

## Humanity and/as Modern Religion: *Ādamīyat*, *Insānīyat*, and *Qānūn* in Mīrzā Malkum Khān and Safī ‘Alī Shāh

### Abstract:

Among the many Persian terms that can be rendered into English as “humanity,” one, *adamiyat*, was particularly central in the work of the Qajar reformist, diplomat, and publisher Mirza Malkum Khan (1833-1908): he named a semi-secret society he founded *Majma ‘-i Adamiyat*, and, there and in the pages of his newspaper, *Qanun (Law)*, called for the establishment of a “religion of humanity” capable of transcending the differences of the particular religions through dedication to the intellectual and material progress safeguarded by this titular law. Meanwhile, in a roughly contemporary Sufi treatise on knowledge and ethics entitled *Mizan al-Ma’rifa (The Scale of Knowledge)*, Mirza Hasan Isfahani (known to his fellow Sufis as Safi ‘Ali Shah), uses another word we could render as humanity, *insaniyat*, as the text’s titular “scale of knowledge.” In that text, to truly be human entails the cultivation of virtue and the correct performance of one’s role, as coded in norms of class, profession, and gender. More than this, though, the text takes these norms to originate in the law, *qanun*. In this paper, I examine the writing of Malkum Khan and Safi ‘Ali Shah to suggest that their texts’ humanities (*adamiyat* and *insaniyat*) undergird their particularly modern ethical directives. Previous studies of both authors have tended to understate this common vocabulary, but I suggest that by emphasizing this vocabulary’s specificity to their period in addition to its appearance in both authors’ works, a clearer picture of the relationship between intellectual and political life in late nineteenth-century Iran will emerge.

### Discussion questions:

- 1) Does the fact that we encounter multiple words for "humanity" in these texts mean anything for scholars of the humanities more generally, or is it just a challenge for translators and specialists in the terms original language(s)? Can the humanities (the disciplines) make something of these humanities (the terms) simply by virtue of the fact that they are more than one?
- 2) How might we study these texts across disciplines? Being that they're from the past, are they only of interest to historians? If not, in what other ways might they be of interest (and to whom)?
- 3) Following up on that: is the fact that they were written in roughly the same period enough to justify studying these particular texts alongside one another, or, given their differences in style, format, and genre, should they be studied alongside different sources with more formal similarities, even if those sources were composed centuries later or earlier?

By 1908, humanity had come to be a central principle around which political discourse in Iran was organized; in response to that year's Russian incursions, the editor of one newspaper (*Habl al-Matīn*) wrote: "In this new, bright age of humanism... in which the protection of fellow human beings is considered a requisite of humanity...our northern neighbor [Russia] has sent a military expedition to our soil without any right or grounds;" this editorial reflects the extent to which the Qajar public sphere had embraced "humanism and patriotic thinking," coming to celebrate "nationhood and the rule of law" and to expect "international recognition of its national sovereignty" in return for such celebration.<sup>1</sup> Much like the Constitutional Revolution (which conditioned the particular round of Russian aggression mentioned above), this emphasis on "humanism," Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet's rendering of two Persian terms, *insānīyat* and *ādamīyat* (which I prefer to translate as "humanity"), had been brewing in Iranian intellectual life for decades before the 1905-1911 period: "humanism became the catchphrase for pursuing progressive reforms aimed at restoring what was seen as Iran's pride and former grandeur" and, in the period's political discourse, "often went hand in hand" with the theme of civilization.<sup>2</sup>

In his *Sih Maktūb*, the nationalist Āqā Khān Kirmānī (d. 1897) writes that civilization not only "means 'a nation saving itself from hardship and savagery,'" but also, the "refinement of the manners and habits of humanism and the promotion of humanity."<sup>3</sup> An 1894 article in the semi-official newspaper *Nāsirī* stressed that it was education that defined humanity by separates humans from animals, "since human

<sup>1</sup> Kashani-Sabet, Firoozeh. "Hallmarks of Humanism: Hygiene and Love of Homeland in Qajar Iran," *American Historical Review* 104/4, Oct. 2000, p. 1171

<sup>2</sup> Kashani-Sabet, p. 1174

<sup>3</sup> Kashani-Sabet, p. 1174

beings, unlike other creatures, could better themselves through education.”<sup>4</sup> As her article’s title suggests, Kashani-Sabet takes the position that hygiene and patriotism were key features of late Qajar humanism, but, I argue that in the three decades preceding the Constitutional revolution, humanity was more closely paired to law and nationhood than hygiene. Like Kashani-Sabet, I take the position that “humanity” was bound closely to “progressive” projects. However, I propose that it is their fusion of “humanity” (*insānīyat* and *ādamīyat*), “law” (*qānūn*), and “nation” (*millat* and *vatan*, among other terms) that most characterizes the period’s texts as modern.<sup>5</sup> The centrality of these terms in both the corpus of both the reformist diplomat and publisher Mīrzā Malkum Khān (1833-1908) and the Sufi Safī ‘Alī Shāh (1835-1899), an Isfahānī merchant who enjoyed close relations with the court in Tehran, illustrates just how widespread these concepts had become even before the Constitutional Revolution.

Much of the English research on both Safī ‘Alī Shāh and Mīrzā Malkum Khān dwells on the question of how “really” religious they were. Hamid Algar (whose *Mīrzā Malkum Khān: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernism* remains the major work on Malkum Khān in English), casts a suspicious eye upon the religious convictions of both Mīrzā Malkum Khān and his father, Mīrzā Ya‘qūb, an Armenian convert to Islam. He notes, “Mīrzā Ya‘qūb is recorded outwardly to have professed Islam,” but Algar definitely places the emphasis on the outward element of this profession: “the sparse information

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1175

<sup>5</sup> In this, I must of course cite Shahab Ahmed’s observation that because “the modern human condition is more thoroughly pervaded by the technology and force of the structures of law,” the central assertion “of Muslim modernism of every stripe is the assertion of the unilateral normative supremacy of something called *sharī‘ah* identified with the law” as organized in and through the nation state, which is “the fundamental organizational unit of modern human society to which all human subjects *belong*.” see: Ahmed, Shahab. *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016). p. 125. The sources I investigate deviate from this observation mainly in their preference for *qānūn* over *sharī‘ah*.

that is available suggests strongly an opportunistic conversion,” through which, Mīrzā Ya‘qūb’s “skeptical and utilitarian view of religion was transmitted to Malkum, who elaborated upon it and made of it an effective weapon for the promotion of westernization in Iran.”<sup>6</sup> Algar concludes that Malkum Khān’s project failed because “Malkum lacked the moral seriousness which alone could have made his thought cohesive and convincing,” as his “equation of Islamic and Western values and concepts...rested neither upon personal conviction nor upon adequate argumentation.”<sup>7</sup> Although he does not go as far as Algar in questioning the sincerity or “moral seriousness” of Malkum’s religiosity, Farzin Vahdat also emphasizes the ambiguity of religion’s position in Malkum’s wider goals, which Vahdat also summarizes as an essentially “westernizing” project, which he summarizes as Malkum Khān’s having “advocated the wholesale importation of European bureaucracy.”<sup>8</sup>

Just as Algar dwells on the question of how “really” Muslim Malkum Khān was, much of the English research on Safī ‘Alī Shāh questions on how “really” Sufī he was by attending more closely to his relationship to Sufism (viewed transhistorically) than his relationship to the period of his texts’ composition. For example, in summarizing Safī ‘Alī Shāh’s *‘Irfān al-Haqq*, Nile Green remarks, “traces of Islamic modernism are engulfed within a mystical reading of Islam,” despite the fact that, “in classic modernist form,” the text plays down “the importance of miracles” and instead presents “Muhammad’s mission as one aimed at the advancement or progress of mankind.”<sup>9</sup> Green also argues that his literary career pursued a program of “deliberate conformity with tradition,” which in a “direct context of the adaptation of European ideas makes the

<sup>6</sup>Algar, pp. 6-9

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 262-263

<sup>8</sup>Vahdat, pp. 31-34

<sup>9</sup>Green, Nile. “A Persian Sufi in the Age of Printing: Mirza Hasan Safi Ali Shah” in *Religion and Politics in Modern Iran*, Lloyd Ridgeon, ed. (London: IB Tauris, 2005).

traditionalist tone of Safi's travels and writings all the more striking."<sup>10</sup> When Lewisohn's "Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism" comes to Safi 'Alī Shāh, the article also questions Safi 'Alī Shāh's consistency with Sufi values more than it does his relationship to the wider context of the Nāsirī era (1848-1896). For example, he alleges that Safi 'Alī Shāh's "doctrine of Sufi elitism...is out of keeping with the tolerance of those classical Persian mystic masters and poets whose mantle he otherwise wore."<sup>11</sup> In all of these cases, the central question is Safi 'Alī Shāh's consistency with an imagined core of essential Sufi values. I would propose, though, that by dwelling on the question of either Mīrzā Malkum Khān or Safi 'Alī Shāh's sincerity, we lose sight of their participation in those elements of Nāsirī culture that, as Green concedes, constituted their "direct context." Closer attention to this context (modernization in nineteenth-century Iran), however, allows us to better understand the centrality of a common set of terms (humanity, law, and nation) at work in both figures' writing.

