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**Title:** Nasir al-Din Tusi's Ethics: Between Philosophy, Shi'ism and Sufism

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**Abstract:** Nasir al-Din Tusi completed his *Nasirean Ethics* (Akhlaq-i Nasiri), the most highly esteemed book on ethics in Persian, around the year 633 AH / 1235 CE while in the service of the Ismaili governor of Quhistan. Two decades later, Tusi parted company with the Ismailis. This essay charts the course of his works, in particular *Nasirean Ethics* to his enigmatic treatise on Sufi ethics entitled *The Attributes of the Illustrious* (Awsaf al-ashraf). Prof. Madelung investigates Tusi's sources, putting a number of what he views as erroneous suppositions about the man to rest. This study of Tusi's works and philosophy affords the reader an insight into Tusi's own personal journey from the time he penned *Nasirean Ethics* (Akhlaq-i Nasiri) to his eventual status as King of Philosophers by the end of his life.

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## **Nasir al-Din Tusi's Ethics: Between Philosophy, Shi'ism and Sufism**

Wilferd Madelung

This is an edited version of an essay which first appeared in *Ethics in Islam* in 1985 edited by Richard G. Hovannisian (Undena Publications).

## **Nasir al-Din Tusi's Ethics: Between Philosophy, Shi'ism and Sufism**

Nasir al-Din Tusi completed his *Nasirean Ethics* (Akhlāq-i Nasiri), the most highly esteemed book on ethics in Persian, around the year 633 AH / 1235 CE while in the service of the Ismaili governor of Quhistan, the *muhtasham* or chief Nasir al-Din 'Abd ar-Rahim b. Abi Mansur. Tusi named the work after his learned patron, who had commissioned him to write it, and opened it with a dedication to him in the flowery style of the time in which he also invoked the blessings of the contemporary Ismaili imam, 'Ala' al-Din Muhammad<sup>i</sup>.

Two decades later Tusi parted company with the Ismailis, whose power was broken by the Mongol conquest and the surrender of (Ala) al-Din's son and successor, (Rukn al-Din) Khurshah, in 654 AH / 1256 CE. He then replaced the laudatory dedication of the book with a new preamble containing a Sunni formula of benediction for Prophet Muhammad, his family, and his companions. Tusi went on to explain that his stay with the Ismailis in Quhistan had been involuntary and that his eulogy of their leaders was motivated by the necessity of self-preservation. The book itself, however, dealt with one of the disciplines of philosophy and as such was unrelated to any religious school or community. Students of different creeds had therefore eagerly perused it, so that numerous manuscripts of it were circulated among men. Thus he felt obliged to replace the original dedication and to publish the truth of the matter in the hope that future copyists would spread the book in its new form<sup>ii</sup>.

*Nasirean Ethics* clearly belongs, as suggested by Tusi here, to the tradition of Islamic philosophy rooted in Greek and Hellenistic thought. Tusi himself summarily acknowledged some of his main sources. His patron had initially proposed that Tusi translate historian and philosopher Miskawayh's well-known ethical compendium *Tahdhib al-akhlaq* from the Arabic into Persian. After some consideration Tusi decided against this in the belief that he would be unable to convey fully the polished elegance of the original. He was also aware of a need for a comprehensive book on practical philosophy comprising its three branches: ethics, economics, and politics, while Miskawayh had dealt with only the first of these.

Tusi therefore undertook to write a new work whose first section, on ethics, would be broadly based on the *Tahdhib al-akhlaq*<sup>iii</sup>. His primary source in the section on economics was, as he later states<sup>iv</sup>, a treatise on the subject by Avicenna, which has been identified as the *Kitab al-Siyasa*. He also used, it has been shown, the Arabic translation of the *Oikonomikos* of the Greek Bryson<sup>v</sup>, which he mentions in passing. The section on politics was based, according to Tusi, on "the sayings and aphorisms (*Aqwal u nukat*)" of al-Farabi<sup>vi</sup>. More specifically, al-Farabi's *al-Siyasa al-madaniyya*, his *Fusul al-madani*, and his admonitions quoted in Miskawayh's *al-Hikma al-khalida* can clearly be recognised as sources for the *Nasirean Ethics*, though Tusi also seems to have had at his disposal one or more treatises by al-Farabi which have not yet been identified<sup>vii</sup>.

It must be stressed that Tusi used these sources loosely and with considerable freedom. Literal translation varies with paraphrase and independent elaboration. His presentation, if not his subject matter, is often original and fuller than in his sources. The traditional philosophical scope and frame, however, are apparently not infringed by this liberty. Tusi gives assurance of his personal detachment by stressing at the end of the introduction:

Let me say that what is recorded in this book, covering all aspects of Practical Philosophy (whether by way of relation or anecdote, or in the form of chronicles or narrative), is repeated from ancient and modern philosophers; not even a beginning is made to confirm the true or disprove the false, nor - in respect to our own convictions - do we engage to support any opinion or to condemn any particular school of thought. Thus, if the reader encounters an ambiguity on a point, or regards any question as open to objection, he should recognise that the author of this book has no responsibility for rejoinder, and offers no surety for uncovering the face of accuracy<sup>viii</sup>.

The book was thus addressed to all scholars, students, and dilettantes of philosophy irrespective of their religious beliefs. They were encouraged to read it as a digest of traditional practical philosophy without worrying about the personal engagement and views of the author and his Ismaili patrons. As Tusi suggests in his later preamble, many of his contemporaries had read and come to appreciate the book as just such a digest. Most later readers have no doubt also viewed it in this perspective.

