Ethics and Normativity (2024), 1(1): 53-72
DOI: 10.22034/EAN.2024.200156 https://ean.urd.ac.ir/

Ethics of Chivalry According to Henry Corbin

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(Received: 13 February 2024; Accepted: 18 May 2024)

Abstract

Futuwwa (spiritual chivalry) is a frequently used key term in Corbin's writings on Iranian Islam. It is no accident that the concluding, the seventh book his *Iranian Islam*, is titled "The Twelfth Imam and *Futuwwa*." Corbin's exploration of Iranian Islam can be classified into seven key themes: methodology, epistemology, theology, cosmology, anthropology, ontology, and axiology. I find it worthy to conduct a comprehensive study about his idea, in which these dimensions are distinguished as much as possible and then their relationships with one another are explained. The limited scope of this writing does not allow such a discussion, but let me point out that, in fact, as far as the axiological aspect of Corbin's research on Iranian Islam is concerned, this issue can be investigated in terms of "*futuwwa*" (spiritual chivalry), or more precisely speaking, in terms of the ethics of *futuwwa*. To comprehend the ethics of *futuwwa*, it is important to elucidate its relationship with other theories pertaining to the human moral obligations and character, particularly those regarding virtue ethics.

Keywords: *futuwwa*, spiritual chivalry, Henry Corbin, ethics.

Morality and Moral Ethics

The main components of morality consist in the following: (a) Actions and practices that ought or ought not to be done. It is by this criterion that moral actions are characterized as right and wrong. General rules are required to systematize particular actions (although it is controversial whether rules are prior to actions or vice versa). In any case, This is one of the main components of morality, which may also be described as one of its most accessible components. Thus, when there is talk of morality, moral dos and don'ts primarily come to minds. (b) Another component of the morality is motivation. Those endowed with moral intelligence often abstain from judging people's actions solely based on superficial factors. When they are engaged in evaluating moral actions, they also take the motivations of their agents

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into consideration as well. Motivations are categorized into decent and indecent motivations. Sometimes, it is assumed that a right action may not have any moral value if it is done out of a malicious motivation. (c) The third component of the morality consists in inner moral states of individuals, which are often known as virtues and vices. Virtues are praiseworthy or decent habits and ingrained states with which people's hearts are adorned, inherent in them regardless of whether they find an external manifestation and expression or not. On the other hand, vices are blameworthy or indecent habits and states that somewhat contaminate people's hearts. Virtues and vices apply to human individuals in general, and the objective of moral training is to adorn people with as many virtues as possible and cleanse vices in them as much as possible. In fact, morality is a demanding institution, as it staunchly recommends all individuals, without any exceptions, to do the right actions, have decent motivations or sincere intentions in doing them, and adorn themselves with virtues that can help the sincerity of their intentions and pave the path for doing right actions. (d) Moreover, morality has an ideal component as well, which is defined in terms of saintly and heroic ideals. In a sense, this component falls outside of the demanding character of morality. Being committed to these ideals and trying to actualize them are deemed supererogatory, namely beyond moral duties. In fact, religious virtues, duties, and actions fall under the saintly ideals, while acting in conformity to the demands of the virtue of chivalry falls under heroic ideals. In our Iranian culture, these ideals coincide in what may be dubbed the "*futuwwa* or chivalrous morality." This is further confirmed by the fact that the heroes of our epics have a mystical dimension, and our mystics have an epic and heroic aspect. We perceive Imam ʻAli as an ideal person who stands on the peak of religiosity and mysticism, hence recognizing him as "chivalrous" or *fatī* (as in the famous hadith, "there is no chivalrous individual except ʻAli, there is no sword except Dhu l-Fiqār [ʻAli's sword]").

Moral philosophy, or ethics, is a branch of philosophy, focusing on the morality. The most outstanding branch of moral philosophy is the so-called normative ethics (other branches include descriptive ethics, meta-ethics, and moral psychology). If we view normative ethics as a discipline concerned with the morality (with all of its four components), the part of it that is concerned with the first component is duty ethics. The part discussing the second and third components is virtue ethics. Finally, the part focused on the fourth component can be termed as "*futuwwa*/chivalry ethics." If we consider these three varieties of ethics in relation to the existential dimensions of human individuals as moral agents, it may be said that, in terms of their external or internal aspects, they involve a hierarchy. To use common terminologies in Islamic spirituality, duty ethics can be attributed to the exotric (*zāhir*) dimension, virtue ethics may be deemed to belong to the esotric (*bātin*) dimension, and chivalry ethics may be attributed to the stage of the esoteric of the esoteric (*bātin al-bātin*).

Virtue Ethics

A distinction should be drawn between virtue ethics and virtue theory or virtue philosophy. Virtue ethics assumes the possibility of virtues as ingrained habits or states within the human nature. Hence, in a sense, it is concerned with this moral dimension of the human existence. However, a more preliminary question should be first answered: Is it indeed possible for states or habits (here, virtues) to be ingrained in human natures such that their conducts arise from them and they behave in accordance with those states? Gilbert Harman says, "I myself think it is better to abandon all thought and talk of character and virtue. I believe that ordinary thinking in terms of character traits has disastrous effects on people's understanding of each other… . I think we need to get people to stop doing this. We need to convince people to look at situational factors and to stop trying to explain things in terms of character traits. We need to abandon all talk of virtue and character, not find a way to save it by reinterpreting it" (Harman 2000, 224; quoted from Jost 2005, 9:679).

The limited scope of the present paper does not allow us to addresses and criticize the reasons behind such denial of virtues. Briefly, let me note that this denials highlights what may be dubbed as the "force of the situation." The idea is that apparently virtuous people act against their alleged virtues in certain real or experimental situations. For instance, an individual who apparently possesses the virtue of innocence may, under certain circumstances, exhibit the wildest and the most horrific acts. However, I think if we accept the "force of situation" in this sense (which is, of course, a matter of dispute), individuals do not show the same degrees of resistance towards them. The varying degrees of their resistance against the force of the situation displays the extent to which they truly possess virtues. It goes without saying that an individual adorned with the virtue of innocence and harmlessness would surrender to a situation of harming others at a much later stage and with greater resistance.

