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### Reconciling Religion and Philosophy: Nāṣir-i Khusraw's (d. 1088) Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn

Khalil Andani

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### Abstract and Keywords

Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. 481/1088), the renowned Ismā'īlī philosopher, poet, travel writer, and missionary (*dā'i*), took on the formidable challenge of showing the essential harmony between philosophy and Ismā'īlī doctrine in his *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* (*The Reconciliation of Philosophy and Religion*). After introducing his life and works, this chapter explores this text's central themes and examines the manner in which Nāṣir attempts to achieve this reconciliation. Fundamental to Nāṣir's method is a form of spiritual hermeneutics, or *ta'wīl*, through which he demonstrates that the truths of philosophy serve as iconic representations of the spiritual truths contained in the Ismā'īlī interpretation of Islam, thereby restoring philosophy to its original state of union with revealed, prophetic wisdom.

Keywords: Ismā'īlī, philosophy, ḥikma, hermeneutics, theology, cosmology, Universal Intellect, Universal Soul, Neoplatonism, *ta'wīl*

## 8.1. Life and Works

MOST of what is known of Nāṣir-i Khusraw comes from his own writings. Born in Khurāsān in 394/1004 into a notable family, Nāṣir served as a treasury official under the Seljuqs for several years. In his early forties, he experienced a powerful dream that led him to set out in search of wisdom and true happiness. Through this pursuit of knowledge, he eventually journeyed to Cairo. Cairo was the seat of the Fatimid Caliphate established by the Ismā'īlīs—a community of Shī'ī Islam that upholds the continuation of the religious and charismatic authority of the Prophet Muḥammad through a line of hereditary spiritual leaders, or imams. This line began with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) and continues through an uninterrupted chain of his descendants to the present day.

While the exact details remain unclear, Nāṣir did come to embrace the teachings of Ismā'īlī Islam and received intellectual and spiritual training at the hands of his teacher al-Mu'ayyad fi l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078). This initiation culminated in Nāṣir giving his allegiance (*bay'a*) to the Fatimid imam-caliph al-Mustanshir bi-llāh (d. 487/1094). Nāṣir then returned to Khurāsān as a Fatimid Ismā'īlī summoner (*dā'ī*), holding the exalted rank of *ḥujjat* (the “proof” of the Imam). Nāṣir's teaching activities were met with both success and great danger. On account of the latter, he was forced to flee eastward and live the remainder of his life in the village of Yumgān, located in the remote Pamir Mountains. Nāṣir found refuge under the protection of the benevolent prince Abū l-Ma'ālī 'Alī b. al-Asad and continued teaching and writing until the end of his life. His spiritual and intellectual legacy has had a lasting impact upon the Ismā'īlī Muslim communities of Central Asia, among whom his poetry continues to be recited, his prose read and reflected upon, and his personality revered.

(p. 170) In addition to being known for having written several important travel diaries in Persian (Khusraw, *Book of Travels*), Nāṣir is still regarded as one of the greatest poets of the Persian language. This explains why many popular versions and at least two scholarly editions of his collected poetic works (*Dīwān*) are extant (for his philosophical poetry, see the studies in Hunsberger 2013).

Among Nāṣir's prose works are his *Gushāyish wa-rahāyish* (*Knowledge and Liberation*), which deals with thirty questions of a theological and philosophical nature concerning subjects such as the Creator and creation, eternity and time, free will and predestination, and the soul-body relationship (Khusraw, *Liberation*). *Khwān al-ikhwān* (*The Feast of the Brethren*) is a text of one hundred chapters concerning a number of subjects, including metaphysics, the nature of the human rational soul, the concept of creation, and eschatology. This text also reworks parts of the *Kitāb al-Yanābī'* (*The Book of Wellsprings*) of the Ismā'īlī philosopher Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), whose adoption of Neoplatonic metaphysics left a lasting impression on medieval Ismā'īlī thought in general, and the thought of Nāṣir in particular (Sijistānī 1994). *Shish faṣl* (*Six Chapters*) explicates a number of key Ismā'īlī metaphysical teachings concerning, inter alia, God, cosmology, psychology, and soteriology. *Zād al-musāfirīn* (*Provisions for Travellers*) deals with the human quest for knowledge and the necessary provisions one requires along this journey (Khusraw, *Zād*). *Wajh-i dīn* (*The Face of Religion*) provides an esoteric interpretation of Ismā'īlī law (*sharī'at*), covering subjects such as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage (Khusraw, *Expressions*).

The most important text for our present purposes is the *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*. This Persian work was written at the request of Nāṣir's aforementioned patron, who had asked him to address a number of challenging philosophical and religious questions posed by a certain

Abū l-Ḥaytham al-Jurjānī in a lengthy poem. As Nāṣir composed this text based on the structure of the questions posed by Jurjānī, his explanations of the major doctrinal themes are often scattered throughout several chapters. What follows is a reconstructed presentation of the central theological, philosophical, and mystical doctrines to be found throughout the *Jāmi'*.<sup>1</sup>

## 8.2. Overview

Nāṣir-i Khusraw explains his reasons for composing the *Jāmi'* with reference to the four Aristotelian causes (efficient cause, material cause, formal cause, final cause), but divides the material cause into two aspects, thereby presenting us with five causes. Nāṣir himself is the efficient cause, his pen and knife constitute the instrumental or (p. 171) active material cause, the paper upon which the text is written is the passive material cause, the forms of learning that Nāṣir possesses comprise the formal cause, and the prince who requested Nāṣir's response to Jurjānī's questions is the final cause. Nāṣir also adds two further causes, the spatial and the temporal cause. These seven causes that Nāṣir presents evoke several key Ismā'īlī doctrinal symbols, such as the seven heavens, seven Messengers, seven Imams, etc. which are further discussed below.

Nāṣir's stated purpose in writing the *Jāmi'* is to "reconcile the science of true religion, which is one of the products of the Holy Spirit, with the science of creation, which is one of the necessary concomitants ('*alā'iq*) of philosophy" (*Jāmi'*, ¶20, 32). By "philosophy" (*falsafa*), Nāṣir is evidently referring to the Greek intellectual heritage stemming from what he refers to as the "deiform philosophers" (*muta'allihān-i falāsifa*), namely Empedocles, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (*Jāmi'*, ¶65, 67). The overall thrust of his work is therefore to demonstrate that philosophical wisdom (*ḥikmat*) stands in harmony with Ismā'īlī wisdom (*ḥikmat*). His intentions are also motivated by an annoyance with certain Muslims in his own time who spurned the study of the physical world as unbelief (*Jāmi'*, ¶15, 27). He answers such a charge by citing a well-known prophetic saying, "reflect on the creation but not on the Creator," and concludes, in a manner similar to that of Averroes (d. 595/1198) some two centuries later (Averroes *Decisive Treatise*, 2), that reflection on creation must be religiously obligatory (*Jāmi'*, ¶15, 27). Besides his patron, Nāṣir also has two potential audiences in mind: his Ismā'īlī co-religionists and the philosophers/logicians. He therefore takes recourse to both scriptural statements and demonstrative modes of argumentation through the work, but clearly gives priority to revelation:

In it I have spoken both to the sages of religion, using verse from God's Book and from the Traditions of His Prophet, and to the sages of philosophy and the experts in logic, employing rational proofs together with premises leading to satisfying conclusions. For the treasury of wisdom lies in the secret heart of him who is the seal and the heir of the prophets—upon them be peace—and yet, there is also a whiff (*shammātī*) of wisdom in the writings of the ancients.