In their excessive focus on the sincerity of Mīrzā Malkum Khān and Safi 'Alī Shāh's religiosity, the works cited above also (mistakenly) assume that modernization was necessarily also a kind of Westernization, one which could not be consistently endorsed alongside Islam.<sup>12</sup> But, in an address delivered in London in 1891, Mīrzā Malkum Khān equated Islam to both progress and knowledge, rather than citing European models as the sole path to political or intellectual development. Encompassing "the whole science of Asia," Islam "offers all kinds of facilities, not in the Khoran [*sic*]

<sup>10</sup>Green, Nile. "A Persian Sufi in British India: A Persian Sufi in British India: The Travels of Mīrzā Ḥasan Ṣafī 'Alī Shāh (1251/1835-1316/1899)," *Iran* 42 (2004), p. 213

<sup>11</sup>Lewisohn, p. 455

<sup>12</sup>Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi convincingly demonstrates the errors of the equation of modernization to Westernization in *Refashioning Iran*, where, among other things, he illustrates this by citing a number of original studies of modern science composed in Persian in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

alone, but in the traditions, for the progress of the people.”<sup>13</sup> This equation of Islam to progress is particularly significant because Malkum Khān opens this address by asking why Persians and other “Asiatic races, who were the first promoters of civilisation, have lagged so far behind” Europeans, who “have made such wonderful progress.”<sup>14</sup> Must we assume that such statements were somehow insincere or inconsistent? And what if we leave aside the question of sincerity, and instead simply focus on the language our authors used, rather than questioning their motivation? The terms for humanity and law that, as we shall see, are quite central in Safi‘Alī Shāh’s *Mīzān al-Ma‘rifah* (*ādamīyat* and *qānūn*, respectively), were also central to Mīrzā Malkum Khān’s reformist projects. These terms, and their relationship to one another, thus illustrate the extent of reformist-nationalist discourse’s influence on a variety of levels of Qajar society.

#### **About the Author: Mīrzā Malkum Khān**

Malkum Khān was born the son of one Mīrzā Ya‘qūb at (New) Julfā in 1833. As with most of the residents of this suburb of Isfahan, the family was Armenian, and therefore Christian, in its origins. New Julfā was established under Shah ‘Abbās specifically to house those Armenians (upon whose mercantile activities the Safavid economy in part depended) that were displaced by the 1603-05 campaign against the Ottoman empire, which destroyed the original Julfā. Although New Julfā suffered the same fate as Isfahan with its conquest by Ghilzai Afghans in 1722, when the establishment of the Qajar state brought relative stability back to Iran, the fortunes of this second Julfā also improved, as Armenian merchants came again to occupy a central place not just in Iran’s economy, but in global trade, from the Mediterranean to the Indian

<sup>13</sup> Prince Malcom Khan, “Persian Civilization” *Contemporary Review* 59 (February, 1891). p. 239

<sup>14</sup> Prince Malcom Khan p. 238

Ocean. Malkum Khān's father, Mīrzā Ya'qūb, was born in Julfā in 1815, educated among the Armenian residents of India, and, reputedly, traveled as far as Indonesia for trade.<sup>15</sup> His travel served him well on his return to Iran, as his having learned French enabled him to acquire positions as an interpreter at the Russian embassy in Tehran and as a tutor to Qajar princes.<sup>16</sup>

Like his father, Malkum Khān also parlayed an education in Europe into positions as both a teacher and a translator. He studied in Paris for seven years, returning to Iran in 1850. Upon his return, he took up a position as an interpreter for the European instructors at the newly established *Dār al-Funūn* (Iran's first modern educational institution) and also served Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh's personal translator. He returned to Paris and also traveled to London on an 1856 diplomatic mission. This voyage led to two major developments in his career as a reformist: upon his return to Iran, he wrote his first treatise on reform, the *Kitābchah-yi ghaybī* ("The Booklet from the Unseen") and founded the first quasi-Masonic lodge in Iran, the *Farāmūsh-khānah* (literally "the house of forgetting," because members were told to respond to any questions about their activities with *farāmūsh kardam*, "I forgot;" the name was also likely chosen for its similarity to *Franc-maçonnerie*, though). Fearing republican agitation, Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh ordered Malkum Khān's exile and the dissolution of the *Farāmūsh-khānah* in 1861. First exiled to Iraq, Malkum Khān traveled from Baghdad to Istanbul, where he entered the service of the Iranian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Mīrzā Husayn Khān, and made the

<sup>15</sup>Algar, Hamid. *Mīrzā Malkum Khān: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernism*. (Berkeley; London; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973). pp. 1-6; though Algar's account supplies a basically sound historical narrative, Amitav Ghosh furnishes a beautiful, if fictional, illustration of the centrality of Armenian merchants in the global market of the mid-nineteenth century through the character of Zadig Bey in his *Ibis* trilogy.

<sup>16</sup>Algar, p. 6

acquaintance of the Azeri reformist and author Fath ‘Alī Ākhūndzādah, with whom he shared an interest in alphabet reform.

### **The Principles of Humanity**

Mīrzā Malkum Khān founded the second of his two quasi-Masonic societies in or around 1890.<sup>17</sup> It was named the “League of Humanity” (*Majma‘-i Ādamīyat*), and its foundation was accompanied by the publication of a treatise, *The Principles of Humanity* (*Usūl-i Ādamīyat*). Though *ādamīyat* is the titular humanity of both the organization and the treatise, the section on the meaning of humanity (*fasl-i avval—dar bayān-i ma‘nī-yi ādamīyat*) uses *insān* rather than *ādam* in its actual points (rather than its title). Thus, it declares, “The human (*insān*) is the most noble of the creations on the earth” and attributes “The nobility of the *insān* over other animals” to the fact “that other animals are incapable of progress (*taraqqī*) or decline (*tanazzul*) and the human is.”<sup>18</sup> As these points proceed, it becomes clear that *ādamīyat* is, unlike *insānīyat*, a goal rather than a starting point: because “there are three worlds for the progress and decline of the *insān*,” the animal, the inanimate, and that of humanity (*hayvānī, jumādī, and ādamīyat*, respectively), “whenever a person maintains the degree of their own humanity at a fixed state, they belong to the world of the animals,” but “whenever a person descends from the position they possess, they enter the inanimate realm” and “whenever a person reaches a higher degrees (*darajāt-i bālātar*) than the position they possess, they enter *ādamīyat*.”<sup>19</sup> Humanity is thus both a capacity for progress, in that Malkum Khān distinguishes the *insān* from other animals by the fact that it can either progress and decline, and the actual

<sup>17</sup> Algar, p. 228

<sup>18</sup> Mīrzā Malkum Khān and Hujjat Allāh Asīl (ed.), *Risālah ‘hā-yi Mīrzā Malkum Khān Nāzīm al-Dawlah* (Tih-rān: Nashr-i Nay, 1381 [2002]). p. 327

<sup>19</sup> Mīrzā Malkum Khān, p. 327



achievement of that progress, in that people reach *ādamīyat* by leaving their original position for degrees higher than it.

*Ādamīyat* is not only the act of departure from a given station, but also the motivation for departure and the process subsequent to the departure. This section's ninth point strikes a decidedly religious note toward that end, declaring, "the Almighty Lord has entrusted the duties of *ādamīyat* to the human heart (*qalb-i insān*)," while its tenth explains, "worldly ignorance has erased the duties of humanity from its [humanity's] memory. The lights of knowledge can establish perception of the duties of humanity in human vision anew."<sup>20</sup> The duties are, according to Mīrzā Malkum Khān: avoiding bad, resolution toward good, removing tyranny, harmony, seeking knowledge, valuing humanity, and preserving order.<sup>21</sup> Each of these points receives its own explanatory section. That on "avoiding bad" (*ijtināb-i badī*) begins by defining the bad as "that which you do not want others to do to you," and continues, "a [real] person (*ādam*) should do no bad to another in word, or deed, or any other category." The next two points justify this position, first by appealing to intellect: "human reason (*aql-i insān*) has given this as the first duty of the duties of humanity," and second, by appealing to revelation: "all of the prophets have, in the interest of proof and confirmation, been charged with this duty."<sup>22</sup> This explanation concludes with a point that makes clear that *ādamīyat* is used to describe humanity as a moral end, and not as a category for classifying a species: "whoever does bad to another is not *ādam*," which is to say, not fully human.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 327

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 327-328

<sup>22</sup> Mīrzā Malkum Khān, pp. 327-328

<sup>23</sup> This last point is, of course, not in and of itself unique to the nineteenth century—one need look no further than the conclusion to Sa'dī's most famous poem (*ay tu kih az mihnat-i dīgarān bī-ghamī, nashāyad nāmat nihād ādamī*) for a pre-modern example of the moralizing use of *ādam*.

