viewed as imprisoned by its *karman.* Thus, the notion that the soul needs to develop is abandoned by him in favour of the view that the soul must struggle, both through its own efforts and through divine grace, to regain its original nature, its proper form. Therefore, he holds the view that the soul does not develop as such, but rather, that the soul must develop the capacity to view its original condition; it must refine its ability to see clearly through the twin imperatives of selfless action and knowledge, under which worship is subsumed.

The issue that is really under discussion here is whether the soul is predestined to return to its origin or not. Ṭūsī deftly weaves his way out of this difficult impasse by suggesting that those souls who do not make it to paradise never had such an origin as they thought they might. In other words, should they choose not to strive under the tutelage of a teacher through whom they will be divinely guided, then abiding life is something that, in ultimate terms, was something that was not meant for them in any case since they were not so originated. However, all humans have the capacity to develop, and it is necessary for them to exercise their choice whether to join the *daᶜwah* or not, for it is only in this way that they will receive the requisite instruction to prepare them for entrance among the people of unity, and hence, abiding life. It should be noted that Ṭūsī must emphasize human choice because in his worldview, a human has only this one lifetime in which to gain the other shore. It is critical that the human being make the right choices here—that is, to join the *daʿwah*—for there will not be any other chances after the span of life is over. If Ṭūsī subscribed to the notion of transmigration of souls, it is not evident in the work under study.

For Rāmānuja, however, since the soul is eternal and indestructible, it may be speculated that at some point all souls will gain liberation. In that sense, it may be said that all souls are predestined, eventually, to regain their original state, that is, not the subtle state prior to manifestation, but the state that is rightfully the soul's, that in which the soul possesses knowledge and beatitude. So what force, then, should scriptural injunctions have in motivating humans to burn up their *karmic* residue? It is the knowledge that *saṃsāric* existence is far more disagreeable an alternative than that in which the soul partakes fully of the bliss enjoyed by Brahman. The prospect of drawing out the struggle for liberation over several tortuous lifetimes should in itself be sufficient motivation to impel the human being to strive toward attaining liberation in the present life.

From the above, the following conclusions may be drawn. Both thinkers see embodied existence as a preparatory stage towards an exalted state that is characterized by knowledge and bliss. Both also hold the view that while in the phenomenal world, human beings do not, at the outset, perceive their own potential nature, in the case of Ṭūsī, and original nature, in the case of Rāmānuja. Both are of the view that the means through which the exalted state of the soul may be attained is through human struggle and divine assistance. It is here that the role of the *imām*, on the one hand, and the *avatāra* (or *arcā)*, on the other, come into play. For Ṭūsī, the *imām* is crucial as the source of knowledge (variously through *taʾyīd, taʾwīl*, and *taʿlīm:* divine assistance, symbolic interpretation and instruction, respectively) that leads to submission *(taslīm)* and worship *(ʿibādah)*, ultimately leading the soul to knowledge of his (the *imām's)* essence *(dhāt)* through himself (the *imām).* For Rāmānuja, the *guru* is crucial for imparting correct knowledge, the *avatāra* is crucial as teacher in some respects, and, with the *arcā*, as focus of worship in all respects, a worship *(bhakti*, through *upāsana* and *dhyāna)* that leads to the knowledge and beatitude that characterizes the proper form of the soul that is recognized as liege to the Lord. Both thinkers also caution that the body, although important in enabling the human soul to find manifestation, can cause deterioration in the soul's status if the human being chooses to serve the interests of the body. All these are significant points of reference in guiding us through the conceptions of each thinker with respect to his views on psychology. However, the thinkers differ immensely from each other in the manner in which they frame their views, as is apparent from the detailed study conducted in the relevant chapters in prior sections.

Epistemology

For Ṭūsī, when the human soul enters the realm of phenomenal existence, it has still not realized its full potential for being. He distinguishes between two levels of perfection, the first level being the perfection of the body, in which the human soul comes into possession of and control over the body. The second level of perfection is attained when the soul purifies its form *(ṣūrat)* to the extent that it becomes material for the use and control of the intellect. At this level, Ṭūsī notes, the soul's "source of life *(ᶜayn-i ḥayāt)* through Him, the All–High, would come into the state of actuality."[16] In this state, the abiding realm of disclosure *(mubāyanat)* will become evident. This world is described as Paradise:

> There is only one real paradise, and it is eternal reward *(thawāb)*, everlasting perfection *(kamāl-i sarmadī)* and limitless existence *(wujūd-i nā-mutanāhī);* and the meaning of all this is attaining God in all aspects.[17]

Further, entrance in this world leads to knowledge of unity: "And leaving this world does not mean natural death, but the arrival from the realm of dissemblance *(mushābahat)* to the realm of distinctions *(mubāyanat)*, and from that to the world of unity *(waḥdat)*."[18] The realm of dissemblance is described as a state "in which all contradictory things are similar to each other, and man is so confused and veiled from the truth that he cannot differentiate and distinguish between any of these things."[19] In contrast, the realm of disclosure *(mubāyanat)*, also called the hereafter, *ākhirat*, is described as "a state in which all dissembling things will be rendered distinct and, through divine gnosis *(maᶜrifat-i ilāhī)*, right is distinguished from wrong and the followers of truth are distinguished from the followers of falsehood with clear distinction."[20] Thus, for Ṭūsī, perfection of being is concomitant with perfection of knowledge: having entered the realm of disclosure, the soul will be led by the divine to itself. Ṭūsī suggests that this is beyond the knowledge conveyed by ordinary people as well as that conveyed by the [clear-visioned] chosen one *(khāṣṣ-i mubāyanat)* (that is, the *ḥujjat)*.[21] This knowledge is such that it can only be said: "I have known You through Yourself, You led me to Yourself. If it were not for You, I would not have known who You were."[22] This may be what Ṭūsī means when he asserts: "the real Paradise is the 'upright' reason *(ᶜaql-i mustaqīm)*, i.e. the one which unites with the Divine volition, *amr*."[23] This stage is further identified as the stage of the return of the soul to its original abode *(kawn-i maᶜād*, the realm of return).[24]

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[16] T 27–28, P 23.

[17] T 52, P 39; B 164. (B)

In Rāmānuja's view, the soul as such has uncontracted *(asaṃkucita)*, unlimited and perfect knowledge.[25] However, the soul that enters the realm of the phenomenal world is enveloped by ignorance *(avidyā)* in the form of *karman*. The *karmic* legacy of the soul determines the kind of body it will enter, whether that of Brahmā or a tuft of grass.

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[18] T 61, P 45; B 169. (I) B. seems to have misread this line.
[19] T 90, P 62, B 177. (B)
[20] T 90, P 62; B 177. (B, with minor modifications by KH)
[21] T 93, P 64; B 179.
[22] Quoted by Ṭūsī in T 93, P 64; B 179. (B)
[23] T 55–56, P 42; B 166. (I, with minor modifications by KH)
[24] T 93, P 64; B 179.
[25] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #78, in van Buitenen, 237.