Yet does this perspective exhaustively comprehend the motivation of the *Nasirean Ethics*? The problem may be approached through a further question. Was Tusi entirely sincere in affirming, in his later preamble, that philosophy was equally unrelated to all religious schools and communities? Philosophy of Greek origin was in the age of Tusi overwhelmingly repudiated as incompatible with Islam by the guardians of orthodoxy, Sunni and Twelver Shi'i alike. There had been and still were, to be sure, Sunni and Twelver Shi'i philosophers who held that Islam was not incompatible with philosophy. They generally did not mix philosophy and religion, however, but viewed philosophy as a truth for the intellectual elite, while the same truth, on an intellectually less demanding level, was reflected in religion and in this form was more suitable for the common people.

The attitude of the Ismailis toward Greek philosophy was entirely different. A Neoplatonic cosmology lay at the very core of their esoteric religious teaching at least since its adoption and adaptation by the Transoxanian *da'i* (missionary) Muhammad b. Ahmad an-Nasafi in the early 4<sup>th</sup> AH / 10th CE century. A century later, the *da'i* Hamid al-Din al-Kirmanî had similarly adapted the cosmological concepts of al-Farabi to Ismaili doctrine. Ismailis thus had come to view philosophy as neither incompatible with their religion nor as a separate statement of the truth, but as identical, at least in part. Of course, not all philosophical thought and opinions were acceptable to them. The Ismaili *da'i* and Persian poet Nasir Khusraw in his *Book Combining the Two Wisdoms (Kitab jami' al-hikmatayn)* discussed agreement and disagreement of the prophetic wisdom of Ismaili gnosis and philosophical wisdom.

The heresiographer Taj al-Din ash-Shahrastani, a secret Ismaili sympathiser, wrote a refutation of some principles of Avicenna's metaphysics from an Ismaili point of view, entitling it *The Wrestling Match (Kitab al-Musara'a)*<sup>ix</sup>. It was to be, he explained, a daring philosophical wrestling match in which he engaged with the grand master of the Muslim philosophers on his own rational grounds. Yet it is evident that he entered into it with a philosophical platform not fully derived from his own reasoning. He himself admits to having drunk from the cup of prophetic revelation.

Ismaili philosophy was not meant to be a matter of free, unfettered rational investigation but a rational ascent under the guiding instruction (*ta'lim*) of the infallible imam<sup>x</sup>. The idea of the imam as the divinely guided, infallible teacher of mankind was vital in much of Shi'i thought. Among the Ismailis, Hasan-i Sabbah, the founder of the Nizari branch and first lord of Alamut, had developed a sophisticated doctrine of *ta'lim* demonstrating that human reason must inevitably go astray without the guiding instruction of the *mu'allim*, the infallible

imam<sup>xi</sup>. The Nizaris were henceforth commonly known as the *Ta'limis*, and al-Ghazali in his refutation of Ismailism attacked primarily this doctrine as their central belief.

Tusi himself wrote, no doubt after his dissociation from the Ismailis, a refutation of ash-Shahrastani's arguments against Avicenna in his *Wrestling Match* with the title *The Downfalls of the Wrestler (Masari' al-musari')*. In it he mercilessly ridiculed ash-Shahrastani's pretense in challenging Avicenna, exposed what he considered the heretical Ismaili motivation of his arguments, and accused him of ignoring the most elementary notions of logic. Clearly ash-Shahrastani's crypto-Ismaili ideology was in his eyes of no relevance to true philosophy. In the light of this devastating judgment there is no good reason to doubt the sincerity of Tusi's assertion in his new preamble to the *Nasirean Ethics*, that philosophy was equally unrelated to all religious schools and communities. The so-called philosophy of the Ismailis was according to him a fake and their devotion to the pure truth a false pretence.

Yet Tusi had not always thought so. In a spiritual autobiography addressed to his Ismaili patrons, which he wrote some years after the *Nasirean Ethics*, he described the path that had led him to find his religious home among the Nizari *Ta'limis*, much as al-Ghazali described his own path to spiritual peace among the Sufis in his famous *Deliverer from Error (al-Munqidh min al-dalal)*. Tusi had been brought up, he explains, among men who believed and followed only the exoteric aspect of the Law (*shari'a*) and relatives whose only learning was in the exoteric sciences.

From other sources it is known that they were Twelver Shi'is. Tusi himself, he goes on to explain, at first merely studied the roots and the branches of their school doctrine and thought that there could be nothing besides it. His father, however, who had seen the world and had been educated by his maternal uncle, a disciple of Taj al-Din al-Shahrastani, was less insistent on following these principles and rather encouraged him to study all kinds of sciences and listen to scholars of different schools and principles. Tusi's specific mention of al-Shahrastani, whom he even calls the grand *da'i*, suggests that the latter's crypto-Ismaili thought may have played an important role in his spiritual development, though he does not further elaborate on it.

He then became attached, on his father's recommendation, to a student of Afdal al-Din Kashi, who taught him primarily mathematics. His teacher ever criticised the speech of the adherents of exoteric learning and pointed out the contradictions into which the followers of the letter of the *shari'a* inevitably fall. Yet whenever Tusi tried to elicit more profound discourse from him, he declined reminding him of his youth and consoling him that he would find the truth later in his life if he kept seeking it.