However, the primary conflict regarding virtue ethics does not arise within the field of virtue theory itself. Instead, its main challenge lies in its ability to overcome its two formidable rivals: consequentialism and deontology. In modern moral philosophy, the focus of normative ethics often revolves around the first component of morality mentioned earlier. It seems that normative ethics is limited to the aspect of morality that deals with external factors (and makes judgments based on appearances), taking the outward manifestations of moral actions and the rules that govern them as having a role in determining their rightness or wrongness. Morality shares similarities with legal systems, as actions are assessed either based on their outcomes (consequentialism) or their conformity to principles akin to laws or intuitive notions of duties (deontology). In the modern era until the present day, normative ethics has consistently witnessed a rivalry between these two perspectives. Various forms of consequentialism have emerged, which

can generally be categorized into two theories: egoism and utilitarianism. Even in contemporary times, newer iterations of the theory have been proposed, such as the "neo-Hobbesian approach" or the competing theories of rule utilitarianism and act utilitarianism. There are also diverse versions of deontology, with Immanuel Kant's theory being one of the most influential. The works of Sir David Ross and the emergence of neo-Kantianism demonstrate that deontology remains a vibrant and influential framework in contemporary moral philosophy.

For virtue ethics to effectively challenge these dominant theories, it must first identify and expose the flaws and limitations of these theories. Additionally, it must demonstrate its own capacity to account for moral life and provide ethical guidance, which may be described as the constructive program of virtue ethics. The first objective, which we may refer to as the critical program of virtue ethics, involves scrutinizing duty ethics for its excessive focus on rule-based moral patterns, over-reliance on excessively rational explanations of moral agency, and the prevalence of formalism therein, which can lead to a neglect of the nuances inherent in specific moral situations. Duty ethics seeks to account for and guide morality irrespective of individuals' inner states, characters, motivations, or intentions. Instead, it reduces the process of moral contemplation to something like logical reasoning and argumentation.

In general, duty ethics strives to bring precision to moral life and minimize the influence of personal biases in moral decision-making and judgments, resulting in a highly rule-based approach to moral conduct. However, this comes at the cost of diminishing and even degrading the essence of morality. Thus, a theory must be presented that does justice to various dimensions of morality and takes into account the character of moral agents along with explaining and guiding moral conduct. The theory should have plans for training and improving the characters of moral agents, rectifying their behaviors and enriching their character.

It is for this objective that the constructive program of virtue ethics strives. Such a constructive program has been pursued in two ways: radical and moderate. The radical program claims that virtue ethics must replace duty ethics. Alternatively put, it assumes that duty ethics is entirely wrongheaded, providing no contributions to explaining and guiding moral conducts. The moderate program, however, alleges that duty ethics is not wrong in its own right, but it should be supplemented with virtue ethics (see Louden 2005, 688). Needless to say that virtue ethics would be easier to embrace in terms of the moderate program. Even in this case, however, a major critique of virtue ethics is its ambiguity. Contrary to duty ethics that provides specific criteria for rightness or wrongness of actions, virtue ethics proposes no such criteria. Instead, it tends to present a model of a virtuous individual who possesses practical wisdom and is able to discern the situation in the best way, offering the best moral judgment. It goes without saying that such a criterion is much less precise than

the criterion of the "best outcomes" (consequentialism) or that of the categorical imperative (Kantian deontology).

Now the question arises whether such an ambiguity is essential to virtue ethics, in which case it can never be presented in terms of clear-cut practical rules, or is due to the fact that virtue ethics is still nascent and less than fully developed, which makes it still unfamiliar to ethicists. I believe that if the latter horn is true and the moderate version of virtue ethics is adopted, this problem will dissipate over time through additional research. Chivalry ethics should be conceived in alignment with virtue ethics. On this picture, it is interesting that in our Iranian Islamic tradition, virtue ethics was practiced at a profound level in terms of chivalry ethics. This is attested by the presence of works in our heritage, known as "Futuwwat-Nāma" (letters of chivalry). I argue that these letters of chivalry should be deemed varieties of applied ethics based on chivalry ethics.

Chivalry Ethics

Thinking of chivalry ethics through the lens of moral philosophers, we can say that chivalry ethics is an ethics of character just like virtue ethics, although it adopts a deeper perspective on the character of moral agents. Chivalry ethics is concerned with virtues that go beyond those addressed in virtue ethics. For, as noted previously, if duty ethics as an ethics of acts represents the outer appearance (exoteric, *Zahir*) of morality and virtue ethics as an ethics of character represents its inner core, then chivalry ethics will represent the inner of its inner (*bātin al-bātin*). To authentically fulfill their moral duties, individuals must cultivate virtues within themselves. Similarly, in order to truly embody moral virtues, they require a deeper foundation, which can be found in the concept of chivalry.

Chivalry ethics extends beyond mere adherence to duties or even virtues, urging individuals to supererogatory virtues. Additionally, chivalry ethics involves profound religious, spiritual, and mystical elements. Genuine adherence to religion can only be achieved through the practice of such ethics. When viewed in its inner dimension, which involves a deep connection to the sacred realm, religion can only be truly attained through chivalry ethics. This ethical framework not only establishes connections between Abrahamic religions, but also links them to Zoroastrianism. According to Corbin, as far as the Zoroastrian tradition is concerned, this chivalry ethics inspired by the combat of the *fravartis*, who chose to descend into this world to defend the creation of Ohrmazd, just as they had watched over the high ramparts of the world of light against the Ahrimanian powers (Corbin 1972, IV:391).

What is fascinating about this ethical framework is the concept of self-sacrifice, where individuals choose to remain in the world of darkness to protect the world of light and ultimately triumph over Ahriman and his followers. Fravartis willingly descended to this world to prevent it from falling under the dominion of Ahriman.

Rather than solely focusing on their own salvation, they strive to save those who are immersed in Ahriman's darkness within this world. Certainly, individuals who are devoted to this form of ethics and follow the example of fravartis are primarily engaged in an inner battle.