Accordingly, the soul's range of knowledge is now confined to that which the body encompasses.[26] It will be recalled that the soul is the knowing subject and consciousness is its tool, while the principle of egoity, *ahaṃkāra*, is an object perceptible to the consciousness and hence, to the soul. The contraction of the consciousness caused by the *karmic* legacy of the soul leads the consciousness to convey the notion to the soul that the *ahaṃkāra*, which is an internal, non-intelligent organ of the embodied self, is indeed the self. The *ahaṃkāra* is *prakṛtic* in basis, and hence, the identification of the *ahaṃkāra* with the self results in the erroneous imposition of the idea of self upon the body, and causes the soul to act accordingly.

Thus, it is clear that for Rāmānuja embodiment conveys a state in which the soul's consciousness undergoes epistemic contraction in accordance with the range of the body's organs of perception. Through performing actions in consonance with the mistaken assumption that the soul is identical with the *ahaṃkāra*, the soul increases its *karmic* legacy. Since the consequences of prior and newly-formed *karman* must be experienced, the soul is kept chained to the realm of phenomenal or *saṃsāric* existence and remains oblivious to its essential state, which is one of uncontracted, unlimited and perfect knowledge.

The state of *mokṣa* or liberation envisioned by Rāmānuja is attained at the time of "the apprehension of Brahman as perfect boundless bliss which presupposes the revelation of the proper form of the soul that results from the worship of the Supreme Spirit."[27] Rāmānuja does not specify whether this occurs before physical death. The revelation of the proper form of the soul is concomitant with an awareness of the soul's true relationship with Brahman, that Brahman in the form of *antaryāmin* is its inner ruler, and that the soul itself is in a body–possessor of body *(śeṣa-śeṣin,* or accessory–principal) relationship with Brahman. Once the soul has gone to the highest light, that is, Brahman, a state which most likely occurs after physical death since it is included in the description of the soul's journey once it exits the body, then it is manifested in the form of its consciousness *(vijñāna).* It experiences supreme bliss; has the power of having its every will save that of creation realized; is characterized by knowledge of all other souls and of Brahman; and has the assurance that it will never again enter the realm of *saṃsāra* in a condition that requires embodiment of the kind dictated by *karman.*

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[26] Ibid.

[27] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #4, in van Buitenen, 185.

Thus, it is clear that for both Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja, existence in the phenomenal world is a state characterized by a state of knowledge that is constrained by the very fact of embodiment existence. For Ṭūsī, the human soul is in a state of potentiality which must be developed in order that it may participate in the realm of distinctions and arrive at an authentic understanding of divine unity *(tawḥīd).* For Rāmānuja, the legacy of *karman* must be effaced in order that the soul can perceive both its own proper form and arrive at a correct understanding of its relationship with Brahman. The achievement of these states of true perception result in a blissful state of being for the soul, along with true knowledge and eternal being. Ṭūsī remains silent on the details regarding the existence and powers of the soul upon the attainment of the state of divine unity from the immediately prior paradisiacal state of the soul—as indeed he must, given the Islamic emphasis on avoiding partnership with the divine unity. Rāmānuja, on the other hand, is able to describe the blissful state of the soul to some degree as in his tradition multiplicity of souls is subsumed under the unity effected by the principal–accessory relationship that obtains between Brahman and the spiritual and corporeal entities; that is, they are Brahman's body and He is its controller. In either case, it is evident that for both philosophers, the attainment of true knowledge is concomitant with the attainment of a perfect state of being. The non-attainment of true knowledge results, for Ṭūsī in a state of hell for the soul, if not non-existence itself; while for Rāmānuja, it results in continued revolutions through the cycle of suffering-laden *saṃsāra* until the dissolution of the *kalpa* or age, a state that may be construed as hell when contrasted with the blissful state that is the soul's proper station.

For Ṭūsī, how does the soul actualize its potential for perfection? Since he speaks of perfection both as a state of being and of knowing, it is clear that his response will be appropriately imaged in terms of gaining access to knowledge resulting in actions enabling the construction of a form able to perceive the realm of disclosure. As discussed in the chapter on epistemology above, it is clear that the natural human capacity for reasoning is simply the basis for further knowledge. This knowledge comes in stages, first through the *tanzīl* or revelation, and then, once the believer is firmly established in that, through *ta᾿wīl* communicated through *taᶜlīm* or instruction from those who are knowledgeable concerning the realm of disclosure. The revelation or *tanzīl*, and its concomitant establishment of the *sharīᶜah* or prophetic law, is mediated by the Prophet, or *rasūl*, and gives rise to the first perfection of the soul, as discussed in the relevant chapter above. The *ta᾿wīl,* and its concomitant establishment of the *qiyāmah*, or resurrection, is mediated by the *ḥujjat* of the *imām*, from whom the truth concerning *tawḥid* as well as inner meaning *(bāṭin)* or *taᶜwīl* (significance) originates. The resonance of the earthly hierarchy of teachers with the hypostaces of the divine pleroma has already been indicated in the chapter, above, on ontology. This second level of knowledge, and the actions that are to ensue from it, give rise to the final perfection of the soul, which is that form which enables it to participate in the realm of disclosure, and thence, to membership among the *ahl-i waḥdat,* the people of unity. In this final stage, Ṭūsī notes, the soul acts in accordance with the *amr*, the divine command, and is led to knowledge of divinity through the Divine itself.

For Rāmānuja, the soul's attainment of *mokṣa* or liberation necessitates the removal of *avidyā* or ignorance that keeps the soul bound in *saṃsāra.* The obstacle—*karman*—facing the soul in its journey toward self- and Brahman-realization has two aspects: first, it must deplete its prior *karman*, and second, it must inhibit the formation of further *karman.* To destroy *karman* necessitates that the soul have access to knowledge that will motivate it to act in such a manner that both aspects of *karman* will be dealt with effectively. Since human knowledge that is sensory and inferential is necessarily *guṇa*-bound, it is important to understand that it is only that knowledge not rooted in humanly originated categories of perception which can provide authentic information about the true nature of the soul, Brahman, and the means to realize *mokṣa.* This information is to be found in the scriptures, that are preterhuman *(apauruṣeya)* and hence, untainted by the *guṇas.* Scripture prescribes the duties enjoined upon one's caste and stage in life *(varṇāśramadharma)*,[28] the rigorous following of which will assist the seeker *(mumukṣu)* through the Lord's grace, in effacing if not completely eradicating prior *karman.* Here again, as with Ṭūsī, revelation is seen as important in laying down a course of action to be followed: adherence to the *sharīᶜah,* correctly understood. The importance of observing the *varṇāśramadharma* in ending the consequences of prior *karman* is that it enables the increase of *sattva,* the *guṇa* that predisposes one toward goodness, for it is only when *sattva* is increased that the knowledge requisite for *mokṣa* is allowed to come into being. Indeed, the proper observance of *varṇāśramadharma* forms the basis of all *vidyā,* that is, of all meditations upon Brahman.