Tusi next studied speculative theology (*kalam*) but soon discovered that it was entirely based on the letter of the *shari'a* and that its adherents employed their reason merely to defend their inherited creed. He then studied philosophy and found it highly rewarding since the students of this science gave their reason free rein in the search of the truth and did not confine it to following a certain convention. When the philosophical discourse reached its ultimate ends, however, namely the recognition of God and the knowledge of the Origin and Destination (of man), he found their principles shaky; for the intellect is unable to comprehend the Donor of the Intellect (*wahib-i 'aql*) and the First Principles (*mabadi'*). Since the philosophers in their conceit were misled to rely solely on their own speculation and reason, they stumbled in this field and talked on the basis of mere conjecture and wishful fancy. They employed reason in what was beyond its limits. Tusi thus became aware of the need for *ta'lim*, transcendent instruction, of a teacher who could guide the human intellect from potentiality to actuality, from deficiency to perfection. He then came by chance upon a copy of the *Sacred Articles*

(*Fusul-i muqaddas*) of imam Hasan ‘ala dhikrihi al-salam, the proclaimer of the Resurrection in Alamut in 559 AH / 1164 CE. Tusi’s eyes were opened and he decided to join the Ismailis.

It was thus as a philosopher and out of philosophical concerns that Tusi converted to the *Ta’limi* faith. He did not give up his own philosophical faith but hoped to perfect and transcend it through the guidance of the infallible teacher. We may thus be encouraged to read the *Nasirean Ethics* from an Ismaili perspective and to search closely, in spite of Tusi’s assertion, for some hints as to where he may have seen their thought as specifically relevant to the Ismaili faith<sup>xii</sup>.

Concerning practical philosophy, comprising ethics, economics, and politics, and its relationship to the law, Tusi states:

It should be recognised that the principles of beneficial works and virtuous acts on the part of the human species (implying the ordering of their affairs and states) lie, fundamentally, either in nature (*tab’*) or in position (*wad’*). The principle of nature applies in cases whose particulars conform to the intellects (*‘uqul*) of people of insight and the experience of men of sagacity, unvarying and unchanging with the variations of ages or the revolutions in modes of conduct and traditions. These correspond with the divisions of Practical Philosophy already mentioned. Where the principle lies in position, if the cause of the position be the agreed opinion of the community thereon, one speaks of *Manners (adab) and Customary Rules (rusum)*; if the cause of the position be, however, the exigency of the opinion of a great man, fortified by divine assistance, such as a prophet or an imam, one speaks of *Divine Laws (nawamis-i ilahi)*.

The latter are further subdivided into three kinds: that which refers to each soul individually, e.g. devotions (*‘ibadat*) and the statutory injunctions (*ahkam*); that which refers to the inhabitants of dwellings in association, such as marriages and other transactions; that which refers to the inhabitants of cities and regions, e.g. penal laws and government.

This type is under the title of the *Science of Jurisprudence (fiqh)*. Now since the principle of this sort of action is position, it is liable to change, with revolutions in circumstances, with the pre-eminence of individual men, the prolongation of time, the disparity between epochs (*adwar*), and the substitution of peoples and dynasties. This category thus falls, as regards the particular, outside the divisions of Philosophy, for the speculation of a philosopher is confined to examining the propositions of intellects and investigating the universalities of things, and these are not touched by decay or transience, nor are they obliterated or replaced according to the obliteration of peoples and the severance of dynasties. From the summary standpoint, however, it does enter into the questions of Practical Philosophy....<sup>xiii</sup>

Ethics and the divine law thus deal with the same subject matter, “the principles of beneficial works and virtuous acts.” Ethics is, however, a rational science based on universal human nature and is therefore not subject to change. The divine law, on the other hand, is, just like conventional manners and rules of custom, “laid down” or posited, evidently not entirely on abstract rational grounds, and thus is changeable with changing ages and circumstances. Tusi does not explain in this passage how the changeable law is interrelated with the unchangeable ethics, both dealing with the same subject matter. It is evident, however, that he, like the philosophers in general, considered the divine law as agreeing in substance with the principles of rational ethics. There could be no conflict between them; rather, the divine law must in

some way embody these principles. Elsewhere, after explaining the Aristotelian doctrine that justice (*'adalat*), implying equilibrium (*i'tidal*) which is the "umbra of unicity," is the cardinal virtue of ethics.

Tusi explains, following closely his source, Miskawayh's *Tahdhib*: "The determiner of the middle-point in every case, so that by knowledge thereof the repulsion of (other) things may be effected in equilibrium, is the Divine Law. Thus, in reality, the positor of equality and justice is the Divine Law, for God (exalted be mention of Him!) is the source of unicity."<sup>xiv</sup> Further on he states, again following Miskawayh: "Justice is a psychological affection, from which proceeds strict adherence to the Divine Law; for the Divine Law is the determiner of quantities, the specifier of positions and middle-points."<sup>xv</sup>

In spite of its divine origin, however, the law ranks below the philosophical ethics on the human value scale leading to supreme felicity. Tusi thus states, elaborating freely on his source, Miskawayh's *Tahdhib*:

The First Tutor, to the whole community, is the Divine Law in general; while the Second Tutor, to the possessor of distinction and the whole minds among them, is Philosophy in particular. So, by these degrees, they may arrive at the ascending ranks of perfection. Accordingly, it is incumbent on both mother and father to bring their children first of all into bondage to the Divine Law, and to reform their uses by various sorts of governance and discipline.... In sum, they should, by compulsion or free choice, so hold them to praiseworthy arts and approved uses as to make them habitual. When they attain perfection of the intellect, they will enjoy the fruits thereof; and they will understand, in all cogency, that the straight path and the right road are the ones to which they have been held; and if they are prepared for a greater favour, a solidier felicity, with ease they will arrive thereat: if Almighty God will, He being the Guardian of Success<sup>xvi</sup>.