(*Jāmi'*, ¶21, 33)

The *Jāmi'* contains thirty-four chapters. The layout of each chapter is explicatory and contrastive in that Nāṣir first presents the views of the philosophers on a particular issue, and then presents the doctrines of the Ismā'īlis—referred to as the Sages of the True Religion (*ḥukamā-yi dīn-i ḥaqq*), the People of Spiritual Hermeneutics (*ahl-i ta'wīl*), or the People of Spiritual Inspiration (*ahl-i ta'yīd*)—which either critique or supplement the views of the philosophers. Nāṣir's method of engaging with Jurjānī's questions and reconciling the seemingly divergent positions of philosophy and Ismā'īlī doctrine is that of *ta'wīl*, a form of spiritual hermeneutics employed by Ismā'īlī authors throughout their writings. The following section serves as an illustration of how *ta'wīl* is a fundamental feature of the *Jāmi'*, as well as the key that leads one to the central argument of the work.

### (p. 172) 8.3. Hermeneutics

The Ismā'īlī thinkers distinguished between the *ẓāhir* (exoteric) and *bāṭin* (esoteric) dimensions of religion. For them, *ta'wīl* is a method of spiritual hermeneutics that disclosed the *bāṭin* of the divine revelation, namely the Qur'ān. As Nāṣir-i Khusraw defines the term, *ta'wīl* is “to return” a thing to its metaphysical origin. The opposite of this term is *tanzīl*, which is to “bring down” or express spiritual realities from this origin in the form of sensible symbols and parables. The concepts of *tanzīl* and *ta'wīl* as respective movements of descent and ascent are situated within an ontology, in relation to which “*ta'wīl* presupposes the superimposition of worlds and interworlds, as the correlative basis for a plurality of meanings in the same text” (Corbin 1977, 53–54).

Nāṣir's worldview envisages a chain of being that consists of several “worlds”: the spiritual World of Origination (*'ālam-i ibdā'*) or the metacosm, the physical World of Nature (*'ālam-i ṭabī'at*) or the macrocosm, and the intermediary World of Religion (*'ālam-i dīn*) or the mesocosm which bridges the spiritual and physical worlds. The World of Religion is comprised of human beings, each of whom is a microcosm (*'ālam-i ṣaghīr*)

possessing a physical body and a spiritual soul. These worlds each contain a number of hierarchical degrees or limits (*ḥudūd*).

The World of Origination consists of eternal, spiritual, subtle or simple beings such as the Universal Intellect (*'aql-i kullī*), the Universal Soul (*nafs-i kullī*), and the three archangelic hypostases called Jadd (Fortune), Faṭḥ (Opening), and Khayāl (Imagination), and who are identified with the archangels Seraphiel, Michael, and Gabriel (*Jāmi'*, ¶140, 129). The World of Nature contains temporal, physical, dense or composite beings comprised of matter and form, including the celestial bodies, elements, minerals, plants, various species of animals, etc. The World of Religion consists of human beings in general and the hierarchical ranks of the Ismā'īlī summons (*da'wa*) in particular—consisting of the lawgiving prophet known as the Enunciator (*nāṭiq*) or the Messenger (*rasūl*), his Legatee (*waṣī*), the Imam, the Proof (*ḥujjat*), the Summoner (*dā'ī*), the Licensed Teacher (*ma'dhūn*), and the Respondent (*mustajīb*). For example, the Prophet Muḥammad was the Messenger, Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was his Legatee and his spiritual successors from the line of Imam Ḥusayn (d. 61/680) down to the Fatimid Caliphs are the Imams. As Nāṣir has explained in one of his works, the Imam of every time is represented in the world by twenty-eight Proofs and three hundred and sixty Summoners who conduct the Ismā'īlī summons and instruct the lower ranks of the Ismā'īlī initiates (Khusraw, *Expressions*).

The highest ranks of the World of Religion are the recipients of *ta'yīd* (knowledge in the form of spiritual inspiration) from the Universal Intellect, which is the *mu'ayyid* or source of this inspiration. In the context of ontology, *ta'wīl* is to perceive a particular object in its own ontological domain as a metaphor and symbol reflecting a corresponding reality in a higher ontological domain. This perception of correspondence between one world and another facilitates the return of the object to its spiritual origin:

(p. 173) To engage in hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) is to bring the word back to its point of origin. The first of all existing things is Origination (*ibdā'*), which is one with the Intellect, and the Intellect is that which sustains (*mu'ayyid*) all of the emissaries [of God].

(*Jāmi'*, ¶112, 112)

By virtue of being spiritually inspired (*mu'ayyad*), the Messengers, the Legatees, the Imams, and the Proofs can perform *ta'wīl* and articulate it as discourse or instruction (*ta'līm*) to lower members of the Ismā'īlī summons. The objects of *ta'wīl*, each of which the Ismā'īlī summoners “read” as expressions of the spiritual realities of the higher worlds, include the Qur'ānic text, the rules and rituals embodied in the *sharī'at*, the World of Nature, and the psychophysical constitution of the human being. Just as the World of Nature and the human being are the “composition” (*tarkīb*) of the Universal

Soul, the revealed Book, the *sharī'at*, and the World of Religion are the “compilation” (*ta'līf*) of the Messenger.

A classic example of *ta'wīl* performed upon the Qur'ān is Nāṣir's interpretation of the verse “Your women are fields for you so go into your fields in any way you wish” (Qur'ān 2:223). While acknowledging that the outer meaning of the verse is “have intercourse with your wives in any way you wish,” Nāṣir discloses the inner meaning according to which the “women” stand for the Respondents of the Ismā'īlī summons, and the verse commands the Summoner to “speak as he wishes” to them. This *ta'wīl* “returns” the verse to its corresponding reality in World of Religion: “women” in the Qur'ānic verses symbolize the Respondents in the World of Religion, and “intercourse” symbolizes the “diffusion of knowledge” (*Jāmi'*, ¶344, 262).

With respect to *ta'wīl* applied to the World of Nature, Nāṣir explains how among the various categories of minerals and animals, there are two that are most noble—such as red rubies and emeralds among indissoluble minerals, gold and silver among meltable minerals, the camel and horse among animals, the date and grape among plants, and the sun and moon among heavenly bodies (*Jāmi'*, ¶179, 164). He then explains that “these two categories are analogous for the two men amongst all mankind which are noblest” (*Jāmi'*, ¶180, 164), meaning the Messenger and his Legatee. This *ta'wīl* relates various natural phenomena to their corresponding origins in the World of Religion.

In other parts of the text, Nāṣir also relates how the Messenger, the Legatee, and other ranks of the World of Religion are symbols or manifestations of the ranks (*ḥudūd*) of the World of Origination such as the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul. These examples demonstrate that *ta'wīl* is, first and foremost, a “perception of hermeneutical correspondence” on the part of the exegete—presumably made possible by *ta'yīd*—that is articulated in discourse. Thus, Nāṣir's *ta'wīl* integrates all of the various “worlds” (spiritual, natural, religious, scriptural, ritual, human) in a harmonious correspondence, a phenomenon that Henry Corbin aptly describes as follows: “The *ta'wīl*, without question, is a matter of *harmonic perception*, of hearing an identical sound (the same verse, the same *ḥadīth*, even an entire text) on several levels simultaneously” (1977, 53–54).

As shall be seen, it is the “harmonic” nature of *ta'wīl* that allows Nāṣir to meet the daunting challenge of forging the reconciliation between philosophy and Ismā'īlī (p. 174) doctrine. Before turning to an exposition of the manner in which he attempts this, we begin with Nāṣir's treatment of some key philosophical technical terms, as it largely sets the stage for the ensuing discussion.