Being truly human requires more than avoiding bad, though: “one must be an enemy of oppression, and wherever one may see oppression, one must stand up to it to the fullest extent of one’s ability...manliness (*mardānagī*) means solidarity with everyone oppressed, and struggle against every oppressor.”<sup>24</sup> Humanity thus carries with it political responsibilities: it demands active opposition to tyranny: “‘I do not oppress’ is not the speech of a human. A human should say, ‘I do not allow oppression to occur.’”<sup>25</sup> Makum Khān did not outline these criteria by which the reader should judge humanity simply to offer a philosophy of the human, though. This document was, after all, written to outline the foundation of a new organization, one that happened to have “humanity” in its name.

The treatise’s second section enumerates “the rules of the order,” which “mean the senses of the capability of *ādamīyat*,” these senses refer to different capacities for knowledge, as they each relate to a progressive degree of comprehension: “however much you go higher in the world of humanity, more senses of the rules of the order will, along with their necessity, be revealed to you.”<sup>26</sup> The humanity in which the reader is to progress is specifically that of the organization Makum Khān founded: “The league of humanity is a structure that has been built on top of these rules. Every adduction you make about a point of these rules will be like your destroying a side of this building, without being able to produce a point to replace what you destroyed.”<sup>27</sup> Knowledge specifically relates to one’s conduct vis-à-vis the league and its rules: “Do not be hasty in your adductions, and know that you will, at some time, know more than what you currently know, and that sometime you will see beyond whatever you see now.”<sup>28</sup> This

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.* p. 329

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.* p. 329

<sup>26</sup>*Mīrzā Malkum Khān*, p. 332

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

passage also concludes by binding learning to these rules of order: “Unless you see, you will not understand. Unless you arrive, you will not see, and you will not arrive except by the rules of the order.”<sup>29</sup>

This particular equation of humanity with progress, and especially progressively increasing knowledge, appears specifically as an endorsement of one particular association’s code of conduct: “Humanity, in the world of the order, has three conditions: relationship (*irtibāt*), acknowledgment, and commitment.”<sup>30</sup> Although this moral teleology is specifically related to a member’s conduct in the League of Humanity, it does cohere with the valorization of progress Malkum Khān expressed elsewhere, as in the previously quoted London address.

#### **About the Author: Safī ‘Alī Shāh**

Mīrzā Hasan Isfahānī was born to a merchant family in Isfahān in 1835. He became a disciple of the Sufi master Rahmat ‘Alī Shāh (d. 1861) in his youth, and spent much of the 1860s and early 1870s in India, where he enjoyed close relations with the Āqā Khān of the Ismā‘īlīyah and published his first work, a collection of poetry entitled *Zubdat al-Asrār*, in 1872. He settled in Tehran later in the 1870s, and it was in this period that he published his *Tafsīr-i Qur’ān*. The controversy surrounding the publication of this *tafsīr* demonstrates that he was already enjoying close relations with the Qajar court: the *tafsīr*’s poetic style (it is also known as the *Tafsīr-i manzūm*, or “the versified *tafsīr*”) raised the ire of many clerics, but, it was after the intervention of Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh himself that the *marja’-i taqlīd* Mīrzā Shīrāzī issued a ruling in favor Safī ‘Alī Shāh’s poetic commentary. His *‘Irfān al-Haqq* first appeared in 1880. He was profiled in the

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

official gazette, *Sharaf*, in 1890-91 and died in 1899, after which a number of his followers, most prominently the courtier Zahīr al-Dawlah claimed to be his sole legitimate successor.<sup>31</sup>

### On Knowledge

Two of Safī ‘Alī Shāh’s prose works, *‘Irfān al-Haqq* and *Mīzān al-Ma’rifah*, use terms derived from the same Arabic root for knowledge (‘-r-f), in their titles. Nile Green summarizes *‘Irfān al-Haqq* as an entry into “the domain of philosophical discussions of the ontological qualities of being (*vujūd*) and divine reality (*haqq*).”<sup>32</sup> These texts, however, are not only treatises on ontology, nor does their presentation of Sufism dwell on metaphysics. These texts concern themselves with knowledge; *‘irfān* did not only (and not primarily) designate mysticism as a genre until later. It and *ma’rifah* both mean knowledge, and their appearance in a text’s title indicate that the text has epistemic concerns, especially since these texts call Sufism *tasavvuf*, and not *‘irfān*, which indicates that *‘irfān* does not merely stand in for *tasavvuf* in these texts. Ata Anzali’s research demonstrates that Persian and Persian-English dictionaries mainly defined *‘irfān* and *ma’rifah* as “knowledge” or “insight” and not “mysticism” or “Sufism” throughout the nineteenth century, though, in more recent periods, *‘irfān* has indeed come to be used to

31 For a more detailed profile, see: Bos, Matthijs van den. *Mystic Regimes: Sufism and the State in Iran, from the Late Qajar Era to the Islamic Republic*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002. pp. 91-95; Green, Nile. “A Persian Sufi in the Age of Printing: Mirza Hasan Safi Ali Shah” in *Religion and Politics in Modern Iran*, Lloyd Ridgeon, ed. and “A Persian Sufi in British India: the Travels of Mirza Hasan Safi ‘Ali Shah (1251/1835-1316/1899).” *Iran*, Vol. 42 (2004), pp. 201-218, and Lewisohn, Leonard. “An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism, Part I: The Ni‘matullāhī Order: Persecution, Revival, and Schism,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* Vol. 61, No. 3 (1998), pp. 453-456

32 “A Persian Sufi in British India: the Travels of Mirza Hasan Safi ‘Ali Shah (1251/1835-1316/1899).” *Iran*, Vol. 42 (2004). p. 201

refer to mysticism in general.<sup>33</sup> The use of *maʿrifah* in *Mīzān al-Maʿrifah* is thus likely in keeping with a longer history of using *ʿarafa* and the nouns derived from it (*maʿrifah* and *ʿirfān*) to refer to “knowledge” rather than “mysticism.”

Based on its title, we can take *the Scale of Knowledge (Mīzān al-Maʿrifah)* as an attempt to assess, or weigh a brand of knowledge with a long history of particularly uses, especially in the particular context of earlier Sufism. This reflects earlier attestations recorded by lexicographers. In his *Lisān al-ʿArab*, Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1312) takes *maʿrifah* to be a synonym of *ʿilm* or that “which causes recognition and which thereby gives knowledge,” while, in his eighteenth-century *Dictionary of Technical Terms*, al-Tahānawī defines *maʿrifah* most broadly by identifying it with perception (*idrāk*), “whether in the form of a concept, or in the form of a judgment.”<sup>34</sup> Earlier Sufi sources also identify *maʿrifah* with *ʿilm*; for al-Qushayrī, “every *ʿilm* was a *maʿrifah*, and every *maʿrifah* an *ʿilm*,” while “the special use of *maʿrifah* as referring to certain metaphysical and ethical insights and practices was due to Sūfī theorizing.”<sup>35</sup> Reflecting this special, Sufi-theoretical use, al-Tustarī, asserts, “knowledge (*ʿilm*) is established by gnosis (*maʿrifah*)...,while gnosis is established by its own essence.”<sup>36</sup>

*The Scale of Knowledge (Mīzān al-Maʿrifah)* presents an epistemology wherein subjects come to possess knowledge by becoming fully human, which entails, simultaneously, the full exercise of capacities for rational thought and the shaping of

33<sup>□</sup>Anzali, *Safavid Shīʿism, the Eclipse of Sufism and the Emergence of ʿIrfan*, p. 269

34<sup>□</sup>Arnaldez, R. “Maʿrifa”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (ed.). Consulted online on 14 July 2016 <[http://dx.doi.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0686](http://dx.doi.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0686)>

First published online: 2012

35<sup>□</sup>Rosenthal, Franz. *Knowledge Triumphant*, Leiden: Brill, 2007. p. 166