How do the philosophical views so far recorded by Tusi, largely in agreement with Miskawayh, accord with the doctrine of the Islamic schools and sects? They were incompatible with the predominant position of Sunni Traditionalism as well as Ash'arism which does not admit a rational, unchangeable ethics independent of the divine law. Rather, it views ethics as an integral part of the imposed divine law and as solely derived from it. Thus ethics is subject to change with the change of the divine law, though the *shari'a* of Islam, the most perfect and final of divine laws, would last unchanged until the end of the world. There was no basic conflict between the views presented by Tusi and the position of the Mu'tazila. They, too, affirmed the existence of a rational basis of ethics independent of revelation and held that the divine law must necessarily conform to it. Twelver Shi'is with their Mu'tazili theology thus might have read the *Tahdhib al-akhlaq* of the Twelver Shi'i philosopher Miskawayh with some sympathy, noting his unambiguous support of the *shari'a* and of the rightful imam as its upholder and just king.

The Ismaili attitude towards the law was more complex. The Ismailis agreed with other Muslims in general that some of the prophets of the past had brought different divine laws, all of which had been superseded by the *shari'a* of Islam brought by Prophet Muhammad, whom they viewed as the inaugurator of the sixth prophetic era. Yet, even those Ismailis who unreservedly affirmed the continued validity of the *shari'a* of Islam believed that in the seventh prophetic era, that of the *Qa'im*, it would be abrogated or, at any rate, fall gradually out of practice<sup>xvii</sup>. The *Qa'im* would not bring a new law but a purely spiritual message, fully revealing the unchanging inner core of all prophetic messages which had so far remained hidden under their outward shell.

Among the Nizari Ismailis, Hasan-i Sabbah had in his argumentation for the doctrine of *ta'lim* emphasised the autonomous authority of each imam in independence from his predecessors. His theory was soon to acquire great practical significance. Imam Hasan 'ala dhikrihi al-salam in 559 AH / 1164 CE proclaimed the Resurrection (*qiyama*) and abrogated the Islamic *shari'a*. His grandson Jalal al-Din Hasan (607-618/1210-1221 CE), known among non Ismailis as the New-Muslim (Naw-musalman), repudiated the *qiyama* teaching, and imposed the *shari'a* in its Shafi'i form on his followers. They obediently accepted his orders as those of the infallible imam as they had earlier accepted the *qiyama*. Jalal al-Din's son, 'Ala' al-Din Muhammad, the imam at the time of Tusi's writing, again relaxed the application of the *shari'a* without formally abolishing it.

The Ismaili teaching establishment was called upon to explain and justify these momentous changes in the conduct of the imams and their administration of the divine law. The new teaching is known to us chiefly from the Ismaili writings of Tusi himself. In his *Rawdat al-taslim* he explained that the *qiyama* proclaimed by Hasan 'ala dhikrihi al-salam had come about the middle of the millennium of the era of Prophet Muhammad and set the pattern for the final *qiyama* at the end of it<sup>xviii</sup>. The reimposition of the *shari'a* by Jalal al-Din was a return to a period of concealment (*satr*) when the truth is hidden under the shell of the law, in contrast to the *qiyama* when it is unveiled and visible to all. In the era of Prophet Muhammad periods of *satr* and *qiyama* might alternate according to the decision of each imam, since every imam was a potential *Qa'im*. These changes and contradictions in the conduct of the imams were, however, merely in appearance and in accordance with the circumstances of the time since the imams were in their true essence one and identical.

This latter doctrine Tusi took from the *Sacred Articles* of Hasan 'ala dhikrihi al-salam<sup>xix</sup>. In his autobiographical letter<sup>xx</sup> Tusi went so far as to affirm that the rightful imam might at different times manifest himself in different forms to mankind, might bring a different communication, reveal another truth, or lay down another *shari'a* without any change of his legitimacy since he was ever exalted above change and modification. The imam thus was fully sovereign over the *shari'a*.

These ideas, entirely foreign to most Islamic thought, are distinctly reflected in the *Nasirean Ethics*. Discussing the opinions of the philosophers concerning man's obligations towards God, Miskawayh had mentioned two views of the modern (i.e., Muslim) philosophers about the duties comprised in worship. The first describes these duties, basically derived from the *shari'a* and traditional creeds, under three headings. The second starts with the brief definition: "Worship of God consists in true belief, sound utterance, and upright action,"<sup>xxi</sup> and then explains action in detail, again in terms of the duties of the Muslim under the *shari'a*. No difference in substance is implied, and both views support the integral implementation of the *shari'a*. In translating Miskawayh's text, Tusi, however, introduces the second view with the words: "Of these (philosophers), a group more akin to the men of discernment, have said that the worship of Almighty God consists in three things: true belief, correct utterance, and upright action."<sup>xxii</sup> He omits Miskawayh's detailed description of action and substitutes the following significant passage: "The detailed implementation of each item, at any moment of time and on any occasion, and in any circumstance and regard, will vary as the prophets and the scholars of independent legal judgment (*'ulama-ye mujtahid*), who are the heirs of the prophets, may expound; and the mass of mankind, to keep the Commandment of the Truth (exalted is His glory!), is under the obligation to submit to them and to conform to their course." Tusi is quoting *hadith* in referring to the scholars of *ijtihad* as the heirs of the prophets<sup>xxiii</sup>. But he does not mean the mujtahids in the technical sense. Rather, the imams are the heirs of the prophets and they, in succession to the prophets, have full authority over the divine law to expound it in accordance with the change of time and circumstances. Already in

his initial definition of practical philosophy Tusi had mentioned the imam together with the prophet as the imposer of the divine law in accordance with the “exigency of his opinion.”