## 8.4. Philosophical Terminology

Before engaging with the philosophical questions posed in Jurjānī's poem, Nāṣir begins by laying out his understanding of some key philosophical notions. His discussion commences with a primer on the key terms of logic as applied by Aristotle. Nāṣir begins by explaining that configuration (*hay'at*) is different from form (*ṣūrat*) in that configuration refers to the unique shape possessed by different individuals of the same form (*Jāmi'*, ¶81, 82). He then goes on to explain that "definition" (*ḥadd*) is "that which is spoken about a thing such that it delimits the thing so that nothing can be added to it or brought out from it" (*Jāmi'*, ¶85, 85). Indeed, Nāṣir gives great importance to definitions, stating that "to know things in their true nature is to know the definitions of those things" (*Jāmi'*, ¶88, 86). Nāṣir holds that definition (*ḥadd*) can be used to explain two kinds of existents: compound things that are composed of other things like form and matter; and simple things that originated (*mubda'*) ex nihilo. "Form" (*ṣūrat*) is "that by which the existence of a thing may be known," and "matter" (*hayūlā*) is "a simple substance receptive to form" (*jawharī-yi basīṭ ast padhīra-yi ṣūrat*). Substance (*jawhar*) is "that which subsists in its own nature and is receptive to contrary attributes," while "attribute" (*ṣifat*) is "an accident which descends into a substance but does not form part of its essence." An existent (*mawjūd*) is "that which we perceive either by the five senses or of which the imagination forms an image, or which something else points to" (*Jāmi'*, ¶89, 86).

Just as the proper understanding of philosophical terms is a prerequisite for engaging philosophical concepts, a proper engagement with the metaphysical doctrines of medieval Ismā'īlism is contingent upon the doctrine of *tawḥīd*, to which we will now turn.

## 8.5. Theology

Although Jurjānī's poem does not actually pose questions about *tawḥīd*, the very centrality of this doctrine in Islam seems to have motivated Nāṣir to address it at the beginning of his treatise. He begins by classifying all people into five groups with respect to their position on the nature of God: materialists, idolaters, Christians, dualists, and monotheists (*muwaḥḥidūn*). The latter group consists of the unreflective conformists (*ahl-i taqlīd*), the theologians (*mutakallimūn*) such as the Karrāmites and Mu'tazilites, and the Shī'īs. Nāṣir considers himself to be among the Shī'ī monotheists, who apply *ta'wīl* to the Qur'ān and situate true *tawḥīd* between the likening (*tashbīḥ*) of God to His (p. 175)

creatures and complete denial of God's attributes (*ta'ṭīl*) (*Jāmi'*, ¶26, 43). Nāṣir articulates his Shī'ī Ismā'īlī concept of *tawḥīd* by offering a number of criticisms against the other Islamic theological camps.

Nāṣir begins his critique with the unreflective conformists (*ahl-i taqlīd*) by dismissing their insistence that God is simultaneously unlike anything and also "hearing" and "seeing" as a contradiction. He refers to their view that God's knowing, hearing, and seeing is real, while man's knowing, hearing, and seeing are figurative or borrowed as absurd, and accuses the literalists of likening God to His creatures. Nāṣir is even less impressed by their claim that "God sees others while they do not see Him," and points out that the Qur'ān (7:27) also says this about Satan and his minions (*Jāmi'*, ¶30, 45). He goes on to accuse the literalists of not even practicing a true literal exegesis, and instead "in many instances, evading literal interpretation, engaging in hermeneutics, or simply bickering in their own ignorance" (*Jāmi'*, ¶34, 47). This is particularly evident for scriptural passages that mention God's face, hands, or eyes, before which the literalists are entirely at odds with one another. Nāṣir concludes his critique of the literalists by remarking that their belief in God as literally having ninety-nine names amounts to nothing but sheer polytheism:

They state that God has ninety-nine names, each of which has its distinct meaning. But any rational person knows that anyone who has ninety-nine names cannot be a single person, for each of the ninety-nine must have its own essence. Polytheism, not monotheism, underlies this group's teachings.

(*Jāmi'*, ¶40, 51)

The next part of Nāṣir's discourse targets the theology of the Karrāmites, namely followers of Ibn Karrām (d. 255/869). The Karrāmite position, as related by Nāṣir, asserts that God is a body but unlike other bodies, and is knowing, living, and powerful but that His knowledge, life, and power are unlike the knowledge, life, or power of others. Nāṣir contends that this doctrine is absurd and meaningless. For example, to say, "He is a body not like bodies" means, "He is a body, not a body," which is contradictory (*Jāmi'*, ¶42, 52). Nāṣir dismisses the Karrāmite position concerning God's knowledge, life, and power (i.e., that they are unlike that of His creatures) by recalling the manner in which the Qur'ān also qualifies human beings and other creatures with knowledge, power, or life (*Jāmi'*, ¶44, 53).

Nāṣir also anticipates a Karrāmite objection to his argument: to deny that God is knowing, living, or powerful effectively leads one to conclude that God is ignorant, dead, and powerless. In response, Nāṣir argues that both pairs of attributes—knowledge and ignorance, life and death, power and incapacity—are inadmissible for God and must be negated from Him. This is because both pairs of attributes are creaturely qualities and



thus invalid for describing God (*Jāmi'*, ¶45, 55–56). In this respect, Nāṣir articulates an Ismā'īlī form of the *via negativa* called double negation. This position was first championed by Ismā'īlī thinkers such as al-Sijistānī and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/934). While al-Sijistānī and al-Rāzī negated qualities such as existence and nonexistence, definition and nondefinition, and perfection and imperfection from God, Nāṣir also employs (p. 176) double negation to negate Qur'ānic names of God, such as the Knowing (*'ālim*), the Living (*ḥayy*), and the Powerful (*qādir*), as well as their opposites. Nāṣir concludes his critique of the Karrāmites on the subject of the divine attributes by accusing them of merely projecting their own inadequate ideas of perfection and goodness onto God, and thus falling into polytheism (*shirk*):

It is wrong to describe God by such attributes as “ignorance” and “powerlessness”—not because they are unseemly but because they are attributes of creatures—as well as that it is also wrong to ascribe the opposites of such attributes, such as “knowledge” and “power,” to Him—glory be to Him, He is exalted—on the grounds that these too are creaturely qualities. The so-called theologians of this community have plunged into grievous error in their inquiry, in ascribing their own fine qualities to God and in declaring Him devoid of their bad qualities. And for this very reason, they have fallen into polytheism.