Though the *futuwwa*, as Corbin has insisted, is, par excellence, *the* ethical category, it has given its spiritual sens to all human company, to the fact of *companionship*, and therefore it is this that ispired the organization of trade guilds and others, which multiplated in the Islamic world (Corbin 1972, IV:410). Traditional notions of morality, as commonly understood by moral philosophers, primarily focus on human rights. Ethical frameworks, regardless of their specific school, strive to define appropriate human behavior in relation to fellow humans, animals, plants, and even inanimate objects. In essence, they aim to elucidate the duties individuals have towards others. What is pivotal to moral consideration is primarily defined in terms of the outside of one's inner subjective dimension. This is why moral philosophers have become concerned with the boundaries of morality: whether morality solely applies to humans or encompasses other creatures as well. In either case, is it limited to things that exist at present or does it include future creatures as well. In chivalry ethics, however, the boundaries of morality expand and the criterion of moral consideration is redefined. Firstly, it is concerned not only with people's rights but also with God's rights as well as one's own rights towards oneself (saintly ideals). Secondly, in this ethical framework, the concept of duty towards others takes on a different and deep significance (heroic ideals). It goes beyond the provision of social and worldly services and extends to the realm of spiritual services. Individuals are called upon not only to fulfill their socieal worldly obligations but also to offer spiritual support to others. Just as one should not overlook the poverty and financial struggles of others, it is equally important to address their spiritual impoverishment.

On this account, in addition to moral imperatives and prohibitions, one should consider religious imperatives and prohibitions. Within this ethical framework, it is not sufficient to merely abstain from immoral acts; one must also refrain from committing religious sins. Sin is a religious concept that modern humans regrettably fail to recognize. They lack a sense of conscience when it comes to committing sins, although they fortunately still possess a conscience regarding immoral acts. Hence, the initial requirement to join the ranks of chivalry is to free oneself from soul's caprice and sins. This aspect of chivalry, known as "muruwwa" or manliness, involves refraining from acts that are religiously forbidden and sinful, leading to the cessation of recording one's transgressions by the "honorable scribes" (*kirāman kātibīn*: Quran, 82:11), namely angels who record one's actions (Kāshifī al-Sabzawāri 1350 Sh, 14). Mawlānā Husayn al-Wā'iz al-Kāshifi has dedicated a chapter in his book *Futuwwat-*

nāma sultānī (Monarchial letter of chivalry) to the definition of chivalry, exploring its various aspects as defined by renowned saints.

Initially, he states that "futuwwa" is derived from the term for youth or juvenility (Persian *Javāni)*, immediately adding that some lexicologists argue that it is synonymous with chivalry (Persian *javānmardī*). Therefore, the term "chivalry" is preferred as its equivalent. "Futuwwa" literally means juvenility, and the adjective form "fatā" refers to a young man between the ages of sixteen and thirty. However, in this context, juvenility is not related to physical age, which is why Corbin asserts that the Latin term "juvenitas" is not an appropriate equivalent. In this context, juvenility is understood in its spiritual sense, "designates a youth over which time has no influence because it is a reconquest of time and its sclerosis (Kāshifī Sabzawārī 1350 Sh, 411). The concept of *futuwwa*, as an expression of juvenility and freshness, is specific to spiritual beings, embodying qualities associated with youthfulness. Avicenna's portrayal of "Hayy ibn Yaqzān" (Alive son of Awake) in his visionary recital of the same name offers a compelling depiction of this concept of youthfulness as something exclusive to spiritual beings:

> Now, as we were coming and going, suddenly in the distance appeared a sage. He was beaiful: his person shone with a divine glory. Certainly he had tested of years; long duration had passed over him. Yet there was seen in him only the freshness proper to young men; no weakness bowed his bearing, no fault injured the grace of his stature. In short, no sign of old age was to be found in him, save the gravity of old sages (Corbin 1980, 137).

A comparable depiction can be found in Shaykh al-Ishrāq al-Suhrawardi's portrayal of the purple in his visionary recital of the same name (Suhrawardī 1372 Sh, 3:228). *Futuwwa* entails liberation from the constraints of the physical body and material attachments, as well as transcending the limitations of time and temporal entities. It involves being spiritually alive, which is attained through a continuous inner struggle. For this reason, Corbin translates "futuwwa" as "spiritual chivalry" (*chevalerie spirituelle*). It is important to note that not everyone is capable of engaging in this battle, but those who are successful in this fight transition from childhood to youthfulness and from inexperience to maturity. As long as the spiritual seekers are bound by their personal desires and wishes, they remain immature like a child. However, once they rise above the level of the soul and reach the level of the heart, they become youthful. Just as a young person possesses physical strength and abilities, so the chivalrous individual possesses human perfections and spiritual powers, earning them the title of chivalrous or "fatā" (Kāshifī Sabzavārī 1350 Sh, 17).

Futuwwat-nāma sultānī presents various definitions of *futuwwa*. One prominent aspect of its definition emphasizes viewing *futuwwa* as faithfulness to the "eternal

covenant." When Prophet Moses inquired about chivalry, God responded, stating that it entails returning the soul as pure as it was received. The purity of the soul lies in reverting to its primordial nature (Kāshifī Sabzavārī 1350 Sh, 17). Additionally, Imam al-Husayn is quoted, stating that "chivalry is remaining loyal to the eternal covenant and steadfast on the path of the upright religion, the right path. It involves being faithful to the pledge of the Day of Covenant … The chivalrous uphold this promise, while breaking it signifies weakness in faith" (Kāshifī Sabzavārī 1350 Sh, 11).

One of the most fundamental moral principles is keeping one's promise, often regarded as the Golden Rule of morality, as it requires no justifications or proofs. Without a commitment to honoring one's promises, morality cannot be established, and genuine human relationships cannot thrive. In any case, a moral individual is defined in terms of loyalty to pledges. However, in addition to making promises with our fellow humans, which we should keep in terms of morality, we also make pledges with God. Many spirituals in Islam believe that the Quran itself describes this eternal covenant in verse 172 of Surah al-Aʿrāf, serving as a reminder of our divine pledge.