Most explicitly expressed, however, are these ideas in the section on politics based on the political philosophy of al-Farabi with its Platonic background. Here Tusi found a discussion of the necessity of change in the divine law and its application by the philosopher-kings in accordance with the requirements of the time yet without incoherence in the unity of their purpose. The immediate source of the following passages of the *Nasirean Ethics*, and how closely Tusi followed it in them, is not known. That he saw them as confirming the Ismaili views which he expounded elsewhere in his writings of this period would be obvious even if he had not drawn the readers’ attention to the agreement. After explaining that government depends partly on enactments (*awda’*), as with contracts and transactions, and partly on rational judgments (*ahkam-i ‘aqli*), as with the management of a kingdom or the administration of a city, Tusi continues:

But no one would be able to undertake either of these two categories without a preponderance of discrimination and a superiority in knowledge, for such a man’s precedence over others without the occasion of some particularity would call for strife and altercation. Thus, in determining the enactments there is a need for a person distinguished from others by divine inspiration, in order that they should follow him. Such a person, in the terminology of the Ancients, was called the Possessor of the Law (*Sahib-i namus*), and his enactments the Divine Law; the Moderns refer to him as the Religious Lawgiver (*shari’*), and to his enactments as the shari’a. Plato, in the Fifth Discourse of the *Book of Politics*, has referred to this class thus: “They are the possessors of mighty and surpassing powers.” Aristotle, again, has said: “They are the ones for whom God has greater concern.”

Now, in determining judgments, there is a need also for a person who is distinguished from others by divine support, so that he may be able to accomplish their perfection. Such a person, in the terminology of the Ancients, was called an Absolute King, and his judgments the Craft of Kingship; the Moderns refer to him as the Imam, and to his function as the Imamate. Plato calls him the Regulator (*mudabbir*) of the World, while Aristotle uses the term Civic Man, i.e. that man, and his like, by whose existence the ordering of civilised life is effected<sup>xxiv</sup>.

Here Tusi adds: “In the terminology of some, the first of these persons is called the Speaker (*natiq*), and the second the Foundation (*asas*).” It is purely Ismaili terminology, referring to the Messenger Prophet, the bringer of a law at the beginning of each prophetic cycle, and his successor, the founder of the imamate. He continues:

It must be established that the term “king” in this place is not that of someone possessing a cavalcade, a retinue or a realm: what is meant, rather, is one truly deserving of kingship, even though outwardly no one pays him any attention. If someone other than he be carrying on the management of affairs, tyranny and disorder become widespread.

In short, not every age and generation has need of a Possessor of the Law, for one enactment suffices for the people of many periods; but the world does require a Regulator in every age, for if management ceases, order is taken away likewise, and the survival of the species in the most perfect manner cannot be realised. The Regulator undertakes to preserve the Law and obliges men to uphold its prescriptions; his is the authority of jurisdiction over the particulars of the Law in accordance with the best interest of every day and age<sup>xxv</sup>.

The imams thus have sovereignty over the divine law to apply its particulars in accordance with circumstances. The point is reinforced and developed in a later passage. Tusi states with respect to the people of al-Farabi's Virtuous City:

Their rulers, who are the regulators of the world, have control of the enactments of laws (*awda 'i nawamis*) and of the most expedient measures in daily life: this, by modes of control that are congenial and appropriate to time and circumstance, a particular control in the enactments of laws and a universal control in the enactments of expedient measures. This is the reason for the interdependence of faith and kingship, as expressed by the Emperor of the Iranians, the Philosopher of the Persians, Ardashir Babak: "Religion and kingship are twins, neither being complete without the other." Religion is the base and kingship the support: just as a foundation without support avails nothing, while a support without foundation falls into ruin, so religion without kingship is profitless, and kingship without faith is easily broken.

However numerous this class may be, i.e. kings and regulators of the Virtuous City, whether at one time or different times, nevertheless their rule is the rule of one individual, for their regard is to one end, namely ultimate felicity, and they are directed to one object of desire, namely the true destination (*ma'ad*). So the control exercised by a successor on the rulings of his predecessor, in accordance with best interest, is not in opposition to him but represents a perfection of his law. Thus, if the successor had been present in the former time, he would have instituted that same law; and if the predecessor were at hand in the later time, he would effect the selfsame control, for the way of intelligence is one. A confirmation of this argument is to be found in the words reportedly uttered by Jesus (peace be upon him!): "I have not come to cancel the Torah, but I have come to perfect it." Control and disagreement and discord, however, are conceived by the community who are Image Worshipers, not Seers of the Truth<sup>xxvi</sup>.

The prophets and their successors, the imams, thus are the philosopher kings, the rulers of the Virtuous City, and the regulators of the world. As such they are the controllers and administrators of the law which they legislate with divine assistance and apply in accordance with the requirements of the time. They are also, however, the guides and instructors of man on the path to supreme felicity, the ultimate goal of ethics. In Nizari Ismaili terms, they were the dispensers of *ta'lim*.

In Miskawayh's *Tahdhib* Tusi found a discussion of the natural obstacles on the way to perfect felicity ending with the statement: "Because of this, men are in frequent need for rectifiers and trainers (*muqawwimin, muthaqqifin*), tutors and directors (*mu'addibin, musaddidin*). For those outstanding natural qualities which drift by themselves, without advice, to felicity are difficult to come by and can only be realised over lengthy times and prolonged periods."<sup>xxvii</sup> In his rendering, Tusi identified the rectifiers of the soul with the prophets and imams and transformed the passage giving it an entirely new significance. Man in his quest for perfection, he explains,

is in a need for prophets and philosophers, imams, guides (*hudat*), tutors and teachers (*mu'allimin*), who should - some graciously, others with severity - prevent his facing towards affliction and disaster (in which there is no need for great effort or movement, every rest and lack of movement being indeed sufficient in that sense); and who should turn his face towards eternal felicity (on which must be expended both effort and solicitude, this goal being unattainable without

movement of the mind along the path of truth, and the acquisition of virtue). Thus, through leadership and direction, discipline and teaching (*ta'lim*), men arrive at the sublimest rank of existence. God prosper us in what He loves and approves, and lead us aside from the pursuit of passion!<sup>xxviii</sup>

As the supreme teachers of spiritual truths which perfect the soul and guide it to ultimate felicity, the prophets and imams are entitled to a love, obedience, and veneration which are second only to those of God. In his chapter on the different kinds of love, Miskawayh had argued that the love of the pupil of philosophy for the philosopher is above the love of the child for his parents and below the love of man for God<sup>xxix</sup>.