(*Jāmi'*, ¶46, 55)

The final portion of Nāṣir's critique attacks the Mu'tazilite position on *tawḥīd*. He begins by summarizing their position, that “the Creator is one, eternal, powerful, living, hearing, and seeing; that His attributes are inherent to His essence; and that He is not comparable to anything” (*Jāmi'*, ¶54, 61). Nāṣir does offer some praise to the Mu'tazilites, remarking that “there is no approach (*ṭarīqatī*) stronger than theirs among the various schools of Islam on the subject of *tawḥīd*” (*Jāmi'*, ¶55, 61). But he also proudly declares that no one has been able to critique the Mu'tazilites apart from his own group—the People of Spiritual Inspiration (*ahl-i ta'yīd*). Nāṣir begins this critique by first attacking the Mu'tazilite claim that belief in *tawḥīd* should not be based on *taqlīd* (uncritical acceptance). He does so by accusing the Mu'tazilites of confusing genuine *taqlīd* with familiarity and habit. He contrasts them by explaining that the latter, habit, is evident in the belief that the world is eternal and has no creator (accordingly, a belief has no prophetic summons), while the former, genuine *taqlīd*, is that to which all the Prophets summoned humankind. Nāṣir evidently sees value in *taqlīd* as a necessary first step to arriving at deeper truth: “He who rejects *taqlīd* never arrives at the discernment of deeper truth; it is by way of acceptance that one arrives at God's oneness and a grasp of the truth” (*Jāmi'*, ¶58, 63). But Nāṣir also asserts that a person who accepts the Prophet's Book and the *sharī'at* through *taqlīd* is equally obliged to study their *ta'wīl*. He argues this

need for the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān by quoting several Qur'ānic verses that describe God with the qualities of His creatures, such as speech, creation, providence, mockery, revenge, knowledge, power, life, and hearing. Unless interpreted through *ta'wīl*, these verses simply lead to contradictory anthropomorphism (*Jāmi'*, ¶¶ 59–60, 86).

Nāṣir then attempts to refute the Mu'tazilite doctrine that at least some of God's attributes are identical with His Essence (the so-called Mu'tazilite doctrine of essential attributes) (*Jāmi'*, ¶¶61–62, 65–66). He notes that an attribute (*ṣifa*) cannot subsist by itself but only through what it qualifies (*mawṣūf*), and any such attribute would be an accident in God's essence. Thus, qualifying God with any sort of attributes leads to His essence being a substrate of accidents (*maḥall-i a'rāḍ*). This leads Nāṣir to conclude that (p. 177) an essence with six different attributes (knowledge, power, life, hearing, seeing, eternity) is actually a composite substance. "This doctrine of theirs," Nāṣir writes, "that attributes are attributes essentially, comes from a sort of fervour which has alighted within their hearts, a fervour which they cannot quite articulate correctly" (*Jāmi'*, ¶62, 66). Nāṣir concludes his critique of the Mu'tazilites by accusing them of the very anthropomorphism that they sought to avoid:

To posit one essence with six different attributes is not true *tawḥīd*. Quite the opposite: it is to posit a multiplicity. Nor can it be true *tawḥīd* to ascribe creaturely attributes to God. On the contrary, that is anthropomorphism. This group never sees anything better than themselves and indeed, fancy themselves to be God.

(*Jāmi'*, ¶64, 67)

Through his critique of the literalists, the Karrāmites, and the Mu'tazilites, it is evident that Nāṣir-i Khusraw's concept of *tawḥīd* negates all attributes and qualities from God, such as knowledge, life, power, hearing, and sight. He equally negates the opposites of these attributes from God, namely ignorance, death, incapacity, deafness, and blindness. As will be seen in subsequent parts of the *Jāmi'*, Nāṣir also exalts God above intelligibility and oneness. In another work, he elevates God above philosophical and ontological categories such as cause and effect, unity and multiplicity, existence and nonexistence, and necessary and contingent being (Khusraw, *Liberation*, 42). This overall perspective serves as the foundation for Nāṣir's Neoplatonic metaphysics explored in the next section.

## 8.6. Metaphysics and Cosmogony

Nāṣir's metaphysics unfolds in a hierarchical cosmology consisting of the following levels: the Command (*amr*) of God, Universal Intellect, Universal Soul, Matter and Form, Universal Nature, Universal Body, the Spheres, the Elements, and the three Kingdoms—mineral, plant, and animal (*Jāmi'*, ¶151, 138). Ultimately, the goal of creation is the human being.

Nāṣir differentiates between the Origination (*ibdā'*) and “creation” (*khalq*). The former refers to the act of bringing something into being ex nihilo, while the latter is the determination (*taqdīr*) of a thing from another thing. After surveying several views on whether the world is originated or created with respect to its form and/or matter, Nāṣir observes that the world is configured, articulated, mobile, constrained, and compelled—all of which serves as sufficient proof that someone or something is constraining and compelling the world to be the way it is (*Jāmi'*, ¶258, 200). Nāṣir concludes that God is responsible for configuring the world in both its form and its matter, and that God's action must be through His decree, as opposed to His essence or nature. He refers to this decree of God that configures and compels the world as an act of Origination (*ibdā'*) or (p. 178) Command (*amr*). Nāṣir maintains that the creative process, from the Origination down to the composition of the World of Nature, is atemporal and instantaneous: “There was absolutely no temporal ‘before’ and ‘after’ in the existence of the heavens, one with respect to the other” (*Jāmi'*, ¶307, 227).

Nāṣir then argues that the existence of particular souls in the vegetables, plants, and human beings implies the existence of the Universal Soul as the origin of the world. He also reasons that the existence of intellect (*'aql*) in human beings among all animals implies that it is a higher faculty in which the nobility of the soul is found. This allows him to conclude that there is a Universal Intellect over and above the Universal Soul (*Jāmi'*, ¶258, 200).

### 8.6.1. Universal Intellect and Universal Soul

Nāṣir-i Khusraw, along with other medieval Ismā'īlī thinkers such as al-Sijistānī and al-Rāzī, regards the Universal Intellect (*'aql-i kullī*) as the first originated being by means of God's Command, and the Universal Soul (*nafs-i kullī*) as the emanation of the Universal Intellect. The Universal Intellect is perfect in potentiality and actuality. It is the simple, luminous substance that contains the forms of all things (*Jāmi'*, ¶89, 88). In another work, Nāṣir describes the Intellect as being endowed with the seven essential attributes:

eternity (*dahr*), truth (*ḥaqq*), joy (*shādī*), demonstration (*burhān*), life (*zindigānī*), perfection (*kamāl*), and self-sufficiency (*bī-nīyāzī*) (Khusraw, *Khwān*, 150–51). While Nāṣir negated these attributes from God Himself, he applies them to the Universal Intellect and, in a less perfect manner, to the Universal Soul. The Universal Intellect contemplates its own essence as the intellecter (*‘āqil*), the intellect (*‘aql*), and the intellected (*ma‘qūl*), as there is nothing that its essence does not encompass (*Jāmi'*, ¶105, 104). Throughout the *Jāmi'*, Nāṣir refers to the Universal Intellect as the “Active Intellect” (*‘aql-i fa‘āl*), a term bequeathed by Aristotle (Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3.5) and appropriated in early Islamic philosophy before Nāṣir's time, most notably in the Neoplatonic cosmologies of Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Avicenna (d. 428/1037).

### 8.6.2. Unity and Multiplicity

The Intellect, being complete and actual, is existentially united with the Command of God in the manner that “white” and “whiteness” are one in existence. Nāṣir even differentiates between the “Absolute One” (*aḥad; yakī-yi maḥd*) that admits no multiplicity, and the “Multiple One” (*wāḥid; yakī-yi mutakaththir*) that is at the root (*aṣl*) of multiplicity. Thus, God is the “Absolute One,” and the Universal Intellect is the “Multiple One” because it is comprised of both “oneness” (*waḥdat*)—identified with the Command of God—and “substance” (*jawhar*), which implies potential multiplicity. The term “the one” (*wāḥid; yakī*) in the numerical sense properly applies to the Universal Intellect and not to God as such. God Himself is the Originator (*al-mubdi'*) of both “the one” (*wāḥid*) (p. 179) and “oneness” (*waḥdat*), where the latter is His Command or trace (*athar*) (*Jāmi'*, ¶150, 137). A similar observation is to be found in later Islamic thought in the writings of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) and his school, where they distinguish between God's exclusive oneness (*aḥadiyya*) and His inclusive oneness (*wāḥidiyya*) (Rustom 2014). In Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Jāmi'*, this distinction would correspond to the “Absolute One” (God as such) and the “Multiple One” (Universal Intellect) respectively.