Performance of the *varṇāśramadharma* alone—that is, those who perform sacrificial and pious deeds but without the knowledge of Brahman, go via the path of the elders *(pitṛyāṇa)* to the world of the elders and thence, to the moon *(candra).* Once the merit so attained is used up, the person will return to the cycle of *saṃsāra* in the form of a foetus, perhaps in a better birth.[29] However, those who are qualified to do so, that is, those of the twice-born castes who may study the scriptures (by which he means Brāhmaṇas), will recognize through the study of the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā that the results of works *(karma,* that is, actions) are ephemeral, and do not lead to liberation. They will thus approach a *guru* and enter into an inquiry into the knowledge of Brahman, that is, enter into a study of the Uttara Mīmāṃsā. From this it will become clear that *Brahmavidyā,* or knowledge of Brahman is essential, and although different *vidyās* are enjoined for different purposes, it is up to the *mumukṣu* to determine whether to undertake them or not. The main purpose of the *vidyās* is to attain Brahman through the eradication of *karman* and *avidyā* which hinder Brahman-realization. The act of knowledge *(vedana*, from *vid*, to know) is, for Rāmānuja, synonymous with meditation *(dhyāna:* continuity of remembrance) and worship *(upāsana)*. Hence, the *vidyās* are termed meditations, and cannot be understood as acts in the proper sense, for they are not subsidiary to acts, but supersede them. In this respect, Rāmānuja is careful to point out that acts are not to be given up in preference to the *vidyās*, but rather that their fruits are to be given up in acknowledgement that the fruits are ephemeral and in recognition of the fact that acts do not in themselves give rise to liberation. Liberation follows from the *vidyās*, upon the grace of the Lord. This is reminiscent of Ṭūsī's view that the *sharīᶜah*-enjoined duties must not be given up, but must be understood in light of their inner meaning. The performance of the *vidyās*—which are at once knowledge, meditation and worship—predisposes the mind to be superimposed upon by Brahman. The process by which this occurs is that the *vidyās* have the power to efface the fruits of both prior and present *karman*, and thereby pave the way for the gratification of the Lord. This is the most that the *mumukṣu* can do. In the final analysis, Brahman is attained only by that person who is chosen by the Lord, and it is ultimately through His grace that the devotee is granted both a sustaining vision of him and *mokṣa*. That is, he himself is the means *(upāya)* by which He may be attained. It has already been remarked upon above that for Ṭūsī, too, the final means to knowledge of unity is God himself.

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[28] It must be noted that R. clearly includes both worship of and surrender to the Lord in enjoined acts. See *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #126, in van Buitenen, 281.
[29] *Śrībhāṣya* 3.1.6ff, in Karmarkar, 782ff.

Salvation/Liberation

The English terms salvation and liberation have connotations that must be clarified before we proceed any further. The term salvation, in English, connotes, by and large, the Biblical notion of a fall from grace, or a primordial sin, from which human beings have to be saved. In his writings, Ṭūsī does not draw attention to such a concept even though Islam, being one the Abrahamic faiths, is more closely related to Judaism and Christianity than is Hinduism.

Indeed, he only remarks that human beings have always been in existence, and his interpretation of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the primordial garden is more in keeping with the knowledge of divine mysteries that they revealed when they were not yet authorized to do so. That particular discussion need not detain us here, apart from noting that for him, Adam is not necessarily the first human being, but rather, belongs more readily to the category of *imāms*, who as has been observed earlier, are human in form, but not in essence. Thus, when speaking of salvation with respect to Ṭūsī, it must be noted that he is not concerned with the idea of an inherent "sin" that the human must be saved from. Rather, his concern is with the potential inherent within the human for an eternal life, and for vouchsafed knowledge of the divine, imparted to the human by the divine himself.

With respect to Rāmānuja, it may be argued that the human condition is such that the human bears a *karmic* weight, which is similar to the original sin borne by the Biblical human only insofar as it is a given facet of the human condition and must be overcome. In this respect, the use of the term salvation to denote the effacement of *karman*, which is possible ultimately only through divine grace, is pertinent. However, this being said, it must be noted that the tenor of the worldview found in Rāmānuja images *saṃsāra* as a form of imprisonment for the eternal, blissful, knowing soul. In this respect, the English term liberation more accurately reflects the notion of *mokṣa:* it is freedom from the bonds of *saṃsāra*, and concomitant with this freedom, is a regaining of the soul's original stature (hence, salvation). I am aware that the discussion on terminology is an ongoing problem in the History of Religions, for the use of English in order to analyze and discuss concepts originally articulated in Persian and Sanskrit, respectively, itself involves a translation of sorts that is further burdened by the cultural, religious and historical connotations of the English itself. My purpose here is simply to draw attention to the use of the terms salvation and liberation when examining the teleological and eschatological views of Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja.

The discussion above has already examined the role of knowledge with respect to salvation/liberation. Revealed knowledge identifies a supreme being who is responsible for creation/manifestation of the phenomenal world and the humans within it; identifies him as the Lord and hence, as the true object of worship; clarifies the true nature of the human soul and its relationship to the divine; and outlines the means by which the human soul may gain access to eternal, abiding, blissful and perfect existence and knowledge. The knowledge that is to be gleaned from scripture itself forms the basis of two other realms of human endeavour: ethical development and worship. These are essential, alongside correct understanding, in order to develop the human soul to the extent that it may receive divine grace.

For Ṭūsī, actions *(ᶜamāl)*, under which he distinguishes between refinement of character *(ākhlāq*, ethics) and self-surrender *(taslīm)*, are of the utmost importance in the development of the soul. As discussed in the relevant chapter above, ethical development is essential for freeing the soul from the tyranny of the sensorial *(ḥissī)*, imaginative *(khayālī)* and estimative *(wahmī)* natural forces so that it may engage in its true occupation: comprehension of that which can be known *(maᶜlūmāt)* and intellected *(maᶜqūlāt)*. Through the acceptance of abstract substances *(mawādd-i ᶜaqlānī)*, the soul may gradually gain the recognition of the *imām*, which Ṭūsī attests is the same as knowing God *(Khudā-shināsī)*. The Persian verb *shināstan* has the connotation of the Arabic verbal root *ᶜ-r-f*, from which comes the term *maᶜrifah*, translated variously as experiential knowledge of the divine, or gnosis, and it is to be distinguished from merely ratiocinative knowledge that presupposes the existence of a subject and an object. Ṭūsī's use of the term *shināsī* indicates that this is an experiential knowledge of the type in which the believer is led to God by himself, as mentionedearlier.

Since the *imām* of the time is the prime interpreter of the mysteries of divine revelation, he is also, according to Ṭūsī, the standard of ethics and behaviour. Indeed, the chief purpose of ethics consists in carrying out the command of the "bearer of the truth of the time" *(muḥiqq-ji waqt).* He connects the notion of goodness with the command of the *imām*, echoing the notion that the divine Command *(Amr)* is the source of all goodness in creation. In a similar vein, just as every existent in creation submits to the existent preceding it in the hierarchy of creation, so is it essential that submission be made out of love to the *imām*. The self-surrender of the universals is done from acknowledgement both of what it receives from the universal above itself and of placing itself at the disposal of the higher universal. Self-surrender, then, is an act that connotes acknowledgement of the superiority of the other, as well as reception from that superior, of something that is beneficial to that which surrenders. The loving self-surrender of the believer to the *imām* opens the way for the *imām's* assistance *(taᶜyīd)*, and alerts the believer to fear God. In worshipping God in this way, thought—which is an emanation of the radiating Intellect *(inbiᶜāth-i shuᶜāᶜ-i ᶜAqlānī)* as well as arising from the human speaking soul *(nafs-i nāṭiqa)*—becomes "the cause of the connection with truth *(sabab-i munāsabat-i ḥaqq)*",[30] and an angel will be appointed to keep these always adorned with truth. Since words are the manifestations of thoughts, and actions are the manifestations of both thoughts and words, such a person will continually be adorned in their thoughts, words and deeds by goodness. Thus, we see here an interiorization of the ethical standard, and by implication, of the divine Command.