Tusi replaces the philosopher by the teacher and says:

The pretenders to love of God are many, but the true practitioners among them are few, nay fewer than few. Obedience and veneration are never absent from such true love: "Few of My servants are grateful."<sup>xxx</sup> Love of parents follows this love in rank, and no other love attains the rank of these two, save that of the teacher in the student's heart, this latter love being intermediate in rank between the two aforementioned loves. The reason for this is as follows: the first (type of) love is at the very extremity of nobility and grandeur inasmuch as the Object of love is the cause of existence and of the grace consequent on existence; the second (type of) love is related to this in that the father is the sensible reason and the proximate cause (of these); teachers, however, in the nurture of the souls, may be equated with fathers in the nurture of bodies; again, from the standpoint that they are the completers of existence and the perpetuators of essences, they imitate the Primary Cause, and from the standpoint that their nurture is a branch on the root of existence, they may be likened to fathers. Thus, love of them is inferior to the first (type of) love, but above the second, for their nurture is a ramification upon the root of existence, but nobler than the nurture of fathers. In truth, the teacher is a corporeal master and a spiritual master, his rank in veneration being below that of the Primary Cause but above that of human fathers.

Alexander was asked whether he loved his father or his teacher the more, to which he replied: "My teacher, for my father was the cause of my transitory life, whereas my teacher was a cause of my life everlasting." Thus, the right of the teacher over that of the father is in the measure of the superiority in rank of the soul over the body, and this proportion must be preserved in the love and veneration shown to him as compared with the father. Likewise, the love of the teacher for the student in the way of good is superior to that of the father for the son in the same proportion, for the teacher nurtures on complete virtue and sustains with pure wisdom, so that his relation to the father is like that of the soul to the body<sup>xxxi</sup>.

Ismaili readers at least could be in no doubt about the primary identity of these teachers.

In the last decade of his life, three decades after the *Nasirean Ethics*, Tusi wrote a treatise on Sufi ethics entitled *The Attributes of the Illustrious (Awsaf al-ashraf)*<sup>xxxii</sup>. In the introduction he explained that, after composing the *Nasirean Ethics*, which expounded the noble character traits and satisfactory conduct according to the way of the philosophers, he had wished to prepare a précis elucidating the path of the saints and the conduct of the people of spiritual cognition built upon rational and traditional foundations. Multiple occupations, however, had prevented him until the vizier Shams al-Din Muhammad Juwayni invited him to carry out the project<sup>xxxiii</sup>.

The *Awsaf al-ashraf* stands apart from Tusi's other writings. Most of his books and treatises of his later age dealt with philosophy and astronomy or defended Twelver Shi'i theology and religious doctrine. The *Awsaf al-ashraf* is his only work in the Sufi style. Tusi briefly describes the states and stations of the mystic on the path from faith (*iman*) to union (*wahda*) and extinction (*fana*) of the self in God in traditional terms. The work thus belongs to the classical school of Sufism; there are no apparent traces of the speculative mysticism elaborated by Ibn al-'Arabi a generation before Tusi.

It represents a Sufism of the heart rather than the mind. The Shi'i creed of the author finds expression only in the formulas of benediction at the beginning and end of the treatise<sup>xxxiv</sup>. Imam Muhammad al-Baqir is described in an edifying narrative as a Sufi having reached the state of contentment (*rida*) while the Companion Jabir al-Ansari was still in the preceding state of patience (*sabr*)<sup>xxxv</sup>. The list of divine attributes mentioned is Ash'ari, and the definition of faith as excluding works, Murji'i Hanafi<sup>xxxvi</sup>, both in conflict with Mu'tazili Shi'i doctrine.

The integral practice of the *shari'a* is enjoined unequivocally. Concerning the state of union (*ittihad*) Tusi emphasises that it does not imply, as some men lacking insight hold, that the mystic becomes one with God but rather that he will become seeing through the eye of divine self-revelation and, as he sees everything to be from Him, will see nothing but Him. Tusi then justifies the famous utterance of al-Hallaj "I am the Truth" as not implying a claim to divinity<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Before Tusi al-Hallaj had universally been condemned by Twelver Shi'is.

How does this Sufi treatise relate to Tusi's personal concerns and aspirations? Was he in his old age attracted to the path of a mysticism of the heart turning away from his earlier intellectual pursuits and religious commitments? There is no evidence that he ever became a practicing Sufi; and in referring to the *Nasirean Ethics* he did not distance himself from his earlier work on philosophical ethics. Why did he feel then both the competence and the call to write a treatise on Sufi ethics, even before he was urged to do so by the vizier?