### 8.6.3. Eternity, Time, and Perfection

Nāṣir defines eternity (*dahr*) as “the continuance of the eternal substance” (*Jāmi'*, ¶114, 113) and “absolute duration” (*baqā-yi muṭlaq*) (*Jāmi'*, ¶115, 113). Nāṣir even deconstructs the philosophers' singular notion of eternity by making a clear distinction between the “eternalizer” (*azal*, the agent of eternity), “eternality” (*azaliyya*), and the being (*azalī*) that is “made” eternal. This tripartite distinction of eternity applies respectively to God (the “eternalizer”), His Command (“eternality”), and the Universal Intellect, the being

that is rendered “eternal” through the manifestation of eternity, identified with God's Command (*Jāmi'*, ¶193, 172).

In his *Shish faṣl* (Khusraw, *Six Chapters*, 44), Nāṣir explains that the Universal Intellect is perpetually in a state of blissful self-contemplation through its praise and worship of God. This praise of the Intellect causes the emanation of the Universal Soul, which is perfect in potentiality but imperfect in actuality due to its coming into being through the mediation of the Intellect. In delineating their relationship in the *Jāmi'*—in a manner akin to what is found again in Ibn 'Arabī and his school (Murata 1992, 162–64)—Nāṣir draws on such Qur'ānic terms as the Pen (*qalam*) and the Tablet (*lawḥ*). The Universal Intellect produces its loci of manifestation (*maẓāhirāt*) by emanating its intelligible forms (*ṣūrat*) upon the Universal Soul, just as a pen writes upon a paper in producing calligraphy (*Jāmi'*, ¶¶262–63, 202–3). Such an explanation serves to integrate Qur'ānic *ta'wīl* with the Neoplatonic Islamic doctrine of emanation. The Universal Soul desires to actualize its potential perfection and is therefore in a state of perpetual movement or activity. The movement of the Universal Soul creates and generates the Cosmos—consisting of Form, Matter, Universal Nature, human souls, and the physical world. Thus, the Universal Soul is the Creator (*khāliq*) or Artisan (*ṣāni'*) of the Cosmos, which is generated as a limited reflection of the Universal Intellect (Khusraw, *Six Chapters*, 71). Although the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul are both within the horizon of eternity (*dahr*), it is the Universal Soul that causes time and motion:

Just as eternity lies within the bound of the [Universal Intellect], so does time lie within the bound of the Universal Soul; that is to say, the cause of eternity (*dahr*) is the Intellect just as the cause of time (*zamān*) is the Soul. We say that the cause of time is the [Universal] Soul since time consists of the number of movements of the sphere, according to the proponents of both forms of wisdom.

(*Jāmi'*, ¶114, 113)

(p. 180) The purpose of the Universal Soul's creation of the Cosmos is to engender perfect human souls such that through these souls the Universal Soul actualizes its own perfection and returns to the Universal Intellect (Khusraw, *Six Chapters*, 49). At the individual level, “The [human] soul's perfection occurs through knowledge by way of this tremendous construction” (*Jāmi'*, ¶117, 115). At the historical and collective level, the Universal Soul engenders perfect souls through the historical cycles of the six Messengers: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. The great soul who serves as the final instrument of the Universal Soul's actualization of perfection is the seventh among the Messengers, called the Master of the Resurrection (*qā'im-i qiyāmat*), who reveals the spiritual meaning or *bāṭin* of all prophetic revelations. Akin to a

Messianic figure, this individual who is the most perfect manifestation of the Universal Intellect ushers in the eschatological return of the Soul to the Intellect:

The self-sufficiency of the Universal Soul from any neediness of its own occurs through that individual who can receive the connection with the Universal Intellect in its entirety and become the leader of all humanity, the final leader of all leaders, and so bring the cycle to its close. Every group has a name for him. One group calls him "Messiah," who will return; another calls him "Mahdi," and yet another, "Qā'im."

(*Jāmi'*, ¶117, 116)

Since the Cosmos acts as the vehicle of perfection, attention will now be given to Nāṣir's cosmology.

## 8.7. Cosmology

The Universal Soul gives rise to two hypostases, namely Prime Matter and Universal Nature. Prime Matter is like a shadow of the Universal Soul. The Universal Soul is continuously inspired by the Universal Intellect and also contemplates Prime Matter in its creative act. Its contemplation of Prime Matter is noble (*sharīf*), and this gives rise to Universal Nature, which is an active substance (*Jāmi'*, ¶135, 124). Thus, Nāṣir views Universal Nature as a subtle (*laṭīf*) entity that serves as the "pupil" (*shāgird*) of the Universal Soul. Universal Nature is omnipresent in all things: "The world is filled with Universal Nature, though it occupies no place whatsoever within it, for it is a substance without spatial location (*jawhar-i nā jāy-gīr*)" (*Jāmi'*, ¶134, 124). With respect to its function, Universal Nature "preserves each and every one of the various natures in its form so that none of them falls asunder, expires, or decays" (*Jāmi'*, ¶132, 123).

### 8.7.1. The Origin of Genus and Species

In several parts of the *Jāmi'* Nāṣir offers a detailed discussion of the hierarchy among genus, species, and individuals in the physical world. He examines the question of (p. 181) priority among them from two perspectives—the intelligible (logical) and the physical. According to the intelligible perspective, Nāṣir notes that "the precedence of species over the individual and of genus over species is not temporal ... rather, it is essential" (*Jāmi'*, ¶278, 212). Yet, according to the physical and temporal perspective, Nāṣir states the following:

The species is sustained by the individual, the species sustains the genus, despite the fact that the individual is within the species and the species is within the genus. In the same way, the whole depends upon its parts, even if the parts are contained within the whole.

(*Jāmi'*, ¶269, 206)

Within the context of the temporal and physical dependence of species upon individuals, Nāṣir sets forth his theory on the origin of species according to which each species (vegetable, animal, human) ultimately derive through physical descent from a “primordial instantiating couple” (*Jāmi'*, ¶318, 236). This originating couple is not born but created without physical birth. Because each species ultimately comes from a group of two individuals (the primordial couple who together make a genus), Nāṣir's conclusion concerning the question of priority between genus, species, and individuals is that they all “occurred at a single stroke” (*Jāmi'*, ¶318, 236).

### 8.7.2. The Seven Lights

One of the most eloquent examples of Nāṣir's harmonization of the teachings of the philosophers and Ismā'īlī doctrine occurs fairly early in the *Jāmi'* (*Jāmi'*, ¶¶104–7, 103–7). In this section, Nāṣir employs *ta'wīl* to illustrate the correspondence between the aforementioned three worlds—the spiritual World of Origination, the physical World of Nature, and the intermediary World of Religion (which includes the human microcosm). Nāṣir's central thesis, which is characteristic of Ismā'īlī thought in general, is that each world contains the traces or manifestations of the contents of the world that is higher than it. He begins by noting the philosophers' view that the physical heavens or the spheres contain seven hierarchical planets (*ajrām*) whose light shines upon the earth. Likewise, the physical earth contains seven fusible minerals in a hierarchy of nobility consisting of gold, silver, iron, copper, tin, lead, and mercury, each of which receives a share of light from the seven planets commensurate to their nature. The World of Origination contains seven primordial lights or “planets of intellect” that cause the corporeal lights or physical planets. These seven lights are God's Command; the substance (*jawhar*) of the Universal Intellect; the Universal Intellect that contemplates its own essence as Intellect (*'aql*), Intellecter (*'āqil*), and Intellected (*ma'qūl*); the Universal Soul; and the Archangels Jadd, Faṭḥ, and Khayāl.