36<sup>□</sup>Rosenthal p. 168

personal conduct in accordance with norms proffered by a religious exemplar. The treatise's complete title is *Risālah-yi Mīzān al-Ma'rifah va Burhān al-Haqīqah dar Sharh va Ma'nā-yi Insānīyat, kih Dānistan va 'Amal Kardan-i ān bar har Insānī Farz Ast*, or, in English, *The Epistle on the Scale of Knowledge and the Demonstration of Reality in the Commentary [upon] and Meaning of Humanity, Knowing and Practicing Which is Incumbent Upon All People*. This title demonstrates that the text is one that concerns itself with assessing knowledge: "scale of knowledge" already suggests this, given that scales are used to weigh commodities and thereby assess their value in the market, but, additionally, *burhān*, can be used to mean demonstrative proof. The subtitle suggests that the knowledge in question is morally weighted. It, for example, uses *farz*, a term used to refer to religious obligations. It also directs this knowledge toward a particular end: it is not knowledge of just any academic discipline. The title tells us it will weigh and prove knowledge of humanity's meaning (*ma'nā-yi insānīyat*). In these disciplines, epistemology and ethics intersect, as both knowledge (*dānistan*) and the practice (*'amal kardan*) of humanity are mandatory (*bar har Insānī farz ast*). The *Mīzān* assimilates knowledge production to ethical practice, but both of these operate through performances of authority and respectability, through which subjects can take on humanity by volitional acts.

### **Governing Speech**

The *Mīzān al-Ma'rifah* begins by outlining the specific rules by which discourse should be produced. The text begins with the standard exordium in praise of God, but this preface itself is a commentary on humanity's station and faculties, and especially the faculty of speech. "I praise the Creator of the world for every blessing, and especially the

blessing of speech, and seek aid from the veracious ones of the court of his glory.”

Though speech is a blessing for which one should be grateful, humanity must be disciplined in its exercise: “He gave humanity a tongue to speak correctly and speech to speak for the Creator’s contentment, and correct and true discourse does not seek prolongation or possess division. The wise language-user (*zabān-dān-i khiradmand*)[is] mostly silent, and, when speaking, speaks with correct awareness, brevity, and propriety to the moment.”<sup>37</sup> Language is clearly a high-priority topic for this text; it is an essential enough quality that the text’s opening thanks God for endowing humans with it without mentioning any other faculties. But, just one sentence later, the preface begins to elaborate something like an ethics of speech in which the use of language is, at best, questionably virtuous: the wise are mostly silent (*khiradmand aghlab khāmūsh*) and, when they do speak, do so with brevity. This suggests that speech is also an epistemic problem—silence, rather than verbosity is a sign of wisdom. To know might not be to speak.

If lack of speech correlates with knowledge, then excessive discourse demonstrates ignorance. A wise person “does not seek increase through elegance of speech,” for “the multiplicity of words casts people into confusion and is the cause of deficiency at every level because it proceeds from vexation and not from balanced views of speech that flow from the heart and settle on the heart and influence it.” A direct command follows this description of wise and unwise speech: “You, oh dear one, [must] comprehend every [expression of] speech and if the proof of its veracity follows with it and if a sound intellect spoke testimony of its wisdom and it has come from a lofty station.” In this passage, the author sets out to position himself as a teacher with authority

<sup>37</sup> Saḥī ‘Alī Shāh, *Mīzān al-Ma‘rifah* p. 2

over the reader, who it treats as a student: it addresses the reader in the second-person singular (*tu*) instead of the more deferential second-person plural (*shumā*) and employs an imperative (*ta'qqul kun*), which demonstrates that the reader is in a position to take orders from the subject enunciating this text. It is, of course, a bit ironic that the text commands readers to exercise their own intellectual authority, but, this is exactly what it does, commanding the audience to question if statements possess rational demonstration (*burhān-i 'aqlī*), making acceptability to a healthy intellect (*'aql-i salīm*) the major standard of an enunciation's value.

It goes on to reject the value of statements without such demonstrative proof, saying, “if it is without demonstration, it is [merely] semantic, and a narration holds no weight and does not yield a profit.”<sup>38</sup> This marks the first appearance in the body of the treatise of a word related to its title: the term used for weight, *vazn*, comes from the Arabic *wazn*, as does the titular *Mīzān*. This figure of speech also serves to relate Sufism to trade: scales obviously measure the amount of a commodity being sold in a market. The next expression used to dismiss claims lacking in a rational demonstration is also decidedly economic: in addition to having no weight, they give no profit (*hāsīlī nabakhshad*).

Even if the wise are normally silent, a certain elite can and do speak about anything: “Spiritual people [*arbāb-i ma'ānī*] speak about everything, and that is outside of the acceptance and rejection, praise and blame, and verification and falsification of any single person or group.”<sup>39</sup> The passage thus shifts tone suddenly: from suggesting that the reader avoid giving undue consideration to unproven speech, it moves to commenting

<sup>38</sup> Safī 'Alī Shāh, p. 3

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3



exactly on expressions that cannot be judged by their content alone, as the status of the subject making the statement plays a role in the statement's meaning. Safī 'Alī Shāh also opposes meaning to self-interest.<sup>40</sup> He continues by replicating the classical opposition between meaning or spirit [*ma'ānā*] and form or appearance [*sūrah*]: spiritual people can speak meaningfully without need of anyone's acceptance and rejection or verification and falsification, "in contrast to the speakers of form who have made speech follow their own desires and claims and have cast it at people's hands and feet, which, when you look well at it, has nothing in it other than their praise for their likes and reproach for their dislikes."<sup>41</sup> Spirituality and knowledge thus intersect in their objectivity, in that this passage presents statements by "possessors of meaning" as true by virtue of their opposition to statements based on the preferences of commoners.

### **From Knowledge to Humanity**

After dedicating itself to language in its introduction, the *Mīzān al-Ma'rifah* shifts its focus to humanity (*ādamīyat* or *insānīyat*). This passage also begins with an imperative toward knowledge: "Know that the alleviation of faults and the arrival at perfect knowledge is a human duty, and the comprehension of humanity is the original point of the creation of the world and possibility;" "humanity" is thus not a given—it is something that must be comprehended. People must learn how to be human, and Safī 'Alī Shāh binds the acquisition of this knowledge to Sufism, which he spends much of the later text defending. "The achievement of this lofty station [*ādamīyat*] is comprised of two things: one is outer discipline [*ādāb-i zāhir*], which is termed *sharī'at*, and the other

40 I have translated *arbāb-i ma'ānā* as "spiritual people," but it could also be rendered "possessors of meanings" or "lords of concepts." This group speaks universally [*bi-kullīyat sukhān guyand*] because of their status as lords [*arbāb*] of meanings [*ma'ānā*], in contrast to others.

41 Safī 'Alī Shāh p. 3

is inner purification [*tanzīh-i bātin*], which is called Sufism.”<sup>42</sup> Humanity is thus something that must be cultivated by these two processes, which feature the conventional pair of *zāhir* and *bātin*. Of these processes, the *Mīzān* treats outer discipline first.

The text holds up the *sharī‘ah* as the exoteric dimension of the process that creates “humanity” as an ethical status particular to one kind of subject. Its appeal to this outer discipline also replicates the introduction’s appeal to the “universal” speech of spiritual people; in both cases, Safī ‘Alī Shāh presents the position he advocates as the one that offers objective knowledge, and he specifically opposes this knowledge to self-interest. *Arbāb-i ma‘ānī* can speak on any topic without need of verification or falsification, but when others speak, they only give voice to their own preferences. Similarly, every nation (*har millat*) possesses a religious and civil law (*qānūn-i shar‘* and *zākūn-i mulk*, respectively), through which the intelligent will oppose the arbitrariness of “the dissolute and materialistic,” whose beliefs the rational will generally consider hideous.<sup>43</sup> Here again, we see problems of knowledge and ethics overlap: intelligence demands law and religion, while the text equates ignorance to materialism, the supporters of which cannot find an objective basis for their position, instead only being able to “intend their own arbitrariness,” much like those whose speech, in the book’s introduction, depends on form, rather than meaning, and through which they can only voice personal preferences, and not objective truths.<sup>44</sup> People need an authority beyond themselves to which they can appeal, and Safī ‘Alī Shāh grounds this appeal in a universalistic conception of religious authority and natural order.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8

<sup>43</sup> Safī ‘Alī Shāh, pp. 8-9

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9

Knowledge carries with it certain entitlements, and it is a religious duty to maintain these: “the argument in the sending of the messages and the descent of the books is, in total, this: creation is inevitably oriented toward good order and honor,” and because “the position of honor is the right of whoever knows the soundness and corruption of the servants [‘*ubbād*] in both their inner and outer dimensions.” As a result of accepting these premises, the text posits that honor, then, belongs to God, because “the Lord is more aware than the servants of every condition.” This deference to the station of the divine has particular legal consequences: “it is not the right of created beings to lay down a *sharī‘at* or pass a *zākūn* for themselves.”<sup>45</sup> If people were, by creating such rules for themselves, to decide upon right and wrong, “they would not persist or remain permanent, because intellects are different and in disagreement, and it is easy for intellects to disagree as to the rightful order.”<sup>46</sup> This appeal to revelation may, to contemporary eyes, reflect a “fundamentalist” (or, to employ the language of latter-day Iranian politics, “principlist,” *usūl-gar*) impulse to insist that a nation-state’s legal code reproduce the injunctions of a particular religion’s scriptures as literally as possible. However, as this passage goes on, it avoids referring to the injunctions of a particular *sharī‘ah*; revealed law seems to stand in for any code that appeals to objective standards rather than personal preferences.

