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## Shī'ī Imāmī Thought on Existence, Life, and Extraterrestrials

Shahbaz Haider, Abdullah Ansar and Syed Ali Asdaq Naqvi

### ABSTRACT

In this article, we develop the intersection of Shī'ī Islamic philosophy and extraterrestrial life. We explain the view of Ḥukamā (Islamic Philosophers) and what implications it holds for asserting a plurality of worlds and life forms. In addition to this, we bring Shī'ī hadīth sources which also suggest the existence of other life forms outside the earth. Combining the philosophical and textual evidence, we argue that the Shī'ī school not only suggests the existence of extraterrestrial life but also provides a potential framework for possible human-extraterrestrial interactions.

### KEYWORDS

Extraterrestrial life; cosmos; Islamic philosophy; Shia Hadīth; Islamic mysticism; human-extraterrestrial interaction (HEI)

## Introduction

The current paper studies the philosophical, mystical, and traditional narratives revolving around the phenomena of existence, life, and extraterrestrials in the Shī'ī school of thought. The Shī'ī philosophical school, commonly known as Hikmah or Falsafa, argues for the primacy of intellect and explores the traditional world through the lens of intellectual reasoning in order to construct a comprehensive picture of religious thought. This approach is deep-rooted in the Imāmī traditions themselves, for there are teachings to employ intellectual prowess while reading any narration from the Imāms or Prophet.

The sequence of the discussion starts from the understanding of existence which in Shī'ī philosophical viewpoint is hierarchical or gradational in nature. Prominent Shī'ī thinkers like Sayyed Ḥaider Āmolī (d.1385),<sup>1</sup> Ṣadr ad-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī (d.1641),<sup>2</sup> Ḥoṣein Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d.1981)<sup>3</sup> and Sayyed Jalāl-ed-Dīn Āshtīānī (d.2005)<sup>4</sup> have extensively contributed to these doctrines. The principal point of the hierarchy is the Necessary Being, otherwise called God, which is the simplest reality and the basis of existence. God is pure existence himself and the point of absolute unity, from whose existence emanates a chain of existents, the Intellects, or Angels. As the emanation proceeds from top to bottom, the aspects of multiplicity increase within each intellect, leading to the existence of the material world that has an inherent plurality.

The research work discusses how this plural world, in the eyes of Shī'ī Philosophers, is the home to substantial motion, which in this worldview, is the basis for Soul's coming into being. Then the narrations are mentioned from Shī'ī Imāms that talk about the existence of a plurality of worlds with distributed life forms within. The text indicates the presence of other beings besides humans in the world, as the infinity of God demands his infinite expositions. This whole overview leads to certain metaphysical, teleological, and religious implications.

This approach opens new doors for research into the nature of life and the possibility of extraterrestrial life. While previous engagements with Islam and astrotheology have laid some fundamental groundwork to conceive of extraterrestrial life in an Islamic framework and argue that Islam and the existence of extraterrestrial life are compatible with each other,<sup>5</sup> there is not much literature which specifically presents the synthesizing analysis of Islamic philosophical Shīʿī thought. Though engagements like that of Iqbal (2018) do mention views of Sunni Kalām schools, they do not engage as thoroughly with the Shīʿī philosophical schools that share differences with the aforementioned schools in some very important respects (such as eternity of universe, emanationism, rule of one, principle of benevolence, and other issues) that have implications on astrotheological discussions.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, from a textual point of view, though there are Sunni sources which can be interpreted to imply the existence of extraterrestrial life, it can be posited that the volume of Shīʿī sources on the subject matter, attributed to the Prophet or the 12 Imāms, is higher because for Shīʿī sources, the sayings of Imāms are also treated as Ḥadīth. This possibly gives a wider Shīʿī dataset to engage with the given subject. Apart from a brief mention by Determann (2020) where he claims that the Islamic philosophers such as Avicenna, al-Birūnī and the poet Nizāmī Ganjavī were among the medieval figures who speculated about the plurality of worlds,<sup>7</sup> there is not much that elucidates the views of Islamic philosophers on the plurality of worlds and extraterrestrial life. In contexts when Islamic philosophical views are described as “anti-science” by the likes of Pakistani Scientist Hoodhboy, this paper clearly lays out how Islamic philosophy rationally lays a case for the possibility of the existence of extraterrestrial existence and presents an ethical framework for conduct with them.<sup>8</sup> It also paves a pathway for analyzing how Islamic theosophical doctrines can help in understanding the nature of life and Being which can in turn create a framework for a probable human-extraterrestrial interaction (HEI).

### **Basis of Discourse in Shīʿī Philosophical School**

Before indulging in an inquiry of Shīʿī philosophy about extraterrestrial life, one must know the epistemological basis for the school. For the Shīʿī philosophers and the broader Shīʿī school as well, the intellect has great importance in religious discourse unlike some more textual and literalist schools. The basis of theology (ʿAqīdah) and basic principles (Uṣūl) is established through the use of reason. In one of the many reports from the Imāms on the intellect, we find the sixth Imām, Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d.765),<sup>9</sup> stating that the authority of God over the creation is the prophet and the authority in what is between the creation is the intellect.<sup>10</sup> This entails presenting rational justifications for a belief in God, prophethood, divine guidance, and so on. To engage with this responsibility, the Shīʿī school has developed a mystical and philosophical interpretation of Islam which can serve to answer the question of this paper. These philosophical and mystical commitments come with their own cosmogony, ontology, and metaphysics and it is only in this broader narrative that the Shīʿī philosophical view of life and extraterrestrial life can be understood. The Shīʿī philosophical school is known by various names in academic discussions such as Hikmah (The Wisdom) as mentioned in the famous Islamic philosophy textbook written by Ḥoṣein Ṭabāṭabāʿī, “Bidāyat al-Ḥikmah” (The Opening of Wisdom).<sup>11</sup> In addition to this, the Shīʿī mystical school