These seven intellectual lights of the World of Origination are manifest respectively in the physical heavens as the seven planets—Sun, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury—which are their effects or traces (table 8.1). The seven physical lights, in turn, (p. 182) manifest and shine upon the physical earth through the seven metals—gold,

silver, iron, copper, tin, lead, and mercury. The seven intellectual lights also manifest in the human soul, the microcosm, in accordance with its capacity to contain seven attributes—life, knowledge, power, perception, action, will, and continuance. The heavens and earth of the World of Nature are mirrored by the heavens and earth of the World of Religion. In the heavens of the World of Religion, there are seven renowned lights: the seven Messengers, namely Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad, and the Master of Resurrection. These parallel the seven planets of the physical heavens, and have received the greatest share of the seven lights. The earth of the World of Religion consists of the ranks (*ḥudūd*) of the Ismā'īlī summons comprised of the aforementioned Messenger, his Legatee, the Imam, the Proof, the Summoner, the Licensed Teacher, and the Respondent. Just as the seven minerals of the physical earth manifest a share of light from the seven planets, the seven ranks of the Ismā'īlī summons hierarchy receive a share of the light of the Universal Intellect with the Prophet's soul being the most noble in this reception. This correspondence illustrated by Nāṣir-i Khusraw is an eloquent form of *ta'wīl*, demonstrating how the existents of the physical world “return” to the realities of the spiritual world. As Nāṣir insists that the human being is the reflection of the cosmos, the next section will explore his psychology and its attendant relationship with his cosmology.



Table 8.1 The Correspondence of the Seven Lights

World of Origination (' <i>ālam-i ibdā'</i> )	World of Nature (' <i>ālam-t.abī 'at</i> )		Human Microcosm (' <i>ālam-i ṣaghīr</i> )	World of Religion (' <i>ālam-i dīn</i> )	
	Heavens	Earth		Heavens	Earth
Origination ( <i>ibdā'</i> )	Sun	Gold	Life	Adam	Messenger
Substance of Intellect	Moon	Silver	Knowledge	Noah	Legatee
Intellect-Intellecter-Intellected	Saturn	Iron	Power	Abraham	Imam
Universal Soul	Jupiter	Copper	Perception	Moses	Proof
Jadd (Fortune)	Mars	Tin	Act	Jesus	Summoner
Fatḥ (Opening)	Venus	Lead	Will	Muhammad	Licensed Teacher
Khayāl (Imagination)	Mercury	Mercury	Continuance	Master of Resurrection	Respondent

## 8.8. Psychology

Nāṣir Khusraw's psychology is rooted in his conceptions of the soul (*nafs*), intellect ('*aql*), and rational utterance (*nuṭq*). Nāṣir holds that the human soul is a part (*juz'*) of (p. 183) the Universal Soul in the sense that the substance (*jawhar*) of the human soul is of the same substance as the Universal Soul. In this sense, individual human souls are instantiations of the Universal Soul. Like the Universal Soul, the human soul is enduring (*bāqī*) and accepting of knowledge (Hunsberger 2000, 213). The human soul contains three faculties that are traces (*athar*) of the Universal Soul: the growing soul (*nafs-i nāmiyya*), which is also present in plants; the sensory soul (*nafs-i ḥissīyya*), which is also present in speechless animals; and the speaking or rational soul (*nafs-i sukhan-gū'i; nafs-i nāṭīqa*), which is present in human beings (Khusraw, *Six Chapters*, 54). The human soul is also gifted with an individual intellect ('*aql*), which Nāṣir defines as a simple substance by which human beings perceive things as they truly are (*Jāmi'*, ¶285, 218). Among these human psychological faculties, Nāṣir remarks that "life is the guardian of the body, that the rational soul is the guardian of life, and that the intellect is the guardian of the rational soul" (*Jāmi'*, ¶285, 218). With respect to the distinction between the body, the soul, and the intellect, he says that bodies are satiated by food, the soul (*nafs*) is that which feeds on knowledge but is never satiated, and the intellect ('*aql*) is that which governs the body and soul and also infers signs from the visible to the unseen (*Jāmi'*, ¶102, 101).

### 8.8.1. Macrocosm and Microcosm

Later in the *Jāmi'*, Nāṣir illustrates a set of astrological, psychological, and religious correspondences involving the relationship between the World of Nature, the Human Microcosm, and the World of Religion (see table 8.2).<sup>2</sup> He begins by grouping the twelve houses of the zodiac with the seven planets. Each planet has two astrological houses (i.e., Mercury has Virgo and Gemini), while the sun and moon only have one house each (Leo and Cancer respectively) because their influence is greater than the other five planets. The sun and moon each serve as an authority (*sulṭān*) over the other five planets, which are like their servants, while each *sulṭān* has dominion (*wilāyat*) over five astrological houses (with each house belonging to one of the five planets) (*Jāmi'*, ¶329, 247).

Nāṣir understands the seven planets as "tools" of the Universal Soul under the guidance of the Universal Intellect in the production of the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms, whose ultimate purpose is the creation of the human form (*ṣūrat-i shakhsī mardūm*), which is capable of acquiring knowledge and wisdom (*Jāmi'*, ¶328, 246). This astrological

configuration of the macrocosm ('*ālam-i kabīr*) is mirrored within the physical constitution of the human form, the microcosm ('*ālam-i ṣaghīr*). Parallel with the sun of the macrocosm is the heart of the human being, which is receptive to the sun's influence and is the abode of the spirit (*ruh*) or intellect ('*aql*). Mirroring the moon of the macrocosm is the brain, which is receptive to the moon's influence and is the abode of the rational soul (*nafs-i nāṭiqā*) wherein are the internal faculties like imagination, memory, recollection, and discernment. Just as the moon receives the light (p. 184) of the sun, thoughts begin in the heart and are transmitted to the brain. The other five planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn) of the macrocosm are paralleled by the five human senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch). Just as each planet has two astrological houses, the instruments of each of the physical senses are in two parts (i.e., two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, two sides of the mouth, and two hands).

Table 8.2 The Correspondences between Macrocosm, Microcosm, and Mesocosm

Macrocosm (' <i>ālam-i kabīr</i> )	Microcosm (' <i>ālam-i ṣaghīr</i> )	Mesocosm (' <i>ālam-i dīn</i> )
Sun (Leo)	Heart: Animates Body (spirit/intellect)	Messenger: <i>ta'līf</i> of Book and <i>sharī'at</i>
Moon (Cancer)	Brain: Governs Body (rational soul)	Legatee: <i>ta'wīl</i> of Book and <i>sharī'at</i>
Mercury (Virgo, Gemini)	Eyes: Sight (right eye, left eye)	Imam (exoteric, esoteric)
Venus (Libra, Taurus)	Ears: Hearing (right ear, left ear)	Gate (exoteric, esoteric)
Mars (Scorpio, Aries)	Nose: Smell (right nostril, left nostril)	Proof (exoteric, esoteric)
Jupiter (Sagittarius, Pisces)	Mouth: Taste (right side, left side)	Summoner (exoteric, esoteric)
Saturn (Capricorn, Aquarius)	Hands: Touch (right hand, left hand)	Licensed Teacher (exoteric, esoteric)