This portion of the *Mīzān*’s equation of *ādāb-i zāhir* to *sharī‘ah* continues by citing the laws of modern, ostensibly secular, European states to support its assertion that humanity cannot make its own laws and instead needs outside help to decide the rules governing subjects’ conduct. “It must therefore be indubitable that judgments [*ahkām*] be

<sup>45</sup> Safī ‘Alī Shāh, p. 9

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

made between people on the basis of veracity [*sidq*], which comes from the Creator, in order to be free of creaturely prejudices, since creatures should also be certain that this judgment had come about fairly [*bi-tusāvī shudah*]" and did not arise from "the tyranny of an equal over them."<sup>47</sup> This is as true in Europe as Iran: "You see this: the new rules in distant kingdoms have come in place by means of the empowerment of the state and government, like the law of Europeans, still have not violated national principles, inasmuch as the name of religion [*sharī'at*] and nation [*millat*] are upon them, unless the cause of order is considered to be in those bold rules; but those too are from among the universal rules that came from the Cause of the world by means of the prophets, which can hold for a few days and sustain actual order and honor."<sup>48</sup> The active legislative programs of European states are thus also capable of sustaining social order, so long as they uphold the same injunctions and prohibitions as religion. Mīrzā Hasan explains this by analogy. It is as if "a proficient doctor called something a special cure and described the purpose of its use and consumption and then someone else came and also put it to other uses;" in such cases, benefit could still come to the second person: "because the intellects of creatures are a ray of the lights of the Universal Intellect, they can certainly find benefits from their origin."<sup>49</sup>

The rise of the nation-state is one of the most characteristic features of the transition to modernity, but, in the Iranian case, nationalists also found themselves in need of a new vocabulary to define their territory as a nation to which citizen-subjects belonged and in light of which subjects' status as humans was defined. Thus, the use of *millat* above, where it appears as one of the key sources of the values determining human

47 <sup>¶</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 10-11

48 <sup>¶</sup>Safī 'Alī Shāh, p.11

49 <sup>¶</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 10-11

obligations, may well reflect the adoption of *millat* in to refer to “nation” as the simultaneously territorial and moral source of subjects’ identity. It appears earlier, to similar ends, in the modern newspaper *Ruznamah-yi ‘ilmīyah-yi dawlat-i Iran*, where, for example, its January 11, 1864 issue, uses *millat* to gloss the French *nation*.<sup>50</sup>

This passage goes on to strike quite an optimistic note about created beings’ intellectual capabilities and the compatibility of religious rulings and modern legal codes: “if intellects agree on and advise in favor of the comfort of the creation and the [sound] arrangement of the realm, it is no surprise that these are all traces that remain from the prophets and have come to commoners from the ruler of the realm, and if it is frequently experienced, it would not be strange for it to give benefits.”<sup>51</sup>

The section also explains divine and human rule in terms of one another simultaneously—these rules “are all traces that remain from the prophets,” which is to say that God sent them, but, they have also “come to commoners from the ruler of the realm.” I also take this to be referring to the divine origin of these traces, but, this also suggests a permeability between metaphysical and historical hierarchies, as it explains the divine origin of these rules in specifically worldly terms of rule and possession, wherein the creation is the common folk (the *ri’āyat*) and the ruler of the realm (*sāhib al-mulk*) is the divine. Of course, even if the innovative legislation of European states is a ray from the same sun as adherence to the revealed law, there would still “be more goodness and

<sup>50</sup> Kashani-Sabet, Firoozeh. “Fragile Frontiers,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29: 2, p. 234, note 150. Kashani-Sabet also notes that the same paper continued to use *millat* as “[religious] community” as late as 1869. However, either use calls to mind a collective entity with a moral claim on its members, and I would argue that in either case, the term serves to appeal to a communitarian sensibility, and, even independent of these nuances, I aim to draw the reader’s attention to this appeal and its role in shaping texts’ claims to knowledge or authority.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

less corruption” if “they acted according to the same original order in all matters... powerful drugs may relieve pains, but they cannot prevent illness.”<sup>52</sup> Safī ‘Alī Shāh thus shows restraint in his approbation of modern legal codes. In keeping with generally modernist impulses, though, he does valorize novelty, and favors the present over the past. A decreased reliance on the strictures of the revealed law is part of this valorization of the present relative to the past.

The passage entitled “On the Level of Humanity Consisting of the Wayfaring of Sufism,” the first to explicitly treat Sufism, begins, “as it has become known, people’s duty [*taklīf-i insān*], is, generally, the achievement and perfection of humanity [*tahsīl va takmīl-i ādamīyat*],” which consists of “of the preservation of external manners and internal wayfaring;” this “internal wayfaring” “is the practice of the customs of Sufism and the path,” which constitutes the distinction between humans and animals: Sufism “means shedding animalistic qualities from the self and acquiring human virtues.”<sup>53</sup> It is thus through their work on themselves that a subject becomes human. This cultivation of virtue is so necessary because “a human with the characteristics of animals cannot be called human or counted as different from other animals.” These human virtues are supposed to be self-evident, as “the reality of the human is virtue [*ihsān*], which is based on its own example,” but despite its apparent self-evidence, the text does explain *ihsān* in contrast to vice: “the truth of the human is veracity and sincerity, not lying, treachery, and the like.”<sup>54</sup> This “reality of the human” [*haqq-i insān*] is what is most essential to humans, but the rhetoric around this essence is just as pragmatic as it is idealistic: this passage first explains that “humanity is a root [*asl*] in humans, and the bad qualities that oppose

<sup>52</sup> Safī ‘Alī Shāh, p.11

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p.13

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14

humanity are a branch [*far*] and an accident [*araz*], meaning that they occur secondarily,” which calls to mind a Platonic return to a more abstract and ideal essence, but the subsequent elaboration employs language more practical than abstract: just as a horse that “does not have skill in running” is a mere pack animal, “a sword that cannot slash does not have any special qualities beyond those of a kitchen knife, and wine that does not give drunkenness is just foul water,” “a person that does not have a human’s special qualities is a useless beast whose status is lower than cattle.”<sup>55</sup> Humanity is its honesty, just as a hammer is its for-hammering.

This teleology simultaneously valorizes novelty: “In all ages, people have mostly been savage and distant from the levels of humanity, perfect souls have preferred the establishment of the rules of civilization and the perfection of the degrees of its form on the basis of their intent and desire for the education/training of servants/worshippers and, to the extent of the capacity of the era and people’s condition, placed law in order for everyone to be comfortable in the security of that law and for them to come together as a nation/sect and simultaneously advise the elite of that nation toward their origin on that basis.” “In earlier times, because people were not educated to the same extent as people today and were more savage, spiritual people kept their states more concealed, and on the rare occasion that someone spoke (openly) about Sufism, it would be trampled by the animals and savages, but in this age, there are many intelligent people who can comprehend meanings and realities, the individuals who can speak meaningfully meet more, and the speech of *‘arifan* [does he mean Sufis, or just wise people?] has, in the way that it is widespread among people, never been in any age [ie, the speech of *‘arifan* is more widespread than ever before].”

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 13-14

The *Mīzān*'s section in praise of the sovereign continues to link the humanity and virtue to knowledge, but it links all three to the era of its composition. It thus esteems its present as especially moral, and links this exceptional morality to knowledge's increased accessibility, while simultaneously responding to reformist criticism of the monarch of the period. "Iran has always been a land of great, just kings," but its current king "is the king of universal refuge, the monarch whose dignity is like Jamshīd, the heaven of whose court is the aid to the Islamic nation, Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh," who has "cultivated the kingdom of Iran to the extent of forty universe-turning, world-seeing, intellect-having, knowing, active, perfect, virtuous, and just kings."