Ṭūsī notes that progress along the stages *(maqāmāt)* of the development of the soul is facilitated by a spiritual being *(rūḥāniyyat)*, that is, an angel *(firishta)*, which facilitates for the soul "its passage through the degrees of perfection and its arrival at, and union with *(luḥūq wa wuṣūl)*, the origin [of its existence] *(kull-i mabdaʾi khūd)*."[31] Ṭūsī draws attention to the fact that such angels are also personified, according to the Qurʾānic verse

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[30] T 101, P 70; B 185. (I)
[31] T 60, P 44; B 168. (B, with minor modifications by KH)

6:9,[32] meaning that such angels are the *ḥujjah* and others. However, once the soul has attained a certain stage *(maqām)*, it is evident that it itself becomes the personification of an angel. The stages Ṭūsī notes are as follows: sensorial perception is perfected by use of the estimative faculty *(wahm)*, which is perfected by the soul *(nafs)*, which becomes intellectual *(ᶜaqlī)*, and which should be [joined with] that which is divinely commanded *(amrī)*.[33] A person in charge of whose actions an angel has been appointed, will climb the ladder of ascension to the world of the hereafter *(miᶜrāj-i ᶜālam-i ākhirat):* "His thought *(fikr)* will be intellectual *(ᶜaqlī)* made of the *Amr* [divine Command]; his word *(qawl)* will be spiritual *(rūḥī)*, made of the intellect; and his action *(ᶜamal)* will be bodily *(jismī)* made of the soul *(rūḥ)*."[34]

Thus, for Ṭūsī, the *imām* becomes the focus of all attention for the believer who decides to join the *daᶜwah* (that is, the Ismāᶜīlī 'mission'). Not only is the *imām* the source of *taᶜlīm* (instruction) and *ta᾿wīl* (symbolic interpretation), but he is also the bearer of the ethical standard, the following of which leads to the interiorization of the Command. The *imām* is to be loved, to be obeyed, and to be submitted to. In this way, the believer or *mu᾿min* attains to the realm of disclosure, is exemplary in the goodness of thought, word and deed, and is ready to be admitted among the *ahl-i waḥdat* should divine grace so choose.

Strictly speaking, for Rāmānuja, liberation (the preferred term here, connoting salvation in the specific manner stated above) is to break free from the bonds of *saṃsāra*, never to return the realm of embodied existence once this life span is over. This freedom from *saṃsāra* is achieved once the Lord, through his grace, grants the devotee the state of *mokṣa*, which is accompanied by the concomitant direct perception of the soul's awareness of itself, and of the supreme being by whom it is itself ensouled. It is assumed that for Rāmānuja, this state occurs after the soul has departed from the body. This is a state characterized by knowledge of all other *ātmans* and of Brahman; by bliss by virtue of its having its every will realized—save that concerned with the operation (that is, manifestation, subsistence and destruction) of the world—; and by the knowledge that it will never re-enter the realm of *saṃsāra* in a condition that requires the kind of embodiment dictated by *karman*.

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[32] "Had We made him an angel, yet assuredly, We would have made him a man." Cited in T 60, P 44; B 169. (B)

[33] T 61, P 45; B 169.

[34] T 102, P 70. Translation mine, based on Ivanow.

As with Ṭūsī, Rāmānuja images mokṣa as a state in which the soul experiences both knowledge and bliss, and in addition, potency. Ṭūsī does not address the issue of the soul's potency; for him, it may be assumed, the potency of the soul lies in the ability to see clearly in the realm of disclosure, and thenceforth, in the knowledge of unity granted to the *ahl-i waḥdat* (that is, the knowledge itself is power, and power *(quwwah)* is, in any case, His alone). What may be brought into focus regarding Rāmānuja's view of *mokṣa* is that he construes it in terms of the soul's direct perception of its proper nature as well as of Brahman, and it has been noted in the relevant chapter above that these two are concomitant: one occurs with the other. It may be recalled that Rāmānuja distinguishes between two types of aspirants that attain *mokṣa:* the *kaivalyārthin* (or *jijñāsu)*, who seeks to realize the true nature of the self as a state separate from association with *prakṛti*, and for whom the soul's relation of dependence on the Lord is not of primary importance; and the *jñānin*, who "has the wisdom to know that *ātma* is essentially characterized by its being essentially related as liege to Lord ... [and] therefore, does not halt or stop away at the point where he may cognize the mere matter-distinct *ātma*, but journeys onward to reach the Lord."[35] As is evident from Lipner's discussion of the issue, both the *kaivalyārthin* and the *jñānin* attain *mokṣa*, with the proviso that the former must recognize the Lord as the recipient of all his sacrifices and penances; indeed, the soul or *ātma*-realization of the *kaivalyārthin* must necessarily culminate in the *ātma*-realization of the *jñānin*. We have already drawn attention to Stevenson's view that Rāmānuja considers the *kaivalyārthin* to be one who focuses on the difference between *ātman* and *prakṛti,* while the *jñānin* focuses on the relationship between the self and the Lord. Hence, for the latter, liberation lies in attaining Brahman with *ātma*-realization as a secondary benefit, and it is clear throughout Rāmānuja's writings that he construes *mokṣa* in the same light: the primary focus, for him, lies in the presentational experience of Brahman by a soul. The preparation entailed for such a soul is that of having faithfully undertaken the duties outlined in the scriptures pertaining to *varṇāśramadharma* without attachment to fruits, and of studying the scriptures under the tutelage of a *guru,* and embarking upon the various meditations of Brahman. In making the connection between knowledge *(vedanā),* worship *(upāsana)* and meditation or contemplation in the form of continuity of remembrance (*dhyāna),* Rāmānuja states: "Now this meditation *(dhyāna)* is of the form of a stream of unbroken calling-to-mind, like the flow of oil; that is, it is a steady calling-to-mind. .... This calling-to-mind is tantamount to seeing. ... This kind of steady keeping-in-mind *(anusmṛti)* is designated by the word *bhakti."*[36] Rāmānuja specifies further:

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[35] *Gītābhāṣya* 7:16, in Govindāchārya, 244.

> And that same remembrance *(smṛti)* is described as having the form of realization *(darśana-rūpa).* And 'having the form of realization' amounts to the attainment of nature of direct perception *(pratyakṣa).* In this way, he particularizes the remembrance *(smṛti)* which is the means for salvation *(sādhana)* as amounting to direct perception.[37]

Rāmānuja means by this that one who had attained to this form of realization *(darśana-rūpa)* has now reached the point at which he may, if he is so chosen by the Lord, be blessed with the vision of Himself, that is, be vouchsafed to the devotee. As discussed earlier, this experience prepares the devotee to receive the grace of the Lord, facilitating the transition upon death to final liberation. It is the means to securing Brahman and has to be practised, along with all the acts in the various stages of life, until death.[38] In addition, it particularizes for the devotee the form in which the Lord will make Himself seen to the devotee, making the experience, as Lipner terms it, "so clear and vivid as to be presentational in character."[39]

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[36] *Śrībhāṣya,* 1.1.1, 13–15, translated by Lipner, *The Face of Truth,* 114–115.
[37] *Śrībhāṣya,* 1.1.1, 15 in Karmarkar, 17.
[38] *Śrībhāṣya,* 1.1.1., 16 in Karmarkar, 19.