However, it is not reasonable to claim that having a covenant with God solely entails acknowledging His Lordship. Bearing witness to God's Lordship requires action, which entails remaining steadfast in upholding one's primordial nature. According to Islam, humans are created with a pure innate nature bestowed by Allah, "the original nature endowed by Allah according to which He originated mankind" (30:30). This pure nature is what God has entrusted to humans. According to the monotheistic worldview, everything that emanates from God is pure good and pure light. Consequently, the soul entrusted to humans, their very existence, is untainted by darkness as it originates from pure light and absolute purity. However, in our material world, which is rife with limitations and conflicts, the pure soul becomes susceptible to contamination from worldly darkness, taking the form of soul's caprice and moral vices. Nevertheless, humans are obligated to safeguard what has been entrusted to them and to return it to its rightful owner, God, based on morality and in fulfillment of the covenant they have made with Him: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due" (Quran 4:58), "O you who have faith! Keep your agreements" (5:5). The chivalrous interpret these verses as primarily pertinent to the borrowed life entrusted to them by God, which they must return in a pure and clean form (as Hafiz, the Persian poet, composes: "This borrowed life, the beloved's trust bestowed on Hafiz / One day, her face I'll glimpse, surrendering to love's bliss.").

> When the primordial nature of humans is purified from bodily contamination, as well as from animal and brute impurities, all

> moral virtues become essential to him. In reality, chivalry serves as a light from the sacred world. In the grace of this light, angelic attributes and the supernatural signs will manifest within the interior of its possessor, causing evil morality and animalistic states that arise in the human soul due to mundane attachments and immersion in material layers to dissipate entirely. (Kāshifi Sabzawāri 1350 Sh, 10)

In the ethics of chivalry, one strives for the hereafter while engaging in the affairs of this world. Prophet Muhammad stated, "There is no monasticism in Islam," referring to the practice of seclusion and detachment from worldly matters in order to solely focus on the afterlife. In chivalry ethics, there is no division between engaging with creation or the Creator, or between the responsibilities of this world and those of the hereafter. There is no conflict between the two in this ethical framework. People must live in this world, and hence they have to engage in worldly affairs. They cannot engross themselves in spiritual wayfaring or tariqa. Thus, al-Kāshifī says, "if tariqa is primary, then why is this discipline known as chivalry rather than tariqa? In response, say this is because not everyone has the ability to stay on tariqa, since tariqa involves following in the footsteps of al-Mustafā [Muhhamad] and al-Murtadā [Ali]. Who has the ability to do so except their immaculate children?" (Kāshifi Sabzawāri 1350 Sh, 29).

Prominent spirituals have the capacity to embark on the tariqa. Others must relinquish their worldly and social responsibilities and embrace some form of monasticism if they aspire to tread this path. The discipline of chivalry is considered a branch of Sufism (*ṭarīqa*) and monotheism (*tawḥīd*) (Kāshifī Sabzavārī 1350 Sh, 5). In *Futuwwat-nāma sultānī*, this is elucidated in relation to the historical experience of humankind, though the history discussed in that book is sacred history or meta-history. The narrative presented in that work is as follows: Sufism originates with Seth, the son of Adam, and it represents a stage of the tariqa. Thus, Sufism, conceived as mysticism, gnosis, or *walāya*, emerges simultaneously with prophethood. Just as the first human being, Adam, the father of humankind, was the inaugural prophet, his prophethood coincided with the *walāya* or imamate of his son Seth.

Adam had ten sons. One day, he summoned all of them and told them that God had ordered them to have a legitimate livelihood and engage in legitimate business. Nine of his sons adopted professions of their own in this world, but Seth secluded himself and engaged in worshipping God. From the heaven, Gabriel brought a green woolen garment and covered him with. Other angels would visit him, and when they ascended back to the heaven, they spoke about him with other angels, mentioning that there is a wool-wearing individual who worships God on Earth. Thus, the two circles of prophecy and *walāya* began. The circle of prophecy began with Adam, and the circle of saintliness commenced

with his son Seth. In the abode of servitude, Adam spread the prayer rug of Sharia, and Seth spread that of tariqa (Kāshifī Sabzavārī 1350 Sh, 70). However, in later eras, during the time of Prophet Abraham, humans could no longer bear the burden of the *khirqa* (Sufi cloak) like Seth did. Yet, they were unwilling to completely immerse themselves in this world without securing a share of the afterlife. As expressed by Rulman Merswin "the time of cloisters and convents had passed", and they needed to contemplate a new spiritual foundation. They confided in Abraham, who welcomed them into the ship of tariqa, guiding them across the sea of truth until they reached the island of chivalry. He then instructed them to build houses on that island to shield themselves against the assaults of Satan (Kāshifī Sabzawārī 1350 Sh, 7).

Thus a third circle began—the circle of chivalry. The circle of prophecy originated with Adam, and the circle of chivalry began with Abraham, who was designated as the Father of the Chivalrous (*Ab al-Fatyān*). According to the Quran, when he boldly shattered the idols and disrupted their trade, his adversaries acknowledged his chivalry, declaring, "They said, 'We heard a chivalrous man mentioning them. He is called Abraham'" (Quran, 21:60). Abraham was the origin and embodiment of chivalry, and this noble quality persisted after him through subsequent prophets, Imams, and their followers. Within the circle of prophecy, there are three main moments: the origin of prophecy (Adam), the pole of prophecy (Abraham), and the seal of prophecy (Muhammad). Similarly, the circle of chivalry encompasses three moments: the origin of chivalry (Abraham), the pole of chivalry ('Ali), and the seal of chivalry (al-Mahdi). Hence, chivalry extends beyond its moral and mystical dimensions; it possesses a profound religious aspect, arguably considered its primary facet. In essence, chivalry represents the ethics of the Prophetic religion.