After his dissociation from the Ismailis, Tusi had, as was natural, rejoined the Twelver Shi'i community into which he had been born. In the catastrophic and chaotic conditions during and after the Mongol conquest, he, more than anyone else, was in a position to protect its members' lives, property, and interests, a position he used fully. He also gave the community his moral support, maintaining close relations with some of its leading religious scholars and writing treatises expounding and defending Twelver Shi'i theology and belief at their request. He rejoined the Twelver Shi'i community as a philosopher as he had earlier joined the Ismailis. Yet he was no longer seeking the *mu'allim*, the supreme teacher who could guide him to perfect and transcend his philosophical faith. He had now become the foremost philosopher of his time. In the Twelver Shi'i community, the position of a supreme teacher could, in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, only fall to him. Tusi himself was the Master (*khwajahi*), the King of Philosophers (*malik al-hukama*), the Teacher of Mankind (*ustad al-bashar*) as he was now commonly addressed.

In writing theological treatises for the Twelver Shi'i community, Tusi may well have remembered the hadith quoted by him in the *Nasirean Ethics*: "We (the prophets) speak to men in the measure of their intelligences!"<sup>xxxviii</sup> It is not likely that he had changed his earlier judgment of kalam that it merely served to defend inherited creeds. It was his own inherited creed which he thus defended now. But he also believed that, as he put it in his new introduction to the *Nasirean Ethics*, philosophy "bears no relation to the agreement or disagreement of school or sect or denomination." Those Sunni scholars in the Mamluk west who described him as an inveterate hater of Sunni Islam and accused him of maliciously encouraging to kill the last Abbasid caliph of Baghdad certainly failed to do him justice<sup>xxxix</sup>. In the Mongol east, Sunni biographers wrote about him with respect and admiration and Sunni

scholars studied, and wrote commentaries on, his main compendium of theology. Among his associates, correspondants, and students were numerous Sunni scholars.

Sadr al-Din Qunavi, the most famous disciple of Ibn al-‘Arabi, also exchanged letters with Tusi, and some of them are extant. There Qunavi puts the questions, and Tusi gives the answers; and although Tusi modestly describes himself as a neophyte (*murid*) and a seeker to learn (*mustafid*) in relation to the eminent Sufi sheikh, he puts the latter in fact more in the place of the pupil<sup>x1</sup>. It is thus not surprising that he felt competent to compose a treatise on the Sufi path. Both he and the vizier Juwayni, a Sunni and firm supporter of Islam, must have sensed the growing tide of Sufi sentiment throughout Islam, which was to reach its peak in the Mongol age. They must have been aware that Sufism, if anything, could break down the barriers between schools and sects and unite all Muslims under the banner of the great Sufi orders. Tusi thus conceived his treatise on Sufi ethics as a complement, addressed to the common Muslim, to his philosophical ethics, addressed to the elite.

He wrote it in simple, uncontroversial terms widely acceptable among Muslims of all creeds, under the motto: “We speak to men in the measure of their intelligences.” The *Awsaf al-ashraf* did not reflect a development in Tusi’s views on ethics. It reflected his awareness of the signs and needs of the time.

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<sup>i</sup> Jalal al-Din Homa’i, *Muqaddama h–ye qadim-i Akhlaq-i Nasiri* (Tehran, 1335/1958), pp. 9-15.

<sup>ii</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*. Ed. M. Minovi and ‘A Haidari (Tehran, 1356/1979), pp. 33-35.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, p 36.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, p 208.

<sup>v</sup> See M.Plessner, *Der “oikonomikos” des Neupythagorders Bryson und sein Einfluss auf die Islamische Wissenschaft* (Heidelberg, 1928), pp. 52-55. Plessner suggests (p.42) that there may have been a more extensive version of Avicenna’s *Kitab al-siyasa* than the one edited by L. Ma’luf in *Mashriq*, 9 (1906).

<sup>vi</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p.248.

<sup>vii</sup> For detailed identification of Tusi’s sources see especially M.T. Daneshpazhuh in the introduction to his edition of Tusi’s *Akhlaq-i Muhtashami* (Tehran, 1339/1962), pp. 19-23, and the annotation by the editors to *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*. Daneshpazhuh’s suggestion that al-Farabi’s *Ara’ ahl al-madina al-fadila* is a source of Sections 1, 3 and 4 of the Third Discourse seems incorrect. The same work is also named as a source of Tusi’s by E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge, 1958), p. 212, and the editors of *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* ( p. 388). No positive evidence, however, has been given. The section beginning p. 289, is based on *al-Siyasa al- madaniyya* rather than *Ara’ ahl al-madina al-fadila*, as the editors suggest (p. 395).

<sup>viii</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p. 43. The translation here and throughout follows the faithful and sensitive rendering of C.M. Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics* (London. 1964), p. 31, with a few changes.

<sup>ix</sup> *K. Musura’at al-falasifa*, ed. *Suhayr Muhammad Mukhtar* (Cairo, 1976). For an analysis of the work and its refutation by Tusi see W. Madelung, “As-Sahrastanis Streitschrift gegen Avicenna und ihre Widerlegung durch Nasir ad-Din Tusi,” in A. Dietrich, ed., *Atken des VII, Kongresses fur Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft* (Gottingen, 1976), pp. 250-259.

<sup>x</sup> See especially M.G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins* (The Hague, 1955), pp. 51-58.

<sup>xi</sup> First published under the title *Sayr o suluk* by an anonymous editor in Tehran and republished by Modarres Redavi in *Majmu’ah-ye rasa’il az ta’lifat-i Khwajah Nasir al- Din* (Tehran, 1335/1958), pp. 36-55.