Where are the details concerning such a particularized form of the supreme being to be found? In the relevant chapter on ontology, above, we drew attention to Rāmānuja's scripturally based view of Brahman, and pointed out that for him, in all meditations of Brahman, the five defining qualities must be present (viz. *satya, jñāna, ananta, ānanda* and *amalatva).*[40] Mention of other qualities, such as compassion, is context-specific, depending on the meditation invoked. In addition, attention was drawn to Rāmānuja's view of Brahman as Viṣṇu–Nārāyaṇa, in his threefold aspect as the supernal manifestation *(divya rūpa* or *mahāvibhūti)* in *paramavyoman* or Vaikuṇṭha; as sustainer; and as *avatāra.* Mention was also made that Rāmānuja considers Brahman, the supreme being *(paramātman),* the inner ruler *(antaryāmin)* and the supernal manifestation *(mahāvibhūti* or *divya rūpa)* to be one and the same. We know that the source for the *avatāra* form is the supernal manifestation, the *divya rūpa.* Thus, the scriptures, according to Rāmānuja, provide many representations of the supreme being that may be viewed as the object of meditation. Among the most poetic representations proffered by Rāmānuja are those of Viṣṇu in his aspect of the divine supernal form, according to his view that the proper form of the Venerable Lord refers to the *paramaṃ padam,* that is, the resort of Viṣṇu in the supernal manifestation.[41] In the proem or introduction to his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā,* Rāmānuja also refers to the notion that the supreme being, that is, the supreme person, Nārāyaṇa, that is, Viṣṇu, "assumed a shape of same structure as theirs [that is, different beings who live in the various worlds] without giving up his proper nature, and in that shape He has descended *(avatīriya)* repeatedly to various worlds in order that He might be worshipped by the beings who live in these worlds ... ."[42] We have noted the extension of the *avatāra* form in the temple iconic representation known as the *arcā*, which could also serve as a focus for meditation. Rāmānuja declares that the means of attaining Brahman "is a superior *bhakti* in the form of rememorization *(anudhyāna-rūpa)* staggered to a state of extremely lucid perception, which is immeasurably and overwhelmingly dear to the devotee."[43] In addition:

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[39] Lipner, *The Face of Truth,* 115.
[40] *Śrībhāṣya* 3.3.13, quoted in Carman, *The Theology,* 88.
[41] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #132ff, in van Buitenen, 288–292.

> When it is realized that the soul stands in a relation of subservience to the Supreme Brahman because this Supreme Brahman—treasury of hosts of innumerable absolute and immeasurable beautiful qualities, irreproachable, possessing an infinite supernal manifestation—ocean of immeasurable and absolute goodness, beauty and love—is the Principal to which the soul is accessory or subservient, then the Supreme Brahman who is thus an object of absolute love leads the soul to Himself.[44]

Rāmānuja consistently holds to the position that *mokṣa* is achieved "by the complete devotion of *bhakti* which is furthered by the performance of one's proper acts preceded by knowledge of the orders of reality as learnt from the *śāstra*."[45] In the *Śrībhāṣya*, he reports the Vākyakārin's enumeration of the qualities that give rise to the *anusmṛti* (which Lipner translates as "steady keeping-in-mind," which leads to *darśana): viveka; vimoka; abhyāsa; kriyā; kalyāṇāni; anavasāda; anuddharṣa.*[46] He interprets this list to mean "that there is the production of knowledge for one faithfully observing regulations by the performance of acts enjoined for the stage of life." Thus, for Rāmānuja contemplation or meditation is not an activity that can be undertaken in isolation; rather, it must be accompanied by the performance of all religious duties within an ethical frame of mind, without attachment to fruits, until death, when He leads the soul to Himself. It may be recalled that even in this,

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[42] Translated in Carman, *The Theology*, 47.

[43] *Vedārthasaṃgraha* #141, in van Buitenen, 296.

[44] Ibid., #142, in van Buitenen, 297.

[45] Ibid., #141, in van Buitenen, 296.

[46] *Śrībhāṣya* 1.1.1.16, in Karmarkar, 19: *viveka*=discrimination; *vimoka*=non-attachment; *abhyāsa*=practice; *krīya*=sacrificial rites; *kalyāṇāni*=auspiciousness; *anavasāda*=non-depression; *anudharṣa*=non-elation; for fuller description see Karmarkar, 19ff.

Rāmānuja notes that the inner controller *(antaryāmin)* may choose to help the devotee in his actions, so as to further deplete the *karmic* legacy and increase *sattva*.

For both Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja, the soul must undergo intensive preparation in order to stand in readiness for the grace of the Lord. For both, the rigorous acquisition of knowledge under the tutelage of a qualified teacher, the assiduity with which all actions, including those of thought and speech are carried out within a sanctioned ethical framework, and the worship of the Lord, whether in the form of love and obedience to the *imām*, for Ṭūsī, or loving meditation of Brahman in his various forms, for Rāmānuja, result in an epistemic transformation. For Ṭūsī, the believer is able to partake in the realm of distinctions or disclosures *(mubāyanāt)*; for Rāmānuja, the devotee is able to see the Lord in a vivid representation *(darśana)*, a steady calling-to-mind *(anusmṛti)*, concomitant with recognizing the true nature of the self as accessory to the Lord, who is principal. Implicitly, for both thinkers, through the external means of scripture and teacher, the intellect (for Ṭūsī) and the soul *(ātman)* (for Rāmānuja) are able to perceive another, more abiding form of reality: through the external, a dimension of reality that surpasses the phenomenal world becomes internally experienced and known. The transition to this internal experience and knowledge safeguards for the souls addressed by Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja an eternal, abiding state of bliss and perfect knowledge, and the powers that are associated with that state. For both, in the end, it is the Lord who leads to Himself, that is, divine grace prevails over the maximum of human effort.