The Circle of Chivalry

I believe that an understanding of the Prophetic religion is essential for grasping the concept of the "circle of chivalry" as envisioned here. In general, one can observe a distinctive feature in Corbin's works that distinguishes him from other intellectuals engaged in the exploration of religion and spirituality—his pronounced emphasis on prophethood. His contributions should be viewed as a significant endeavor to address a substantial gap in research related to religion and spirituality in our time. In the realm of modern religious studies, three main groups are typically involved: atheists, agnostics, and theists. Our primary focus lies within the sphere of theists, as it is their perspective that has laid the groundwork for the activities of atheists and agnostics. In a sense, Corbin may be seen as calling attention to prophethood and the prophetic religion in our time, given that prophets and prophethood are often more overlooked than religion and belief in God.

Radical rationalism, on one hand, and radical empiricism, on the other, have constrained the prophetic religion. The religion promoted in the modern world is

confined within the boundaries of reason alone, as articulated by Immanuel Kant. If there is room for a belief beyond rational and argumentative understanding, it is religious experience or something akin to an "existential" encounter with the sacred. What humans ultimately gain from religious belief often manifests as various formulations of what is termed "deism," essentially rational theism. However, it can be argued that despite the significance of belief in God as a central tenet of religious belief, this belief does not equate to true religious belief. The essence of religious belief, as explored in Corbin's works based on philosophical and mystical traditions, and, of course, in light of religious texts, can be understood as the belief in the unseen world and the unseen aspects of reality.

One aspect of religious belief involves faith in the unseen world, i.e. belief in God and realms surpassing the entire material world, along with countless beings inhabiting those realms—specifically, the belief in innumerable angels that mediate God's grace both in existence and in religious legislation. However, this alone is insufficient. Religious belief requires faith in the unseen aspect of the world as well, signifying that our world is adorned with sacredness. The unseen world is revealed in our world as well. This world serves as the manifestation of the unseen world, and, there exist individuals among us, of the same nature as us, in whom the unseen world is reflected. These individuals, persisting throughout history as prophets, Imams, and saints, constantly embody the hidden world. From this religious perspective, revelation or disclosure becomes a means of encountering the sacred, as God Himself has chosen to unveil His essence through these mediations.

The element of faith, in conjunction with reason, plays a decisive role in the belief in revelatory religion. One might adhere to a form of fideism, though not in the way envisioned by Søren Kierkegaard and others who perceive reason and faith as divergent, even conflicting ("I believe because it is absurd"). Instead, we refer to fideism in the sense of a "faith seeking understanding," a necessary condition for embracing this type of religious belief. Consequently, traditional Christianity regards faith, hope, and charity as the three religious virtues. Additionally, this is why Islam places so much emphasis on divine unity . The Quran asserts that polytheism, which opposes divine unity and involves associating partners with God, constitutes a grave wrong: "Truly ascrbing partners is a tremendous wrong" (31:31). Muslim spirituals have warned not only against explicit polytheism but also against implicit polytheism, a more intricate and elusive form. Prophet Muhammad himself stated, "The creeping of polytheism among my people is more imperceptible than the crawling of a black ant on a black rock in a pitch-dark night."

Implicit polytheism infiltrates our religious belief when we think or act as though other beings, alongside God, possess an independent life and existence. This implies that, though created by God, these beings have their own constitution and persistence. Genuine belief in unity of God necessitates holding the conviction that nothing exists

in the universe except God. Clearly, there is a significant distinction between this religious belief and deism that reduces God to a supernatural clockmaker, a God of the gaps, or similar metaphors. In any case, the ultimate purpose of revelatory religion can be described as a summons to monotheism, and those who positively respond to this call are adorned with the virtue of faith and purified from the vice of polytheism. Indeed, the aim of religious calling is to emancipate people from both forms of polytheism. The fulfillment of this objective necessitates the involvement of both the circles of prophecy *(nubuwwa)* and *walāya* al-Sayyid Ḥaydar al-Āmulī writes:

> All prophets, from Adam to Muhammad, emerged solely to summon people to theological *tawḥīd*—an appeal to the absolute deity [God] and a caution against limited deities, while also advocating for liberation from explicit polytheism, which is antithetical to this divine unity. Similarly, all saints, from Adam to al-Mahdi Sāhib al-Zamān, arose to beckon people to existential monotheism—a call to the absolute existence and a warning against constrained existence. They also aimed to liberate individuals from implicit polytheism, which runs counter to this onthological *tawḥīd*. (Āmulī 1386 Sh, 85, section 173)

Theological *tawḥīd*, or liberation from explicit polytheism, is relatively easy to attain, and the majority of traditional followers of religion embrace this form of monotheism. However, emancipating oneself from implicit polytheism is exceedingly challenging, or deceptively simple, so to speak. Al-Sayyid Ḥaydar himself remarks on this: "With all its simplicity, it cannot be attained by everyone. Instead, among one hundred thousand thousand individuals, only one may have this opportunity, for it is more concealed than the Simurgh of the Qaf mountain and rarer than the Red Sulphur" (Āmulī 1386 Sh, 98, section 195). Nevertheless, the ultimate purpose of religion is the belief in onthological *tawhid*, or more precisely, realization of it.

What is presented in Shi'ite prophetology within the periodic history of prophethood (namely, the sacred history of prophethood) must be understood in light of this ultimate purpose. This prophetology interprets the history of religion primarily based on the concurrent circles of *nubuwwa* and *Walāya*. Within the circle of *nubuwwa*, there are periods, each commencing with one of the seven arch-prophets (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad). The period of each of these arch-prophets signifies the descent of Sharia from heaven. However, the descent (*tanzīl*) is always accompanied by interpretation (*tàwīl*), and thus, interpretation is exclusive to the circle of *walāya*. Corresponding to every circle of *nubuwwa*, there is a circle of *walāya*. However, in each circle, the period of descent is brief, while that of interpretation is prolonged. This is precisely why many propagating prophets were sent after each Sharia-holding prophet. In essence, propagating prophets belong to the circle of *walāya*.