<sup>xii</sup> It is to be noted that even in his new preamble Tusi used some typically Ismaili concepts and terminology. He praises God as the creator of man who, in his material nature, has “the brand of the World of Creation (*simat-i ‘alam-i khalqi*)” while, in his human form, he has been granted “the pattern of the World of Command (*tiraz-i ‘alam-i amri*)” (*Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p. 33; Wickens, p.23). The terms World of

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Command and World of Creation, signifying respectively the spiritual world brought forth initially by God through his command (*amr*) and the physical world of creation (*khalq*) produced secondarily through it, were of central importance in contemporary Nizari teaching. Tusi himself explains in his autobiographical epistle (pp. 43-44) that according to the doctrine of the Ta'limis all existent things have issued from God through something which the moderns (*mota'akhkeran*) among them term his command or word (*kalima*). According to them it was the First Cause of the Intellect, which is the First Effect (*ma'lul*). Through this doctrine they raised God above being the First Cause and countered the thesis of the philosophers that from the One could issue only one. The Ismaili point of view in this question has been upheld by al-Shahrastani in his *Wrestling Match*. There he rejected Avicenna's views that from God, the perfect One, only a single intellect could issue and that God is the unintentional necessitating cause (*mujib*) of creation, and argued that all created things have an equally immediate relationship to God who is their giver of existence (*mujid*) through what prophetic revelation terms his volition (*irada*) and command (*amr*). In a crypto-Ismaili sermon al-Shahrastani also described the divine *amr* as the source (*masdar*) of creation which in turn was its manifestation (*mazhar*) ("As-Sahrastanis Streitschrift," pp. 256 f.) Tusi accorded the thesis of creation through the divine *amr* prominent treatment in his Ismaili writings.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, pp. 45-46; Wickens, pp. 28-29. Tusi's source in this section appears to be, as suggested by Daneshpazhuh, Avicenna's *Risala fi aqsam al-'ulum*, whose discussion, however, is much more summary.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p.133; Wickens, p. 97. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib al-akhlaq*, ed. Qustanin Zuraiq (Beirut, 1966) p. 115.

<sup>xv</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p. 143; Wickens, p. 104. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib*, pp.125 f.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, pp.105; Wickens, p. 77. Miskawayh, *Tahdhib*, p.35.

<sup>xvii</sup> The latter was the view of Hamid ad-Din al-Kirmanî. See W. Madelung, "Das Imamât in der fruhen ismailitischen Lehre," *Der Islam*, 37 (1961), 125.

<sup>xviii</sup> W. Ivanow, *The Rawadatu't-Taslim Commonly Called Tasawwurat by Nasir ad-Din Tusi* (Leiden, 1950); see especially pp. 67 f. and 115-175.

<sup>xix</sup> *Rawadatu't-Taslim*, pp. 130 f. Hodgson (*Order of Assassins*, p.59) seems to be mistaken in attributing the quotation to Hasan-i Sabbah.

<sup>xx</sup> *Majmu'a*, p. 52.

<sup>xxi</sup> Miskawayh, *Tahdhib*, pp.122 f.

<sup>xxii</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p. 141; Wickens, p. 103.

<sup>xxiii</sup> In its common form the *hadith* speaks only of the scholars ('ulama) as the heirs of the prophets. For a Shi'i version, attributed to imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, see al-Kulaini, *al-Usul min al-Kafi*, ed. 'A.A. al-Ghaffari (Tehran, 1388/1968), p. 32, n.2, where the scholars are identified with the imams.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, pp.253 f.; Wickens, pp. 191-192.

<sup>xxv</sup> The addition is missing in many manuscripts and may have been removed by Tusi in his later revision of the text. See the editors' annotation to p.253 of *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* on p.390.

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p.285; Wickens, p. 215. Daneshpazhuh (introd. To *Akhlaq-e Mohtashami*, p.22) suggests that the passage is based on al-Farabi's *Talkhis nawamis Aflatun*, ed. F. Gabrieli (London, 1952), p. 35. There is, however, no close parallel.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Miskawayh, *Tahdhib*, p 71.

<sup>xxviii</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, pp. 64 f; Wickens, p. 48.

<sup>xxix</sup> Miskawayh, *Tahdhib*, pp. 148 f.

<sup>xxx</sup> Qur'an, 34.13.

<sup>xxxi</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, pp. 270 f; Wickens, pp. 204-205.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Ed. Narollah Taqavi (Berlin, 1306/1929). Another ethical work by Tusi, *Akhlaq-i Mohtashami*, is of no immediate relevance here. It is a collection of ethical texts and aphorisms taken from the Qur'an, hadith, statements of the imams, da'is, and philosophers begun by Tusi's Ismaili patron, the Muhtasham Naser ad-Din, and completed and translated into Persian by Tusi. Another ethical treatise ascribed to Tusi,

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*Gushayishnamah* (ed. M.T. Daneshpazhuh, in the volume *Du risalah dar akhlaq* [Tehran, 1341/1964]), does not appear authentic.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> *Awsaf al-ashraf*, p. 2.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 69.

<sup>xxxv</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42 f.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6 f.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66 f.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p 283; Wickens, p. 214.

<sup>xxxix</sup> See the accusations of Ibn Taimiyya, ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya, al-Subki, and others quoted by Modarres Redavi, *Ahval wa athar-i Khwajah Nasir al-Din* (Tehran, 1334/1957) pp. 46-49. Tusi's diversion of the religious endowments to the support of philosophy and sciences, for which he was also criticised, certainly was detrimental to Sunni interests in particular. His measures in this regard were, however, merely an aspect of the disestablishment of Sunnism as the official religion by the Mongols.

<sup>xl</sup> See Modarres Redavi, *Ahval*, pp. 270-277. For Ibn Taimiyya's view of the correspondence see T. Michel, "Ibn Taymiyya's Critique of *Falsafa*," *Hamdard Islamicus*, 6 (1938), 12.