II. The Satpanth Question

The identification of the figure/concept of *avatāra* and *imām* in the Satpanth Ismāᶜīlī tradition has already been noted. In the *ginānic* literature, ᶜAlī, the son-in-law of Muḥammad venerated by the Shīᶜah as the first of the *imāms*, is declared to be the tenth awaited *avatāra* (Kalki). For instance, in the *gināns* of Pīr Shams, one of the earliest *pīrs*[47] of the Satpanth tradition:

> God *(devatā)* in his tenth manifestation *(avatār)*
> Assumed a form *(rūpa)* and became visible.
>
> The Supreme King first came in the form of a Fish (Matsya)
> He was the support for the seer Mugḍala.
>
> ...
>
> Luckily, he came as Kṛṣṇa!
> He protected Draupadī with reams of cloth.
>
> In this fourth age *(kalyug)*, he has become manifest
> He is ᶜAlī, mighty comrade of Muḥammad.
>
> ...
>
> Think about this wisdom *(ginān)*, O pious Brothers! Do not talk about other things!
> Serve *(sevā)* your Shāh single-mindedly and you will attain Heaven *(Vaikuṇṭha)*.[48]

In another hymn or *ginān* titled the *Nāno* or Abridged *Das Avatār:*

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[47] Kassam, "Songs of Wisdom", 203, where Kassam suggests that Pīr Shams was most likely active during the century preceding the destruction of the Nizārī Ismāᶜīlī stronghold at Alamūt. This fort fell to the Mongols in 1256 CE, and Ṭūsī is said to have been instrumental in persuading the then *Imām*, Rukn al-Dīn Khūr Shāh to surrender to Hülagü. Ṭūsī himself then joined the court of Hülagü and denied that he was an Ismāᶜīlī. See Marshall Hodgson, "The Ismāᶜīlī State", in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, v.5, ed. J.A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) 481. His career subsequent to this saw him rise to an esteemed position both among the scientists of his day and Twelver-Shiᶜite thinkers. However, the *Taṣawwurāt* and the *Sayr va Sulūk* are generally accepted by scholars as being Ismāᶜīlī works, regardless of the theological positions Ṭūsī adopted after quitting Alamūt.

[48] Kassam, "Songs of Wisdom", 268–270.

> Know what marvels the Shāh, the lord *(deva)* Murārī[49] has executed
> Swāmī descended into the ocean in the form *(rūpa)* of the Fish (Matsya);
> The Shāh slew the demon Śaṅkha; ᶜAlī made the Invisible *(alakha)* manifest.
> Listen gathering *(gat)*, be attentive! Now the Lord Murārī is the Shāh.
> Listen gathering, bring hither a firm mind! The Shāh resides in Kahak.
> Listen gathering, bring hither a firm mind! The Pīr lives with the Shāh.
> Listen gathering, bring hither a firm mind! The Eternal *(qāʾim)* is All-Forgiving.
>
> ...
>
> Verily, his tenth form is right before you—the Shāh rides upon a chariot!
> He who has impurities in his heart, how will he get across?
> Leave the sixty-three rebirths, and seek the thirty-three [million gods]!
> The promise-keeper has come at the last juncture;
> Know him, recognize him, for now the promised one has arrived;
> Pīr Shams says, Listen O gathering of believers *(muʾmin):* Be true in conduct![50]

These *ginān*s, among others, establish that the same Viṣṇu–Nārāyaṇa who descended in various forms as *avatāras* in previous eras has descended in this, the fourth age, as ᶜAlī. It is this same being who is currently the Shāh, that is, the *imām*, whose spokesperson is the *Pīr*. It is not difficult to surmise that the *pīrs* or *dāᶜīs* ("preachers", lit. "those who call, invite") who were sent to the Indian subcontinent maintained close ties with their headquarters at Alamūt, and that they were familiar with the doctrinal developments taking place within Nizārī Ismāᶜīlīsm, such as the declaration of the *Qiyāmah*[51] by the *imām* Ḥasan II in 1164 CE. In her pioneering study of Pīr Shams, Kassam has made a compelling argument for the ingenuity and rapprochement of the Nizārī *daᶜwah* in its initiation of the Satpanth tradition in the Indian subcontinent. She notes that:

> The declaration of the Qiyāmah by Ḥasan ᶜala Dhikrihi al-Salām in 1164 CE, therefore, may not have been limited to establishing his own claim to *imāmate*; it may also have been a prescient legitimation by the head of Alamūt of what already was in process under the Nizārī *daᶜwah* in Sind. At

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[49] Epithet of Kṛṣṇa, ibid., 375.
[50] Ibid., 275.
[51] That is, the declaration of the Resurrection, "interpreted to mean the manifestation of the unveiled truth *(ḥaqīqa)* in the person of the Nizārī Imām." See Daftary, *The Ismāᶜīlīs*, 388 and 386ff.

> any rate, the separation of form from spirit implied by the doctrine of *qiyāmah* would have legitimized and given impetus to a nascent Satpanth identity in Sind. Even if it were to retain many Hindu concepts and practices, the task of the *pīrs* of the *daᶜwah* in India would have been to ensure that at the core of this new religious formation called Satpanth, an Ismāᶜīlī identity was celebrated and upheld. This they did successfully, for instance, by their pivotal placement of Satpanth as the culmination of Hinduism, and the Ismāᶜīlī *imām* as the long-awaited, tenth *avatār* of Viṣṇu.[52]

In her view, the widely held opinion that Satpanth was a consequence of "the creative and literary endeavours of Ismāᶜīlī *pīrs* to effect and facilitate conversion of Hindus to Nizārī Ismāᶜīlism"[53] must be revised to include and acknowledge the deliberate political, social and religious alliances built by the *daᶜwah* between itself and similarly threatened Indian communities. The consequence of this careful rapprochement was Satpanth, a form of Ismāᶜīlism that reflected a clever merger of Hindu and Ismāᶜīlī beliefs without compromising core Ismāᶜīlī principles such as Qurʾānic revelation, the authority of the *imām* of the time, ethical action, and spiritual development through knowledge.

At the outset of this study, a secondary problematic was raised, namely, whether or not there was a philosophical basis upon which the Satpanth identification of the *imām* with the *avatāra* could be made. This dissertation has explored the notions of *imām* and *avatāra* with respect to two major figures in the traditions that are pertinent to the Satpanth tradition: Ṭūsī, who is perhaps the best known articulator of Persian Nizārī Ismāᶜīlī doctrines immediately prior to the fall of Alamūt (1256 CE); and Rāmānuja, a Śrī Vaiṣṇavite thinker *par excellence.* Although Rāmānuja was active primarily in the eleventh century, his work formed the basis of all subsequent theological developments in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. If Kassam's dating of Pīr Shams' period of activity—circa twelfth century—proves to be correct, then our two thinkers fall on either side of him.

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[52] Ibid., 202.
[53] Ibid., 199.

It is difficult to identify the sources utilized by the *pīrs* to arrive at an understanding of Hinduism, although it is clear that in the *ginā̄ns* quoted above, Pīr Shams is clearly addressing himself to Vaiṣṇavas for whom the listing of the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu and the mention of Vaikuṇṭha would be significant. A reconstruction of the Hindu sources of the *ginā̄ns* requires internal textual gathering of evidence that is far beyond the scope of this study, and is a task which must be left to *ginā̄n* scholars to pursue. It is also a task for the *ginā̄n* scholars to unravel the historical connections of the *pīrs* to the central *daᶜwah* in the region of Alamūt. Our small but salient contribution toward this area of scholarship will limit itself to the philosophical issue, that is, the compatibility of these two concepts as they were articulated in thinkers whose thought quite possibly could have had an influence—direct or indirect—on the shaping of Satpanth Ismāᶜīlī doctrine.

The first point to be made, as the main focus of study in this dissertation shows, is that the notion of *imām* in ontological terms can be viewed as a manifestation in the phenomenal world of the closest that one can speak of divinity, that is, His Command. This manifestation is not limited or compromised by any of the limitations attached to corporeality or creatureliness. In a similar vein, the *avatāra* can also be viewed as a manifestation, rather than incarnation, of the supreme being, Brahman, the supreme Person, Nārāyaṇa who is also Viṣṇu. The *avatāra* is not, strictly speaking, an incarnation, for his body is not carnal in the sense of partaking of matter that is *guṇa*-bound; it is manufactured from an entirely other substance. In assuming human form, the supreme being is, therefore, not compromised in any way. Both the *imām* and the *avatāra* appear in human form: from the point of abiding reality, however, the *imām* has not, according to Ṭūsī, ever left his realm, and the *avatāra*, according to the *Gītā*, may be mistaken by fools to be human, but is not so.