Indeed, *nubuwwa* and *walāya* are two sides of the same coin: *nubuwwa* represents the outer (descent), and *walāya* embodies the inner (interpretation). The quintessence of prophethood is the true prophet (*verus propheta*) or the Muhammadan truth. One facet of this true prophet (*verus propheta*) is the eternal Imam, who consistently accompanied the arch-prophets in various forms, such as Seth, Aaron, Simeon, and' Ali. This is why Prophet Muhammad proclaimed, "Ali was sent along with each prophet covertly, and with me overtly" (Āmulī 1386 Sh, 382). A famous hadith from Prophet Muhammad is also pertinent here: "I leave two weighty things among you, and as long as you hold fast to them, you will never be led astray after me: the Book of Allah and my Household" (Shaykh al-Mufīd 1413 AH, 1:233). This statement by the Prophet expresses a comprehensive and profound truth that cannot be confined to the circumstances of Islam and Muslims. In fact, it serves as a guideline for the salvation of all humanity, illustrating the religious and spiritual agenda of humanity both before and after his prophetic mission.

There is of cource, a distinction between the circle of prophecy and that of *walāya.* Since *walāya* involves *ta'wīl* (spiritual hermeneutics), and the cycle of ta'wil is longer than that of *Tanzil* (descent of prophetic revealation), *walāya* is not manifested in only one person, but in pesons "all of whom are a single light". That is why each arch-prophet (*ulū al-ʿazm*, prophet with the resoult decision) had twelve Imams; hence the Shi'ite belief in twelve Imams. Just as Prophet Muhammad is the seal of prophecy, the *walāya* corresponded to his prophecy will also be the Seal of *walāya*. Imam Ali represents the Seal of universal or absolute *walāya* meaning that due to the Seal of prophecy, there can not be a new prophecy hence no new *walāya*. After the Seal of prophecy, due to the persistence of *ta'wīl*, *walāya* will endure in the Imams of the Muhamadan circle until the day of resurrection. Consequently Imam al-Mahdi is the seal of particular *walāya* or the seal of Muhhamadan *walāya*.

> From what we have previously learned, namely that all the prophets prior to Mohammad were, towards him, the Seal of prophethood, in the same relation as the *awliyā'* or "friends of God" subsequent to the Seal of prophethood are towards the XII Imām, it follows that the same relation defines the position of all the spiritual knights, all the Javanmardān, with regard to the XII Imām, Seal and final perfection of their fotowwat or chivalry. This indicates at the same the relationship between *walāya* and *futuwwa*; this is, par excellence, the manifestation of *walāya*; it expresses its characteristic ethos. Placed where they are, each where they are, as companions of the XII Imām, this ethics makes each person responsible for the future of the Parousia, of epiphany of the Imām, the perfect man. Also spiritual chivalry (Javanmardi, Fotowwat is the ethics of fiends of God (Awliyā' Allah) of the cycle of *walāya* in the present period of "occultation" (Corbin 1972, 4:416)

Transition from Heroic Epic to Mystical Epic

A key aspect of Iranian Islam, eloquently depicted in Corbin's writings, revolves around the theme of epic and its multifaceted dimensions. Indeed, epic serves as a narrative of human bravery, courage, and valor, dedicated to safeguarding heroic or saintly ideals. Accordingly, epic involves recounting incidents that unfold for heroes in the external, world. In simpler terms, epic constitutes a narrative of the battle against devil forces in the external world, naturally captivating any reader or listener. However, as per a famous hadith from Prophet Muhammad, external combat alone is insufficient, as the greater battle lies in confronting the inner enemy. In Islamic terminology, heroic epic can be likened to the "lesser jihad," which involves participating in a morally and religiously just and fair battle. Nevertheless, this epic must be complemented by another battle—what Prophet Muhammad describes as the "greater jihad."

The Prophet elucidates the greater jihād as a battle against one's own passions. This jihād has two facets: moral and mystical. In this context, heroic epic must evolve into moral epic and, ultimately, into mystical epic. I believe this is what chivalry ethics signifies, serving as the ethics of the Occultation Period for followers of *walāya* and, in general, the ethics for all periods. Heroic epic implies that we cannot remain passive in the face of events unfolding around us, surrendering ourselves to the waves of circumstances. This demand aligns with trustful despair (*desperation fiducialis*), a characteristic of true anticipators of the Occulted Imam al-Mahdi. True anticipators are discontented with the conditions of the world and humanity but remain hopeful for reforms. Moreover, they do not turn toward superficial solutions or engage in uprisings or movements lacking profound foundations and high ideals. Under all circumstances, they remain committed to inner reform.

Therefore, their heroic epic must be supported by moral epic. They strive for moral refinement at the highest level, and while they live in this world, they are cognizant of their exile within this mundane existence. Corbin frequently cites a hadith from Imam al-Sadiq as the best articulation of the Shi'ite ideal:"Islam started out in exile (*gharīb*) and will once again be in exile. Happy are those who exile themself" (Majlisī 1403, 52:191). This sense of exile is fully visible in the life of Prophet Abraham, who originated chivalry (Father of the Chivalrous). He was "the first to turn away from this world and its pleasures, eschew adornments and wealth, seclude himself from his tribe and people, distance himself from his homeland and peers, and endure the hardships of journey and the sorrows of exile for the sake of God" (Kāshifī Sabzawārī 1350 Sh, 17). The same holds true of other chivalrous individuals mentioned in the Quran, such as the Companions of the Cave (or the Seven Sleepers): "When the youths [the chivalrous, *fatya*] took refuge in the Cave, they said, 'Our Lord! Grant us a mercy from thy presence, and make us incline to sound judgment concerning our affair'" (Quran 18:9).