The text continues by attributing the increased of knowledge in the present to the virtue of his rule, under which "most people have come to possess knowledge and craft and have found the manners of humanity, except for a rare, exception from among the savage who have still not found education." This knowledge is as praiseworthy as it is modern, for those who oppose it "set fire to the steam carriage that is the cause of their comfort."<sup>56</sup> This responds to those intellectuals who enjoyed the progress (exemplified by the "steam engine") over which Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh ruled while criticizing his rule, while the comparison to the legendary Jamshīd reflected the historical sense of the nationalist fascination with great kings of Iran's past. Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet notes that the Comte de Gobineau, having observed "that the Persians perceived their country as 'very ancient, and as they say themselves, perhaps the most ancient in the world that had a regular government,'" concluded that Qajar Iran met his criterion of nationhood" by virtue of the fact that "Qajar historians were captivated with ancient Persian emperors, if not always

<sup>56</sup> Safī 'Alī Shāh, p. 35



with their contemporary kings.”<sup>57</sup> “Iranians’ love for their past, as demonstrated by their twin loyalty to Anushirvan and ‘Alī, persuaded this Frenchman, himself an offspring of the 1789 revolution (albeit a reluctant one), to refer to Iran as a ‘nation’ as early as the 1850s,” but contemporary historians tended to compare Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh unfavorably to Anushirvan.<sup>58</sup> This being the case, Jamshīd’s appearance in the *Mīzān al-Ma‘rifah*’s praise of the Shāh likely served as a rejoinder to this disappointed nationalist comparison to Iran’s past imperial glories. As Kashani-Sabet notes, that Qajar Iran’s “historians vaunted the exploits of earlier royal heroes” rather than their current rulers, who by virtue of their “failed territorial intrigues, could not always boast of heroic feats,”<sup>59</sup> So, Safī ‘Alī Shāh could have been responding to these historians by saying that Qajar kings were still as heroic as those of legend. The *Mīzān* comments on these territorial anxieties as well, but it praises the king’s ability to preserve security in Iranian territory, rather than claiming that he could not protect it as well as Anushirvan or Jamshīd.

This modern king’s government, then, safeguards knowledge itself by preserving order: “...the king, in the interest of preserving religion and the worldly progress of the people of this kingdom, has provided guidance, so that people may find insight, be united, and tend to overlook their differences.” Because of his ability to preserve order, “violent dealings would rarely occur, and these would result from the unreliability of your self-knowledge, not the deficiency of the state.” As in its opening, the text attributes moral failures to ignorance, and credits the modern state with reducing both ignorance and violence. The text also credits Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh with raising Iran’s international profile by making “the sublime *Ithnā-‘Asharī mazhab* glorious and strong all over the

<sup>57</sup> Kashani-Sabet, “Fragile Frontiers,” p. 234, note 150

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p. 226

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* p. 226

earth without [the use of] war and turbulence and, having represented all the people of Iran to great kings and states, made them respected.”<sup>60</sup> This passage not only associates Shī‘ism with Iranian identity by giving the king responsibility for preserving the reputation of both; it claims that Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh’s diplomacy had served their international image, thereby casting his travel to Europe, for which he was often resented, in a positive light.

In addition to praising him for raising Iran’s international station, Safī ‘Alī Shāh also praises that Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh’s ability to preserve Iran’s territorial security. In the past, “there was not a single *farsang* of Iranian soil without a thief or dishonest person,” but now, “security is now at such a point that unaccompanied young children could carry gold and jewels from city to city.”<sup>61</sup> Even from his exile in London, Malkum Khān praised the shāh in similar terms: “it is to the honour of the present Shah that he has felt and recognised the situation. He has done what he could to guarantee security of life and property to his subjects, by inviting the signature of all the great powers to a liberal proclamation to that effect.”<sup>62</sup> Praise of the sovereign is of course a fairly standard feature of classical Persian literature, as well, but both of our authors are particularly modern in their common focus on the relationship between the territorial security of the nation-state (for example, the reference to soil as a territorial marker in Safī ‘Alī Shāh) and diplomacy (as in Safī ‘Alī Shāh’s reference to the king’s ability to “represent” Iran to great powers and Malkum Khān’s mention of the shah’s having sought the signature of these same great powers). As Firoozeh-Kashani Sabet has established, soil was a central motif in the development of Iranian nationalism: between 1850 and 1896, “a nationalist rhetoric based

<sup>60</sup> Safī ‘Alī Shāh, pp. 35-36

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 35

<sup>62</sup> Prince Malcom Khan, p. 240

on land emerged to emphasize the need to guard the frontiers;” as Mīrzā Mahdī Khān Mumtāhin al-Dawlah claimed with especially patriotic zest, “the people of the country of Iran...in bravery and courage were superior to all the people on earth;” training in “the military principles of present-day Europe” would enable them to retrieve “the whole world” from “the sprawling empires of Europe,” which “had redefined the touchstone of greatness.”<sup>63</sup>

The *Mīzān* explains its open advocacy of Sufism by contrasting the intellectual culture of the present age with that of the past. Because people were less educated in earlier times, “spiritual people kept their states more concealed, and on the rare occasion that someone spoke openly about Sufism, it would be trampled by the animals and savages,” but, “in this age, there are many aware people who can comprehend intelligibles and realities,” as a result of which, “the individuals who can speak meaningfully meet more, and the speech of gnostics [‘*ārifān*] is widespread among people as never before.”<sup>64</sup> Sufism, and its particular brand of knowledge (this passage’s *idrāk-i ma‘ārif va haqāyiq*) thus acquired a unique currency thanks to the education made available by modernity. This quote, however, concludes a passage that treats humanity as a station of moral development that depends specifically on the education Sufism makes available.

### **Sufism at Work: Ethical and Economic Practice**

In trying to make Sufism respectable, the *Mīzān al-Ma‘rifah* presents a limited collection of professional and spiritual activities as acceptable. It offers professional advice to government officials, religious scholars, military officers, and merchants, and

<sup>63</sup> Kashani-Sabet, Firoozeh. *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. pp. 74, 47

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* p.17

emphatically rejects both mendicancy and occultism. Sufi ethical writing has a long history of tying its pedagogy to supererogatory spiritual exercises; however, alongside this ascetic bent, as Sufism developed into distinct, institutionalized lineages, it came, more and more, to construe professional and associational life, rather than isolation, as domains in which subjects could practice the exercises by which they would constitute themselves as moral agents. *The Scale of Knowledge*, however, does not treat as wide a variety of urban professions as some early modern Persian texts that treat the professional ethics of the guild trades in Sufi terms (for example, Kāshifī's *Futuvvat Nāmāh-yi Sultānī*). I take this to suggest that the *Mīzān*'s restricted scope serves to comment not only on how a subject could practice their trade most virtuously, but also on what trades were particularly respectable in the urban life of late nineteenth-century Iran.

The effort to market Sufism as a practice by which modern subjects can be made properly human is also an effort to demonstrate Sufism's compatibility with practical, worldly life. This effort begins with a narrative account of Sufism's origins, which explains the relative secrecy in which its knowledge was preserved and transmitted: "the people of intelligence and understanding do not treat" the topic of Sufism, "except in person, because in the past, this matter was not the means of ordering a person's livelihood and worldly credit; they consumed the wages of the path, bore its burdens, and survived disappointment" in private.<sup>65</sup> However, "gradually, unemployed people found their way to this path" because they fell into envy for "the possessors of station who, with desire for this group, applied themselves to it" and, from envy, "clothed themselves with the garments of Sufism. The name of 'solitary Sufism' [*tasavvuf-i khalvat*] was put on this group for them to become famous in the world." So, ironically enough, according to

<sup>65</sup> Safī 'Alī Shāh, pp. 17-18

Safī ‘Alī Shāh, solitude served a thirst for fame, as some from this “became a reference-point [*marja* ‘] for place-seekers,” and “because no commodity goes long without a buyer, some consumers gathered around them and mixed essence with appearance and confused the matter [so] sedition became widespread,” which the text attributes to the devil himself: “Iblīs also came in human garb and displayed himself with a thousand virtues, and distinguishing this matter became so difficult as to cause all ignorance of the call of Sufism. He made himself famous in the name of *qutbīyat*.”<sup>66</sup> This seems to respond to criticisms that specifically targeted the deference extended to Sufī masters (termed, among other things, *qutb*) by dissociating the Sufism that Safī ‘Alī Shāh endorses from the grandiosity of claims made by, or on behalf of, those Sufī masters deemed exploitative and dishonest by critics of Sufism. Additionally, though, this passage seems to comment on human fallibility and the uncertainty of moral judgment—when it says that Iblīs came in human clothing, it uses the term *Ādam*, from which the “humanity” that is so central to *The Scale of Knowledge*, *ādamīyat*, derives. This, in turn, seems to suggest that even if *ādamīyat* is a moral *telos*, someone’s appearing to have achieved it or seeming to possess “a thousand virtues” can obscure their actual corruption.