In this connection, I would like to draw attention to a brief discussion by Ṭūsī regarding the *Qiyāmah*. He introduces the general concept of *taʾwīl* and offers his view of how, for example, the pilgrimage to Makkah or *ḥajj* must be understood: as giving up attachment to the perishable abode, seeking instead the eternal one. Within this larger discussion, he introduces the subject of the proper understanding of God's unity: that one must abandon all thought, word and action that is not connected with God's command, as well as all thought, word and action that will give God partners. In this connection, he mentions that God is known by many names, for example, the Hindus call him Nāran—a clear reference to Nārāyāṇa, indicating that this discussion may have been in response to some questions posed within his circle.[54] Ṭūsī asks the question whether the name (by which God is called or addressed) is eternal, and that to which it is applied is transient; or the name is transient, and that to which it is applied is eternal, or whether both of them are one, or both are independent. His point is to establish that any of these positions are guilty of either applying plurality to God or are pointless. His conclusion is as follows:

> In all these ways, the door of this talk must be closed, and its ultimate sense will be that it is inevitable for creatures dwelling in the created realm of dissemblance that they should make reference to Him, the All-High, calling Him by a certain name. And as they can only belong to these three categories, namely, common, chosen, and specially chosen, the members of each class can only speak of God from the standpoint of their category. ... And the specially chosen *(akhaṣṣ-i khāṣṣ)*, in accordance with the principle of purification *(tanzīh)*, that is non-attribution to God of qualities belonging to the created world, use oft-repeated names, and above it, that name which belongs to the existence in which the name and its bearer are one, which is absolute and free from attributes and what creates them. And that name is the Greatest Name, manifested and hypostatized, the one who says: "We are the most beautiful names of God and His brightest attributes. And: God is recognized through us, obeyed through us and disobeyed [through us], meaning that God is recognized through us and worshipped through us. Whoever obeys us has obeyed God and whoever disobeys us has disobeyed God. Thus, whoever wishes to pronounce the real name of God, the Exalted, and to recognize the Exalted by His real name should recognize the person whose claim and summons this is and who is unique in this claim and summons. Peace be upon you.[55]

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[54] A reference to Nārāyaṇa is found in Pīr Shams. See Kassam, "Songs of Wisdom", 240: Not recognizing the man was Swāmī, the Lord Nārāyaṇa;/ He foolishly let his feet into the cage. O Brother, so be it; and 281: Nārāyaṇa assumed the form of ʿAlī;/ Brother, his turn came along too.

[55] T 159–160, P 108; B 221. (I, B, KH)

For a *dāʿī*, or *pīr*, in India, such instruction would immediately call to mind the notion of *avatāra.* That is, he would have to shift his focus from the supreme being to the manifestation of that supreme being as *avatāra*, and by extension, *arcā.*

In another discussion, Ṭūsī tackles the worship of luminaries *(hayākil)* and idols *(butān)* Unfortunately, his descriptions are too vague to ascertain which religious tradition he was referring to, but it is likely that his audience understood his allusions. It is possible that he meant the Indian deities *(devas)* when referring to the luminaries *(hayākil)*, and it may be speculated that by idols he may have mean the *arcā* forms. He takes issue not with the noble rank *(sharafī)* ascribed to these, nor to the need for an intermediary between the supreme being and creatures. Rather, he questions why such an intermediary should not be human, for the human is the purpose and aim of creation, and further, the human intellect is the place where "both ends of the chain of existence" meet.[56] Again, a discerning *dāʿī* may have taken a discussion such as this—which itself requires further study—and taken the cue that emphasis was to be moved from worship of *devas* and the *arcā* to the *avatāra.* For, the *deva* cannot be seen, only propitiated; the *arcā* is a material representation of the deity, while the *avatāra*, certainly in the case of Kṛṣṇa and others prior to him, shares human characteristics such as use of language to communicate. These are possibilities that are being raised, pending further research.

The second is the importance attached in both traditions to the preceptor: the *ḥujjat/dāʿī* in the case of Ṭūsī, and the *guru* in the case of Rāmānuja. The task of the preceptor in each of the traditions is to communicate the correct understanding of the scriptures, so as to instruct the believer/devotee in the true nature of reality, the status of the soul and the means to attain salvation. Concomitant with this is the specification of the duties required and the manner of worship. The role of the preceptor in each case is to point the way to, as well as to highlight the devotion and obedience to the *imām*, on the one hand, and Viṣṇu–Nārāyaṇa in his various modes, on the other. In this respect, Ṭūsī's emphasis on love and obedience to the *imām* would find a resonance with the emphasis placed by Rāmānuja and the subsequent Vaiṣṇava tradition on *bhakti*.

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[56] T 177ff, P 121ff.

In summary, while the historical connections require further research, from the point of view of the philosophical underpinnings of the doctrines that emerged in the Satpanth tradition and were expressed in its literature, it can be argued that the identification of *avatāra* and *imām* was not merely expedient. On assessing the deeper facets of the concept of *avatāra* and *imām* as understood by Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja in terms of ontology, epistemology, psychology and salvation, it seems that there was sufficient scope for linking the two divine–human configurations.

III. Toward Developing a Typology for Divine-Human Configurations

Based on the analysis undertaken here of two instances of the divine–human configuration, I would like to offer a few observations on some of the issues that are pertinent toward developing a typology of theanthropos.

The first set of issues arise from the examination of such a figure is examined from the point of view of safeguarding divinity. The philosophical articulations such as have been explored in Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja clearly attempt to distance the theanthropos from any entanglement with the limiting factors of human existence. That is to say, for Ṭūsī, the *imām* may *appear* to have been born, and to live as a human being. However, for those who perceive clearly, the *imām* cannot be said to have entered the realm of relationality *(iḍāfī)*, that is, the mundane world. Yet, from the point of view of those who are in the realm of dissemblance *(kawn-i mushābahat)*, the *imām* can be said to be here as a human being in order to show them the way to the realm of disclosure *(kawn-i mubāyanat)*. As a manifestation of the *Amr* (Command) of God, the *imām's* essence *(dhāt)* is a mystery to all but those whom he has led to knowledge of himself. It is crucial to note that the *Amr* stands beyond the intellect and the soul, that is, it is implied, beyond being itself, beyond created existents as such. In this way, the *imām* is ontologically other in the same way that the *Amr* is ontologically other than existents, and yet, in some unknowable manner, is the source of existence.