After showing the correspondence between the macrocosm and microcosm, Nāṣir demonstrates how both realms are also reflected in the World of Religion or mesocosm. The Messenger occupies the place of the sun in the macrocosm and the heart in the microcosm because the life of the World of Religion comes through his compilation (*ta'līf*) of the revealed Book and the *sharī'at*. His Legatee occupies the place of the moon and the brain because he brings order to the world of religion through his *ta'wīl* of the Book and the *sharī'at*. The five religious dignitaries (*ḥudūd*) under the Legatee, namely the Imam, Gate (*bāb*), Proof, Summoner, and Licensed Teacher, are analogous to the five planets of the macrocosm and the five senses of the human being. Just as each planet has two astrological houses, these five dignitaries watch over both the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*) aspects of the Book and the *sharī'at*. Likewise, there are six days in the physical world, and the World of Religion has six prophetic cycles of the six Messengers—the cycles of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. As the six days are succeeded by the seventh day or Sabbath, the six prophetic cycles are succeeded by the cycle of the Master of Resurrection. Such a correspondence between the macrocosm, microcosm, and the World of Religion allows Nāṣir-i Khusraw to declare:

(p. 185) Just as God the Exalted composed the structure of the human body on an analogy with the structure and composition of the world, the Prophet established the true religion on an analogy with the creation of man, so that the sages of religion would see this great model and see that it accords with creation.

(*Jāmi'*, ¶338, 253)

### 8.8.2. The Soul-Body Relationship

When dealing with the question of the relationship between the soul and the body, Nāṣir discusses the philosophers' view that a human being with respect to his 'I-ness' or selfhood is a combination of body and soul. He agrees with this notion while cautioning that the body-soul relationship cannot be understood in literally the same way that a knight consists of a man upon a horse (*Jāmi'*, ¶95, 97). He also accepts Aristotle's definition of the soul as the perfection of the body, interpreting it to mean that the body is potentially living, while the soul is living by its very essence.<sup>3</sup> Thus, with respect to life, the living body is a shadow of the human soul (*Jāmi'*, ¶109, 110).

Nāṣir also maintains that "the 'I' belongs to the rational soul, which is an intellectual substance (*jawharī-yi 'aqlī*), knowing to the limit of potentiality, active by its very nature" (*Jāmi'*, ¶96, 97). The rational soul is the locus of action, directing the body and its various organs and faculties. To make the point that the body is under the soul's control

as its “servant,” Nāṣir evokes the Platonic image of the chariot of the soul (Plato 1997, *Phaedrus* 246a), where the soul is akin to a rider and the body akin to its horse (*Jāmi'*, ¶101, 100). In agreement with Aristotle, Nāṣir also sees discourse or rational utterance (*nuṭq*) as the defining faculty of the human soul:

Rational utterance is neither Arabic nor Persian or Hindi nor any language whatsoever. On the contrary, it is one of the faculties of the human soul by which a human being is capable of conveying some meaning which lies in his innermost mind to others by means of his voice, written letters, and speech.

(*Jāmi'*, ¶186, 167)

### 8.8.3. Angelology

Nāṣir then relates his psychology to what one could call an angelic anthropology. He begins by discussing three kinds of angels: spiritually originated angels, visible and created angels, and human angels (the Prophets and Imams). The purely spiritual angels are originated in nature (*ibdā'ī*) through the mediation of the Universal Intellect, Universal Soul, and the Archangels Jadd, Faṭḥ, and Khayāl. They are represented by the spheres and stars of the physical world—called the visible and created angels. Nāṣir also notes (p. 186) how the idea of the spheres and stars being angels is in agreement with the views of the early astronomer and mathematician, Thābit b. Qurra (d. 288/901) (*Jāmi'*, ¶138, 128).

The purpose of the visible angels—the stars and spheres—is to manifest the originated angels through human beings who are potential angels. Subsequently, the purpose of the Messenger, his Legatee, and the Imams is to bring these potential angels into actuality by means of the Book and the *sharī'at*. The person who brings these potential angels (i.e., human beings) into actuality is himself an actualized angel (*Jāmi'*, ¶141, 129).

Nāṣir's discussion also broaches the subject of the jinn or *parī* (*Jāmi'*, ¶142, 130–31). Using the example of the angels bowing before Adam and the disobedience of Satan mentioned several times in the Qur'ān (Q 2:34, 7:11, 15:31, etc.), he differentiates between two types of jinn (*parī*)—angelic and demonic—depending on whether the jinn is obedient (like those who bowed to Adam) or disobedient (like Satan, who refused to bow). With respect to the human soul, the rational soul is a potential angel or an angelic jinn. The concupiscent soul (growing soul) and the irascible soul (sensual soul) are potential demons or demonic jinn. Nāṣir relates this to the prophetic tradition: “Every man has two devils who entice him.” When the concupiscent soul and irascible soul subdue the

rational soul, the human becomes a demon in actuality. On the other hand, when these “two devils” obey the rational soul, and the rational soul obeys the Prophet or Imam, the human being becomes an angel in actuality. Nāṣir eloquently concludes his discussion of angels, jinn, and demons with the following remarks: “Within the human being there is both an angel and a demon, but he himself is a *parī* (jinn). Human beings are angels and demons in potentiality. That world beyond is filled with angels and with demons in actuality” (*Jāmi'*, ¶145, 133).

## 8.9. Epistemology

Several sections of the *Jāmi'* treat questions pertaining to the nature of knowledge, the ways of knowing, and perfection of the rational soul by means of knowledge. Knowledge, in the worldview of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and other Ismā'īlī thinkers, has a salvific and eschatological dimension as the Universal Soul's perfection is achieved through human souls becoming actualized through knowledge.

### 8.9.1. Knowledge and Intellect

Nāṣir defines knowledge (*'ilm*; *dānish*) as “a conception (*taṣawwur*) on our parts of a thing as it really is” (*Jāmi'*, ¶89, 87). This view of knowledge as conception appears to be a discursive knowing, relating to the definition (*ḥadd*) of a thing as the means of knowing its true nature (*Jāmi'*, ¶88, 86). In this respect, knowledge is dependent upon articulate discourse (*sukhan*), as Nāṣir states: “But the perfection of the rational soul comes through knowledge and knowledge comes to man only through discourse” (p. 187) (*Jāmi'*, ¶116, 114).<sup>4</sup> Nāṣir also contrasts knowledge (*'ilm*) with *ma'rifat* or recognition (*shinākht*). In this context, knowledge is acquired by human beings through various media (thought, crafts, revelation, instruction) and includes things such as language and philosophy. Recognition, on the other hand, is innate and not acquired. It consists of the direct recognition or apprehension of things by their natures, such as thirst, hunger, or pain, without necessarily knowing their names (*Jāmi'*, ¶¶283–84, 217).<sup>5</sup>

Nāṣir distinguishes between *'ilm* and intellect (*'aql*) when he defines intellect as a simple substance by which people perceive (*andar yāband*) things (*Jāmi'*, ¶285, 218). Accordingly, Nāṣir understands *'ilm* to be a trace (*athar*) and act (*fi'l*) of the intellect, and notes that the intellect is, therefore, superior to *'ilm*, which is its trace (*Jāmi'*, ¶280, 216). In a similar vein, he defines the knower (*'ālim*; *dānishmand*) as one who conceives a thing as it really is. This knower is contrasted with the intellectual (*'āqil*), who perceives (*andar*

*yāft*) things as they truly are. The intellect can also know both sensible objects (*maḥsūsāt*) and intelligible objects (*ma'qūlāt*) at the same time (*Jāmi'*, ¶285, 218). The distinction between knowledge and intellect appears to correspond to the distinction mentioned earlier between knowledge and recognition, especially when Nāṣir, somewhat allusively, remarks that recognition is the basis of intellect (*Jāmi'*, ¶284, 218). At the conclusion of this chapter, Nāṣir notes that the names “knowing” (*‘ālim*) and “intelligent” (*‘āqil*) cannot be applied to God directly and instead refer to the originated Universal Intellect (*Jāmi'*, ¶285, 218).