Solitude and mendicancy, however, are just two of many practices that have come to be associated with Sufism. “Common people,” who concern themselves with “property, position, acquisition, and labor,” who dispute “over something about the very being of which they have no comprehension,” have come to apply to “the name of Sufism [*ism-i darvīshī*]” a “snare” by connecting it to “alchemy, spirit-summoning, amulets, and others like these, the intent of all of which is entrapment.” This association has made people “incapable of doubting that Sufism is like these things and has no point other than

<sup>66</sup> Safī ‘Alī Shāh, p. 18

this: that poverty [*faqr*], Sufism, and guidance [*irshād*] are nothing other than pretexts for someone's making a living."<sup>67</sup> Later, in its section offering specific advice [*nasīhat*], the text specifically advises against fusing Sufi practice and the aforementioned occult sciences. It commands, "do not make yourself famous for occult sciences like alchemy and spirit-binding."<sup>68</sup>

The equation of Sufism to the occult sciences, and rejection of both, was a regular feature of reformist thought. Ākhūndzādah's 1850 plays, for example, satirize these apparently equivalently irrational features of life in the formerly Iranian Caucuses and Iran. His *Hikāyat-i Mullā Ibrāhīm Khalīl Kīmīyāgar* targets the titular alchemist, "the credulity and ignorance of those who allowed themselves to be exploited by the alchemist," and "a dervish and a mollā" are "secondary targets of satire" in the portrayal of "religion as equivalent to superstition." His second play similarly attacks a religion and the superstition he associated with it. Its title is *Hikāyat-i Musyū Zhurdān Hakīm-i Nabātāt va Darvīsh Mast 'Alī Shāh Jādūkun-i Mashhūr*, and in it, Ākhūndzādah targets "magic and the superstitious women that have recourse to it."<sup>69</sup> In addition to the designation of the magician character as "darvīsh," the name Mast 'Alī Shāh also calls to mind the titles common in the Ni'mat Allāhī *silsilah* (like Rahmat 'Alī Shāh, Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh, and our Safī 'Alī Shāh, for example).<sup>70</sup> According to Hamid Algar, "Ne'mat-Allāh Walī and Sufis of his line were also the first to deal imperiously with monarchs:"

<sup>67</sup> Safī 'Alī Shāh, p. 19

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 37

<sup>69</sup> Hamid Algar, "Akundzada," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/7, pp. 735-740; an updated version is available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/akundzada-playwright> (accessed on 13 May 2014).

<sup>70</sup> The portrayal of women as the gullible consumers of the magic in which the play's dervish traffics should also raise (admittedly as yet underdeveloped questions) about the performances of gender that Sufi ethics prescribed in the second half of the nineteenth century.

they equated their *darvīsh* status to kingship by including “‘shah’ in their Sufi names (often combined, it is true, with ‘Alī, who was in popular tradition called *šāh-e mardān* ‘the king of true men’)” and, starting with Ni‘mat Allāh Valī himself, pioneered the use of the term *tāj* (crown) in reference to “dervish headgear.”<sup>71</sup>

Though Ākhūndzādah wrote these plays in Azeri (and of course, lived much of his life outside of Iran’s borders after Russian expansion into Armenia and Azerbaijan), his opinions were not dissimilar from those of his Iranian correspondents, and are sufficiently indicative of modernist equations of Sufism to irrationality within Qajar culture that the above-discussed commands in the *Mīzān al-Ma‘rifah* are likely to recuperate Sufism in light of modernists’ rejection of the superstition associated with traditional religion. Such directives are also, within the text, part of a larger program by which Sufis are to manage their reputations as religious figures.

The advice directed to practitioners of Sufism specifically seeks to dissociate them from the exploitative and irrational reputation of the occult sciences. The *Mīzān* tells aspirants, “if you, oh friend, are of the line of gnostics, guides, and hermits, first, believe correctly, then take hold of guides with good beliefs, and encourage the *sharī‘ah*.” This would, among other things, protect the practitioner from accusations of heterodoxy and could reassure non-Sufi readers that this text’s Sufism does not threaten the legal-religious order. From here, the passage goes on to speak to more supernatural-seeming topics: “do not guarantee people’s death or sickness, and do not boast of unveiling or miracles; because of this, reject disciples who speak boastfully on your behalf, and do not depart from reflection [*murāqabah*] in assemblies.”<sup>72</sup> In advising

71<sup>1</sup>Shaki, Mansour and Hamid Algar, “Darvīš,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, VII/1, pp. 72-76, accessible online at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/darvis> (accessed 13 July 2016).

72<sup>2</sup>Safī ‘Alī Shāh, p. 19

against claiming certainty or responsibility for another's death or sickness, the passage \ engages with modern understandings of causality, which deny the possibility of action at a distance. The text does not comment on a theory of causality; it simply suggests that would-be Sufis not claim to be able to ensure another's death or illness, likely for the sake of their own reputations, especially when paired with the command against attempting to practice the occult. This advice against bragging and claims to having violated natural law by way of causing sickness from afar or having made miracles [*karāmāt*] is part of the passage's advice against making practitioners' reputations as ascetics central to their professional or public lives: "do not 'spend' sanctity and piety more than the necessities of civilization demand and do not 'sell' asceticism."

Its advice regarding the use of authority also aims to preserve Sufis from allegations of exploitation or abuse of disciples and their resources: "do not involve yourself in disciples' exoteric matters, do not make disciples' families your concern, do not unnecessarily request disciples' possessions...support indigent disciples to an appropriate extent and do not complain of poverty in front of anyone."<sup>73</sup> Given that they appear in the relatively open medium of a printed text, these norms governing master-disciple relationships seem not only directed at would-be teachers, but would-be students as well, as they would also guide non-Sufi readers' judgment of the supposed Sufi masters with whom they might consult. Sufi teachers, then, should not threaten their students' prosperity, and should, if anything, help to stabilize economic relations in terms of both the larger economy (trade and the professional sphere) and in terms of the smaller economy (the household, to which *oikonomia* originally referred).

### **The Sufi and the New Man**

<sup>73</sup> Safi 'Alī Shāh, pp. 37-38



This treatise's concern with the preservation of a "natural" domestic order also extends to a concern with governing gender relations and limiting the range of acceptable sexual activity. In articulating its claims, the *Mīzān* appeals to a gender hierarchy it takes for granted. Many of its least programmatic remarks reveal the operation of assumptions that position its treatment of ethics and rationality as functions of a patriarchal and heteronormative order on which it offers little explicit commentary, simply taking this order as so natural as to be able to explain other remarks without being explained itself. Afsaneh Najmabadi has remarked, "From the late eighteenth century through the first decades of the twentieth century, Iranian modernity was shaped in the rearticulation of concepts like nation (*millat*), politics (*siasat*), homeland (*vatan*), and knowledge (*'ilm*)." I have, up to this point, aimed to illustrate the *Mīzān al-Ma'rifah*'s participation in this rearticulation by reading its treatment of (religious) knowledge in light of ethical norms it binds specifically to the relationship between the knowing subject, the nation (*millat*) and its political and economic life. However, because "these reconceptualizations" also, in general, "depended on notions of gender," it also bears pointing out that the knowing subject aimed at in Safī 'Alī Shāh's treatise is a gendered subject—the ethical code it dictates specifically tells the aspiring Sufi how to be a man and how, as a man, one should interact with women and *amrads*, the genders the text (and its brand of modernity) excluded.<sup>74</sup>

Within the *Mīzān*'s imagination, patriarchy is natural enough to explain the text's other claims without needing any explanation itself. In the aforementioned argument in favor of the necessity of a divinely-ordained law, the treatise argues that reducing legal

<sup>74</sup> Najmabadi, Afsaneh. *Women With Mustaches and Men Without Beards*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. p. 16

decision-making to human deliberation would have a dire effect on the domestic order: because “everyone has self-interest, interests are inescapably the cause of disagreements, to such an extent that no rational person would be satisfied that he could impose limits or punishments on his own wife and child.”<sup>75</sup> This passage’s language assumes that rational subject [‘*āqil*] is necessarily not a woman, as it opposes ‘*āqil* to the word for woman/wife [*zan*] at the outset; but this passage also suggests that the fact that the law enables rational subjects to impose limits and punishments upon their wives and children is somehow evidence of this law’s rationality.