For Rāmānuja, the limiting factors of human existence are expressed in two ways: (i) that embodied souls *(jīvātman)* are subject to *karman*; and (ii) that their bodies are *guṇa*-bound. Rāmānuja clarifies that the *avatāra* (or, indeed, any of the manifestations of Brahman) is not subject to *karman*, nor is his body the ordinary *prakṛtic* body of humans, but a body composed of pure matter *(śuddhasattva)*. Thus, for Rāmānuja, corporeality poses a real problem. In this respect, the use of the English term 'incarnation' to describe the *avatāra* is, in my view, erroneous, for incarnation connotes the idea of 'entering into a body'; indeed, the term carnal (in incarnation) denotes sensual. The term 'manifestation' would, I suggest, be a more accurate description of what Rāmānuja means by *avatāra.*

Therefore, when looking at a divine–human configuration, it is salient to examine whether such a theanthropos is (i) ontologically other than embodied beings in general; (ii) whether its body is the same or not; that is, whether it is an incarnation (god entering human) or a manifestation (god appearing to be human to the perception of other humans). I am not qualified to speak of the philosophical debates regarding the question of Incarnation in Christianity, but no doubt this issue has been grappled with there, too. With respect to Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja, however, it is clear that both had to devise ways of understanding the theanthropos in a manner that would not compromise the divinity. For one, the notion of *ḥulūl* (incarnation) was unacceptable to Ṭūsī and thus, he locates the appearance of the *imām* as an epistemological issue; for another, the notion of god becoming human was unacceptable to Rāmānuja for the reasons stated above, primarily the limitations attached to matter, and so he locates the appearance of the *avatāra* in Brahman's power to create matter that is appropriate to bear his manifestation, which matter is unlike ordinary *guṇa*-laded matter.

Another set of issues arise from the point of view of epistemology. The theanthropos is necessitated by the fact that the supreme being or divinity is in some way, hidden from the view of the ordinary human being. For Ṭūsī, the phrase *Allāhu akbar* captures the notion that God is so great that He is far above anything humans may say of him. Given such an epistemological divide, how is God to be known, and thereby worshipped? Thus, for him, the *imām* provides a link whereby God may be made accessible to the knowledge and worship of believers.

Rāmānuja, too, states clearly in his *Gītābhāṣya* that the supreme being, having created the universe, retires and becomes incognizant to humans. Even though he exists within the universe as its inner ruler or *antaryāmin*, humans cannot perceive him as such. Therefore, the *avatāra* and other manifestations of the divine supreme being are ways in which he makes himself accessible to, and an object of worship for, human beings.

Based upon this epistemic obscuring, and the need for an attributed divinity for the purposes of worship, it would be salient to ask when examining a divine–human configuration whether (i) the pure divinity (Allāh for Ṭūsī and Brahman of the five essential characteristics for Rāmānuja) is in some way beyond, or obscured from, the perception of humans: that is, is there an epistemological divide between divinity and humanity? And (ii) how may the divinity be worshipped? Does the theanthropos represent a divine favour to the believer/devotee through which the divine may be known and worshipped?

Yet another set of issues centres around the question of authority. Scriptural revelation is one form in which the divine communicates to humanity. However, Ṭūsī does not view divine communication as coming to an end once the scripture has been revealed, for it continually needs interpretation as humans become better prepared to understand the divine mysteries encoded in the scripture. For him, the spiritual authority of the Prophet is continued in the spiritual authority of the *imām* of the time *(imām-i zamān)*, even if he draws distinctions between the ontological stature of the prophet and that of the *imām*. This authority concerns both the way in which human affairs are to be ordered, and this is crucial with respect to ethics, and with how the knowledge of divine mysteries, which are too many and too profound to be communicated all at once, is to be revealed.

For Rāmānuja, the scriptures, being *apauruṣeya* (non-humanly originated), are to be correctly understood as all words contained therein having the supreme being as their ultimate referent. The correct interpretation of scripture is crucial in communicating to the devotee what prescribed duties for each person's caste and stage in life are to be carried out. In addition, the scriptures, correctly understood, are a source of information regarding the means through which Brahman-realization may be attained, and this source is identified as being verily the Lord himself. Thus, not only is the devotee to be guided by the ethical imperative to do good works, but also by the necessity of loving devotion *(bhakti)* in the form of worship *(upāsana)* in order to prepare the devotee to receive the grace of the Lord. I have already pointed to the importance of the *guru* for the correct interpretation and knowledge of the scripture. Further, I have pointed out the role of the *avatāra*, in the *Gītā*, as the source of teaching regarding how *mokṣa* and Brahman-realization may be attained.

Therefore, when examining a theanthropos, some of the questions that need to be asked are: (i) in what ways is the divine–human configuration or theanthropos a source of authority regarding scripture? (ii) does such a figure have the authority to teach, impart instruction that will aid the human to achieve the tradition's stated teleological and eschatological aims? (iii) does the necessity for such a figure take into account the dichotomy between scriptures that are eternal but "frozen" in a mythical or relatively recent historical time, and the evolving human needs and capacities for understanding that are in tune with changing historical times? That is, the issue of eternal versus temporal time with respect to divine communication to humanity must be addressed. And finally, (iv) given that each religious tradition is keenly aware of the abuse of the absolute authority that may be accorded to such a figure, what safeguards are put into place? This question points to the primary importance attached by both philosophers studied to the question of ethics. If humans are to place their trust in the *imām*, the *guru*, the *avatāra*, then they must be assured that he will not, as the prime source of ethical authority, sanction self- or other-destruction, even if, out of obedience, they are required to be willing to do so as part of their surrender to such a figure. That is, the whole question of ethics and authority must be examined carefully.

I would like to end by noting that Foucault has observed that a thing can never be known in itself, but only to the extent of the categories that are utilized to understand it.[57] In this respect, we have seen that both our philosophers acknowledge with differing degrees of emphasis that divinity is incognizant to humans, but that nonetheless, there are ways in which that divinity attempts to communicate with us. The task of these two philosophers, then, has been to provide an interpretation of divinity according to their own philosophic ethos, methods and presuppositions. Despite the hermeneutical difficulties attached to the inquiry, the task still merits attention for the insights it offers into how different traditions and thinkers sought to make sense of the issues; here specifically, those pertaining to divine–human configurations. In this respect, it is of key importance to acknowledge Waldman's observation that:

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[57] "... the absolute character we recognize in what is simple concerns not the being of things but rather the manner in which they can be known. A thing can be absolute according to one

> Those of us who would acknowledge our role in constructing our object of study rarely spend much time articulating just *how* we have imagined it.[58]

In this study, I have entered into the philosophic thought of two very different religious traditions as articulated by two intriguing philosophers. To understand, analyze and compare their views on theanthropos, I have utilized the four philosophical categories of ontology, psychology, epistemology and salvation. In so doing, these interpretive categories have helped bring into sharper focus the nuances of Ṭūsī and Rāmānuja's conceptions of the divine–human configuration. Using the analogy of the map, these philosophical categories have not only helped to steer us through the thick, complex particularities of each philosopher's writings, but also afforded an aerial view from which comparisons and contrasts can be observed and issues highlighted for further inquiry.

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relation yet relative according to others; order can be at once necessary and natural (in relation to thought) and arbitrary (in relation to things), since, according to the way in which we consider it, the same thing may be placed at different points in our order." In Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), 54.

[58] Marilyn Robinson Waldman and Robert M. Baum, "Innovation as renovation: The "prophet" as an agent of change" in Michael A. Williams, Collett Cox, Martin S. Jaffee, editors, *Innovation in Religious Traditions* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993), 241.

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