To rectify the chaotic moral conditions, spiritual poverty and wretchedness of humanity, we must distance ourselves from these. While being among people and contemplating their conditions, we must isolate ourselves from them. A group of Muslim scholars and philosophers who referred to themselves as "Ikhwān al-Safā' wa-Khullān al-Wafā' " (Brethren of Purity and Loyal Friends) describe their manifesto as that of the Companions of the Cave. In their *Epistles*, they introduce themselves as follows:

> Kow, oh my brother, that we are the society of the Brothers of purity, beings who are pure, sincere and generous-hearted. We sleep in the *cave* of our father Adam through the lapse of time during which temporal vicissitudes and calamities of events turn us over, sometimes onto one side, sometimes onto another, until at last, after our dispersion through divers countries, there comes the moment of our meeting in the kingdom of the master of the eternal religion (Nāmūs Akbar), the moment in which we shall see our spiritual city rise into the air … The City out of which our father, his wife and his posterity were forced to go. (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' 1928, 4:58)

The Brothers of Purity were philosophers who likely lived in the fourth century AH (tenth century CE) in complete anonymity. Similar to the Companions of the Cave, they isolated themselves from people. However, during their exile and seclusion, they did not neglect the practice of manliness and chivalry. Throughout this period, they contemplated the moral, intellectual, and spiritual problems and tragedies of humanity. The result of their contemplations during their exile was a monumental encyclopedia with titles, chapters, and discussions that reveal many truths about them. The full title of this encyclopedia is *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity and Loyal Friends and Companions of Justice and Children of Praise*. This encyclopedia comprises fifty-two essays discussing various theoretical and practical issues. While they are concerned with the ultimate purpose of theosophy, which is theosis, deification, they also address social and moral issues, as well as natural sciences.

Translating *Nāmūs Akbar* as eternal religion, Corbin see in it an allusion to the universality of chivalry ethics. The eternal (*ḥanīf*) religion, is the religion of Abraham, the Father of the Chivalrous. "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. Rather, he was a Hanif, a Muslim" (Quran 3:67). Abraham's religion goes beyond denominational and sectarian diversifications. The quintessence of Abrahamic religions, and, in fact, the quintessence of monotheism, is Abraham's eternal religion, and he is the hero of monotheism. In practical and moral aspects, too, Abraham was a chivalrous individual who served as the role model for all chosen monotheists. On this ground, while speaking of the unity of religions of the book in terms of beliefs and theory, Corbin unifies the followers of these religions around "ecumenical chivalry."

> Since the Father of Chivalry was Abraham, this tradition encompasses the heroes of the Bible and "Christian chevaliers represented by the Seven Sleepers mentioned in the Quran. This perspective responds in the west to the idea of an "ecumenical" chivalry, which also encompasse knights of Christianity and knights of Islam. (Corbin 1972, 4:416)

Thus, one of the fundamental contributions of Corbin is his explanation of "ecumenical chivalry" in terms of chivalry ethics, which he discusses in various works such as (his preface to *Traite's des conpagnons – cheveliers*), *Temple and Contemplation*, as well as the second and fourth volumes of *Iranian Islam*. We do not have enough scope to delve into this issue, but let me point out that Corbin's comparisons between "Jām-i Jam" in Iranian tradition and the "Holy Grail" in Christian tradition, the characters of Kay Khosrow and Parsifal (scond book of *Iranian Islam*), his discussions of "the *Image templi* and templar knighthood" and "the temple and templers of the Grail" (Corbin 1986, 356 ff.), and his elaborate discussions on "Johannine Green Island" (seventh book of *Iranian* Islam). can be studied from this perspective.

This moral epic is distinct from "moral living" in today's sense of the term. While none of the requirements of moral living will be violated in this epic, the moral scene will be presented as a battlefield. Here, the objective remains to serve people and act upon moral ideals. As noted before, heroic and saintly ideals will also be at work, and they should not be deemed as contradicting or conflicting with morality but rather as being in alignment with it. Furthermore, in this moral epic, intentions will play a determining role. A kind of sincerity in action with the intention of closeness to God, promoting monotheism, or something akin to this will become significant. Unlike modern secular ethics, where intentions are not emphasized as much, in this context, they hold substantial weight. Immanuel Kant, a crucial figure in modern philosophy, assigned a central role to intentions in determining the moral value of actions. In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, he writes:

> What is essential to any moral worth of actions is *that the moral law determine the will immediately.* If the determination of the will takes place *conformably* with the moral law but only by means of a feeling, of whatever kind, that has to be presupposed in order for law to became a sufficient determining ground of will' so that the action is not done *for the sake of the law*, then the action will contain *legality* indeed but not *morality*. (Kant 1996, 198, 5:72)

For Kant, a purely sincere intention means that one performs an action *out of respect for duty*, without allowing personal interests and desires to influence their will for action. However, the intention at play here goes beyond mere sincerity; it is a

divine intention in the sense that the action must be done out of respect for God's will. Moreover, the individual must transform into an instrument at the disposal of this eternal will. In fact, if a moral action or service to people is motivated by anything other than this divine intention, it will lack considerable worth. Such a moral epic is vividly portrayed in the brilliant verses composed by Rumi, describing Imam 'Ali's battle against "Amr b. 'Abd Wudd. When the Imam had defeated 'Amr and contemplated killing him, 'Amr spat on the Imam's face. Displaying remarkable patience, the Imam delayed the act of killing him to ensure it would be driven by sincere intentions rather than anger and personal desires:

> He said, 'I am wielding the sword fo God's sake, I am the servant of God, I am not under the command of the body
> I am the lion of God, I am not the lion of passion: my deed bears witness to my religion
> (*Mathnawi*, Book One, 1387-8)

In fact, the following remark by Rumi about Imam 'Ali may concern heroic and moral epics:

> In bravery you are the Lion of the lord: in generosity indeed knows who (what) you are?
> (*Mathnawi*, Book One, 3732)

In external battle (the minor jihad), the Imam can be considered a prime exemplar of valor and courage, but his character in the internal battle (the major jihad) exemplifies an ineffable degree of manliness (*Muruwwa*) and chivalry.