A similar “throwaway” line concluding a passage on the slander of Sufism also assumes that women are less capable of participating in intellectual exchange. “In the past, the ignorant, masquerading as scholars, would mislead the public about the state of *fuqarā* and ‘*urafā*, writing and speaking about with much hideousness, lest anyone find out about the laudable qualities and virtues of this group, [for] sales would slow in their bazaar.” The privileged present, however, has made public discussions of Sufism’s reality more possible and undermined clerical obfuscation of this reality. “In these days, the topic has become public,” disproving the allegations against Sufis to all “except for an old woman who could be misled about this matter,” aside from whom, only another selfishly exoteric cleric, “a man of their station” would accept such claims. The passage concludes by pointing out such a man’s station “is less than [that of] old women in every regard.”<sup>76</sup> In praising the age of Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh as one of increased public rationality (or at least reduced gullibility), the text not only casts old women as holdouts in their uncritical acceptance of clerical propaganda, but then also uses women as the basis of an

<sup>75</sup> Safī ‘Alī Shāh, p. 9

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17

unfavorable comparison, specifically insulting Sufis' clerical accusers by placing them below women, which, to be an insult, must assign women a low position at the outset.

When advising the aspiring Sufi how to relate to disciples, the text directs the reader, "do not converse with strange women in private."<sup>77</sup> Its advice to merchants also aims to limit the participation of women or "beardless youths" in the economy. The text advises merchants, "do not sell to women and *amrads* on credit, for that is distant from caution and near to sedition, especially because if they do not pay it back, your request would seem severe."<sup>78</sup> Thus, to preserve the reputation of merchants from the allegations of callousness or cruelty that might follow from demanding that a woman or *amrad* repay a debt, *The Scale of Knowledge* recommends that merchants avoid doing business with them in the first place, which, in effect, advises in favor of their exclusion from the economy, or at least from the credit economy.<sup>79</sup>

The treatise also constructs military life as a domain of particular moral concern, which, given the military's role as the guarantor of the nation-state's territorial integrity seems particularly modern. After all, the first acts of modernization in Iran were military reforms carried out by 'Abbās Mīrzā following Iran's defeats (and subsequent losses of territory) in the Russo-Persian wars. The *Mīzān al-Ma'rifah*'s concern with the moral integrity of the military seems to parallel the wider Qajar period's concern with the territorial integrity of the nation state. In casting a concerned gaze on the army's virtue, the text makes military life a domain of moral concern, but it also reflects nineteenth-century transitions in sexual norms. After declaring that military officers should be brave

<sup>77</sup> Safī 'Alī Shāh, p. 38

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56

<sup>79</sup> Although there is a much broader body of literature on merchant ethics that advises against extending credit to a number of classes alongside women and *amrads* (like princes and paupers), in this text, the only groups mentioned are women and *amrads*.

and morally upright, Safī ‘Alī Shāh elaborates, “he who is not pious has no share of bravery and the king should not make him the head of an army, especially if he is an *amrad-bāz* [literally, someone who “plays” with *amrads*], a gambler, a glutton, or [someone] impure.”<sup>80</sup> This passage continues by advising generals or other high-ranking officers to support one another and thus develop and maintain bonds within their ranks: “When an officer displays excellence in war, make it known and send word of it to the king, and even if you may internally have unkind thoughts about him, do not conceal his excellence.”<sup>81</sup> The text thus values military men’s mutual support quite highly; even if a general dislikes a fellow officer, he should support him by publicizing the officer’s accomplishments.

The same bonds that an officer can preserve by refraining from voicing unkind thoughts or speaking favorably about someone he dislikes, however, should not be extended to anyone who might be perceived as a corrupting influence, like, for example, a man who inclines to sexual contact with “beardless youths,” though the fear of “corruption” extends beyond sex and also to general questions of piety. Safī ‘Alī Shāh commands, “do not allow the worldly, heretical, or irreligious into your camp and do not befriend them, and if you find someone without religion in your army, expel them;” male bonding can only go so far, “for someone without religion has no bravery, and by keeping company with them [*suhbat-i ān*], they would deplete the heart of the army and hold it back with their ugly actions.”<sup>82</sup> The virtues of the ties between officers are as valuable as they are fragile—they must be preserved from a variety of threats that includes not only ignorance and irreligion, but also involvement with beardless youths.

<sup>80</sup> Safī ‘Alī Shāh, p. 48

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* p. 49

The construction of Iranian national identity in the Qajar period involved the making of a masculine state subject capable of defending the homeland, which came to be feminized. Therefore, it was precisely in the era of the *Mīzān al-Maʿrifah*'s composition that honor (*nāmūs*) “was reclaimed as a national concern,” because “its meaning embraces the idea of a woman’s purity ( *ʿismat*) and the integrity of the nation, *namus* was constituted as subject to male possession and protection in both domains; gender honor and national honor intimately informed each other. But, as Safī ʿAlī Shāh charges the military with defense of the nation’s honor, the honor of the military itself must be defended, and this defense consists of the regulation of the officer corps’ conduct in religion and sexuality.

Reflecting what Afsaneh Najamabadi has termed the “closeting” of the male beloved and the elision of *amrad-bāzī* and pederasty, the *Mīzān al-Maʿrifah* not only seeks to exclude *amrads* from the sphere of acceptable interactions, but, it additionally seeks to exclude the *amrad-bāz* from this domain, specifically in the name of the homosocial bonds between military men that uphold the nation-state. In the restrictions it places upon social (and, implicitly, sexual) intercourse, the *Mīzān al-Maʿrifah* does not only, or even mainly, cast the regulation of sexual appetites and conduct as part of an ascetic program, its regulatory injunctions instead serve the cultivation of a state subject. In this, Safī ʿAlī Shāh’s text stands in contrast to some earlier Sufī literature, in which the beardless youth figured as an aesthetic-erotic ideal. Everett Rowson argues that as early as the ninth century, “some Muslim mystics claimed to see in the beauty of adolescent boys a ‘testimony’ to the beauty and goodness of God, and initiated the practice of gazing

at such a boy as a form of spiritual exercise.”<sup>83</sup> Such practices, known, among other things, as *nazar-bāzī* and *shāhid- bāzī*, and the literature referencing them, persisted throughout well into the nineteenth century.

*The Scale of Knowledge* reflects its period’s newfound emphasis on the disavowal of desire for young men, a desire which had organized the erotic-aesthetic universe of earlier eras of Islamicate (and especially Perso-Islamic) history. Afsaneh Najmabadi explains, “heteronormalization of eros and sex became a condition of ‘achieving modernity,’ a project that called for heterosocialization of public space” as well.<sup>84</sup> The *Mizān al-Ma’rifah* is a snapshot of Iranian life as these projects took place over; thus, in it, we can glimpse the heteronormalization of eros at play alongside an attempt to resist the heterosocialization of economic life.

### Conclusion

Safī ‘Alī Shāh’s treatments of knowledge in the Nāsirī period were not composed independent of the period’s circumstances, as a result of which, the defense of Sufism and its model of knowledge is closely related to the cultivation of virtues and the adherence to norms of gender and class. The *Scale of Knowledge*, for example, demands that Sufis position themselves as aids in their disciple’s moral formation without making supernatural claims or demanding payment and thereby distinguish themselves from the exploitative or irrational occultism on which grounds nineteenth-century reformists condemned Sufism’s role in Iranian life. In elaborating its view of rationality and moral order, though, the text takes pains to exclude women and *amrads*. Knowledge is neither

83<sup>]</sup>Rowson, Everett. “Homosexuality in the Medieval Islamic World: Literary Celebration vs. Legal Condemnation,” Paper presented at the conference “Gender and Alterity in Near Eastern Societies, 6 April 1995. p. 24

84<sup>]</sup>Najmabadi, pp. 1-2

neutral nor asocial, and the Sufism of the Qajar era found itself displaying knowledge by displaying its respectability through demands to moral formation, ethically conducted interpersonal relations, and the preservation of class and gender hierarchies. The text makes clear that these demands, and the defense of Sufism of which they are a part, belong to their time and place; comparisons to constitutional European states, praise of the present as especially rational, and of Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh's rule as uniquely capable of preserving public rationality and Iran's territorial integrity situate the Sufism of the *Mīzān al-Ma'rifah* within a specifically Qajar context in which mysticism and modernity commingled. Mīrzā Malkum Khān's work on humanity and law illustrates another side of this context: assumed to be full of westernizing zeal, his appeals to religion and deployment of a vocabulary similar to Safī 'Alī Shāh's suggests that both figures participated in a single conversation, one which was independent of either author's convictions.