### 8.9.2. Perception

In Nāṣir's theory of perception (*idrāk; andar yāftan*), the universal perceiver (*ḥiss-i kullī*) is the substance (*jawhar*) of the human soul that perceives through the five external faculties (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch), and through the five internal faculties (estimation, reflection, imagination, memory, and recollection). Mainly concerned with external sense perception, Nāṣir argues that “the perceiving agent, i.e. the *mudrik* who perceives, is affected by his own act of perception; his state is altered while the object of perception remains as it was” (*Jāmi'*, ¶292, 221). Nāṣir also speaks of various levels of perception in relation to the different kinds of temporal existents: the eye perceives what is in the present, the ear perceives what was of the past, reflection (*fikrat*) perceives what will be in the future; and the intellect perceives the simple originated beings (*mubda'āt*) (*Jāmi'*, ¶294, 222). God as the Originator (*mubdi'*) is not reached by perception qua perception, not even by the Universal Intellect. Unlike Neoplatonic and Peripatetic Islamic philosophy, where the Intellect contemplates God in an active manner, for Nāṣir, the (p. 188) Universal Intellect only “perceives” or “affirms” God in a passive and indirect sense through the contemplation of its own essence. This pure affirmation is free from all sensible and intelligible attributes, as a result of which the Intellect receives nobility and radiance (*Jāmi'*, ¶293, 221).

### 8.9.3. Instruction

The human intellect, according to Nāṣir's epistemology, exists at two levels, the innate intellect (*‘aql-i gharīzī*) and the acquired intellect (*‘aql-i muktasab*). The former level of the intellect is potential and passive in its acceptance of knowledge. The latter level is an actual intellect that receives *ta'yīd* from the Universal Intellect. The Messengers, Legatees, Imams, and Proofs are the recipients of this *ta'yīd*. The actualization of the human intellect from potentiality to actuality is only accomplished through instruction (*Jāmi'*, ¶151, 138). Just as eyesight allows human beings to perceive sensible objects with

the aid of light, insight is what allows a person to perceive intelligible objects with the aid of knowledge. Physical sight requires light from the sun and the moon, and insight requires knowledge from the Messenger and his Legatee, who are the sun and moon of the World of Religion (*Jāmi'*, ¶¶214–15, 180).

Nāṣir distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge that the human soul requires: the exoteric and the esoteric. The exoteric refers to the literal revelation (*tanzīl*) of the Book and the *sharī'at*, filled with parables and symbols that, in keeping with Nāṣir's analogy of knowledge being food for the human soul, he compares to "fruit that is unripe and tasteless" (*Jāmi'*, ¶217, 181). The esoteric refers to the *ta'wīl* of the Book and the *sharī'at*, which is analogous to "colour, scent, and taste" (*Jāmi'*, ¶217, 181). In a similar vein, the Messenger who delivers the *tanzīl* is the spiritual father of human beings, and his Legatee who discloses its *ta'wīl* is their spiritual mother. Just as a newborn baby can only consume the mother's milk and is unable to digest dense food, the newborn initiate cannot directly internalize the Prophet's *tanzīl* unless the Legatee first applies *ta'wīl*, extracting pleasing precepts that are amenable to the initiates (*Jāmi'*, ¶231, 187).

## 8.10. Reconciliation and Restoration

The foregoing presentation of the main arguments and themes in the *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* sheds considerable light on the various ways in which Nāṣir-i Khusraw saw the relationship between Ismā'īlī wisdom and the wisdom of the deiform philosophers (*falāsifa-yi muta'allihān*). Nāṣir expresses clear disagreement with philosophy on a small number of issues, the most notable example being the subject of God's creative act, where he rejects views attributed to Aristotle, Socrates, and others and instead puts forth a distinctively Ismā'īlī doctrine of Origination (*ibdā'*) ex nihilo coupled with the Neoplatonic concepts of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul.

(p. 189) On a few other issues, most particularly the concept of the human soul, Nāṣir integrates his Ismā'īlī views concerning the soul as the "I" and the body as its shadow with both Aristotle's teleological conception of the soul-body relationship (i.e., that the soul is a perfection of the body) on the one hand, and Plato's famous example of the chariot of the soul (i.e., that the soul is a "rider" of the body) on the other. Needless to say, Nāṣir stands in full agreement with philosophy on most issues. In such instances, he tends to supplement his discussion of a given topic by performing *ta'wīl* in order to show how a particular set of philosophical ideas serve as "icons" or representations for corresponding realities in the World of Religion and the World of Origination.



This raises the broader question of how Nāṣir and his fellow Ismā'īlis regarded the tradition of philosophy. In line with the general Ismā'īlī emphasis on the distinction between the esoteric and the exoteric dimensions of reality, Nāṣir seems to have regarded philosophy as part of the more exoteric framework in need of *ta'wīl* in order to be fully understood. In this respect, Nāṣir does not regard philosophy as inherently contrary to Ismā'īlī doctrine, but, rather, a “whiff” of it, just as the exoteric or physical realm manifests the traces of the esoteric or spiritual realm. Indeed, Nāṣir holds that all sciences and knowledge, including philosophy, derive from the Prophets (*Jāmi'*, ¶17, 29). Thus, while it can be said that the *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* presents us with Nāṣir-i Khusraw's attempt to reconcile philosophy and religion (i.e., Ismā'īlī doctrine), it is equally an attempt to restore philosophy to its original state of union with revealed, prophetic wisdom. This type of restorative effort on Nāṣir's part would thus be in keeping with the famous saying in early Islamic thought, “Philosophy springs forth from the niche of prophecy” (*yanba'u al-ḥikma min mishkāt al-nubuwwa*) (Nasr 2006, 3).

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## Notes:

(<sup>1</sup>) This chapter uses Eric Ormsby's translation of the *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* (2012). References to the *Jāmi'* are as follows: the title, the paragraph number in the original Persian text (which is retained in Ormsby's translation), and the page number(s) of the translation itself.

(<sup>2</sup>) For a similar table, see Hunsberger 2002.

(<sup>3</sup>) In another work (Khusraw 1998), and in keeping with the Aristotelian notion of hylomorphism, Nāṣir defines the human soul as the form (*ṣūrat*) of the body.

(<sup>4</sup>) In this passage, I have rendered *sukhan* as "discourse," as opposed to "language," as translated by Ormsby.

(<sup>5</sup>) Elsewhere (Khusraw, *Khwān*, 194), Nāṣir equates *ma'rifat* or recognition with man's knowledge of his own soul. A thorough exposition of self-knowledge as the goal of the philosophical life can be found in the writings of Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī (nearly half of his corpus is translated in Chittick 2001).

### **Khalil Andani**

Khalil Andani is a doctoral student in Islamic Studies at Harvard University where he focuses on Islamic theology and philosophy, Shī'ī Islam, and Ismā'īlī history and thought. He holds a Master of Theological Studies (MTS) degree from Harvard Divinity School and his prior publications include "The Metaphysics of the Common Word: A Dialogue of Eckhartian and Ismaili Gnosis" in *Sacred Web* Volume 26 & 27.