This moral epic is not the ultimate destination of the journey; rather, it serves as an intermediate stage leading to a higher station—the mystical epic and triumph within it. The moral epic finds its fulfillment in the mystical epic, characterized by advancement in the hidden degrees of the world, coming to life through pure existence. According to Corbin, this marks an opportunity for a second birth. However, in Corbin's perspective, this second birth is achieved through connection to the Active Intellect, the perfect nature, the heavenly Alter ego, and the internal Imam. An articulation of this theme in the context of a mystical epic is evident in Suhrawardi's work, *The Purple Archangel*. This essay references the battle of Rostam and Esfandiyar. In conventional versions of this narrative, Rostam was cognizant of the challenges posed by the battle against Esfandiyar and its potential consequences. As expressed by Fersowsi, "who sheds Esfandiyar's blood / will be hunted by time." Nevertheless, Esfandiyar presented Rostam with a choice between esteem and humility: "Seek nothing but war or arrest." In any case, Rostam was compelled to engage in a difficult battle with Esfandiyar. Through the intervention of his father Zal, who was nurtured by Simurgh, Rostam sought the aid of Simurgh. She takes Zāl to the thores of china, giving him directions to changes the branch of

a tamarisk tree into an arrow with a dual point. In the confrontation with Esfandiyar, Rostam aimed the arrow at his eye (as Esfandiyar's sole vulnerability lay in his eyes, given that the rest of his body was impenetrable), ultimately securing victory. However, Suhrawardi's rendition of the narrative differs.

> Rostam did not have enough strength to defeat Esfandyâr and collapsed from fatigue. His father, Zāl, poured out supplications before Simurgh. However, Simûrgh naturally had the power that when someone held a mirror directly in front of her, or some other thing like a mirror, every eye that looked into that mirror would be blinded. Zâl made a breastplate of iron with a perfectly polished surface and put that on Rostam. Likewise he put a perfectly polished helmet on Rostam's head and hung pieces of mirror from his horse. Then he directed Rostam to place himself directly in front of Simurgh. Esfandyâr inevitably had to come at Rostam. The moment he came close, Simurgh's rays that fell on the breastplate and the mirrors reflected back into Esfandyârs eyes; he became dazed and couldn't see anything anymore, He imagined and believed that he was wounded in the eyes because he caught a glance of two sharp points. He fell from his horse and perished at the hands of Rostam. Consider that the two points from the arrow made out of a branch of the *gāz* tree of which the recitals speak, are Simurgh's two wings. (Suhrawardī 1372 Sh, 3:233-34; Corbin 1972, 2:253)

In Suhrawardi's version, the battle of Rostam and Esfandiyar transcends the realm of a mere heroic epic. A central theme here revolves around the concept of the "mirror phenomenon." In the mystical epic, the human act and its impact occur in *signifactio passive* (passive meaning). Essentially, we are to glean from mirrors that the reception of grace is contingent upon being polished and refined. The symbolic narrative of the contest between the Chinese and Romans in rumi's mathnawi (Book first, 3467ff.) is relevant in this context (see Corbin 1394c Sh, pp. 21 ff). The takeaway from that anecdote is:

> Though you're dark matter, just like iron, you
> Should nonetheless start burnishing well too.
> (*Mathnawi*, Book Four, 2470)

We ought to be the bearers of mirrors reflecting the radiance of Simurgh, a constant illumination in our world that requires capable souls to receive such radiance. However, in Suhrawardi's recital, where mirror-holding before Simurgh's lights is devised by Zal and Rostam, the question arises: Who emerges triumphant in this battle—Rostam or Esfandiyar? The story concludes ambiguously at this juncture.

However, if we consider Suhrawardi's recital as a mystical, rather than heroic epic, we can more clearly speak of the triumphant of this battle. Prophet Muhammad

said, "Your Lord sends in the days of your era special breaths, so make sure to receive them!"

> The Prophet said, "In these days the breathings of God prevail: keep ear and mind (attentive) to thesec (spiritual) influences, cacth up such-like breatings." The (divine) breathing came, beheld by you, and departed: it gave life to whom if would departed. Another breating has arrived. Mayst not miss this one too. (*Mathnawi*, Book One, 1951-4)

In reality, Simurgh's radiance represents the "breathings of God" sent to humans, bestowing upon them life and soul. This enlivening of living humans constitutes the "second birth." Consequently, the one who exposed himself to these breaths—Simurgh's radiance—in the battle between Rostam and Esfandiyar was not Rostam but Esfandiyar. The "vulnerability" of Esfandiyar's eyes should be interpreted as the extraordinary acuity of his vision, the openness of his inner eyes, and the transformation of the eye on his head into the eye of heart. Thus, as a physical creature, Esfandiyar was impervious to Simurgh's radiance except through the eye of heart, similar to other individuals. Consequently, Esfandiyar succumbed to the second birth and to death in a state of ecstasy. His eyes became entranced by the light of Simurgh's radiance. According to al-Suhrawardi's narrative, Zal sought Simurgh's assistance to spare Rostam from physical death (at the hands of Esfandiyar) and ensured the triumph of death in the state of ecstasy, masquerading as apparent defeat for Esfandiyar. In this manner, Suhrawardi illustrates the culmination of the Iranian heroic epic into the mystical epic. Corbin contends that the notion of heroic epic culminating to mystical epic aligns not only with Suhrawardi's Illuminationist Philosophy, his lifelong research, but also with the overarching significance of the illumination doctrine in the spiritual fabric of Islamic Iran. This transformation from heroic epic to mystical epic, a fundamental aspect of the Iranian consciousness, is evident in Rumi's words. In a renowned ghazal in *Dīvān Shams*, he expounds on the ideal human, the Perfect Man (*Anthropos teleios)* portraying him in two figures: Imam ʻAli and Rostam:

> Saddened by weak-willed comrades, my heart aches,
> Yearning for God's Lion (Ali) and Rostam, my desire takes.

It should be noted, however, that these two figures differ significantly in many respects. Indeed, Imam ʻAli cannot be likened to Rostam or any other individual except for immaculate saints. Yet, a pivotal characteristic of the ideal human in the Iranian consciousness is "chivalry," a trait manifest in our national consciousness through Rostam and the heroes of Shah Nama. In our religious consciousness, this virtue is embodied by Imam ʻAli, other Imams, and their close companions. Thus, the ethics of chivalry can be seen as a point of connection between the national and religious identities of Iranians.

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