which is inherently related to Hikmah is known as ‘Irfān (Gnosis).<sup>12</sup> The preferred term used by those internal to the tradition though is “Hikmah” and out of academic courtesy and religious respect, this will be the term used in this paper from henceforth.<sup>13</sup> In this Shī‘ī Hikmah worldview, the history internal to the tradition suggests that the view held by the Ḥukamā (the philosophers) and ‘Urafā (the mystics) is the worldview that is taught by the rightly guided Imāms themselves. Therefore, the philosophical worldview that is adopted by the Shī‘ī Ḥukamā has philosophical as well as religious importance. Given that the Shī‘ī worldview treats the Imām as a divinely appointed person, their sayings are also trustable especially when they can be backed by logical evidence as well. A report from the first Shī‘a Imām, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d.661), states that one must use reason to accept or reject a report since it is the most primal way of judging the veracity of a report.<sup>14</sup> This understanding of basic Shī‘ī philosophical epistemology is very important to understand because much of the evidence for extraterrestrial life in Shī‘ī corpus is from the sayings of the Imāms.

### The Cosmogony of Shī‘ī Ḥukamā

While there are nuanced differences between the sub-schools of Ḥukamā (such as the Ishraqis, Sadrians and Avicennians), the general cosmogony is the same which is held by other Islamic schools (such as Akbarians) as well.<sup>15</sup> In this worldview, God is the most simple and basic reality which can not be divided further.<sup>16</sup> It is the reality through which all other realities get their existence from as no other reality essentially is real apart from this one. This reality does not directly create everything but rather it creates through spiritual and intellectual intermediaries who gradually increase in their multiplicity as they get disconnected from the ultimate source of existence.<sup>17</sup> The only reality that is directly created by God is the First Intellect which is the reality of Prophet Muhammad, all the other prophets, and the Infallible Imāms.<sup>18</sup> In one of the reports, the sixth Imām, Imām Ja‘far al-Šādiq states that the intellect is the first creation out of the immaterial creations (*rūḥāniyyīn*).<sup>19</sup> It is through this reality that another reality is emanated and so on until the scheme of emanation reaches such existential deficiency that this world can come into existence which, in its nature, is marked by great multiplicity and motion. Although limited, the universe has enough existence to sustain multiple life forms. This is proven in virtue of the very fact that the existence of an extraterrestrial life form is metaphysically conceivable and does not lead to a logical contradiction. This nature of the universe suggests the possibility of the existence of extraterrestrial life. The same idea is also analyzed through the lens of Divine Names as well where the Divine Essence is the basis for all the Divine Names in perfect unity and in everything else, the Divine Names manifest in a way that befits that essence. They are fully manifested in a relative unity in the First Intellect but from thereon, as the intensity of existence decreases, the perfect union of the divine names also gets multiplied and different divine names manifest differently in a different creation. For our topic, the most important Divine Name is The Alive (Al-Ḥayy), given that our discussion is on life.<sup>20</sup> It is also argued that all the Divine Names and attributes are infinite in their own nature.<sup>21</sup> It is also argued that the cause must have a mutual affinity and synchrony with the effect such that the perfection that is within the cause must also exist within the effect as well, according to the capacity of the effect. Due to this, it can be said that since

God is eternally alive and is identical to the reality of the pure infinite life, there must exist in his effect as well life in infinite ways.<sup>22</sup> This is the primary philosophical argument that can be used by Ḥukamā to argue for the existence of extraterrestrial life.

### The Revelational Theory of Shī'ī Ḥukamā

Islam uses figurative and allegorical language to explain nuanced concepts to people who might not necessarily understand them in their truest representation. [Q 24:35] This idea that revelation is an allegorical and figurative representation of complex and nuanced truths, is widely held by Islamic philosophers. According to the Shī'ī philosophers as well, following the Sadrian and the Avicennian tradition, the Qur'ān is a book that is filled with metaphors and allegories to explain complex truths to the masses.<sup>23</sup> This is done so that the audience can be diversified and the message can reach a wider variety of people. Given that there is gradation in the intensity of the intellectual capabilities of people and every person has a different level of intellect and they all need to be accommodated, the revelation, just like a teacher who uses the simple notation to explain complex ideas to students, uses simple explanations that contain deeper truths for those who seek. This revelational theory suggests that any intellectual being can benefit from the revelation given that they are able to comprehend the universals that are explained in it. As discussed later, this gives a common base for probable human-extraterrestrial interactions (HEI). In one of the reports, the Prophet Muhammad is cited as saying that the group of prophets speaks to people according to their intellectual level and capacity.<sup>24</sup> Some other reports also state that the Prophets and Imāms as well as all people sent by God do not communicate to people what is unknown to them and only describe to them what is relatable and known to them.<sup>25</sup> Philosophers have not only brought various verses of the Qur'ān to support this theory of revelation but have also made logical arguments in support of it as well. According to them, this lexical simplicity and contextual depth of the Qur'ān is essentially the reason that the Qur'ān suggests pondering over the signs. This encouragement of pondering over the signs of God which relate to the inner self of the people but also the outer world itself is, from the Shī'ī theosophical point of view, is a reason for the search of extraterrestrial life. Many Islamic schools apart from the Shī'ī philosophers believe that the Qur'ān has deeper reading (bāṭin) that is only accessible to people of knowledge. [10:101] To transcend the symbols and to understand the deeper meaning of Qur'ān is one of the main goals in the esoteric sects of Islam.<sup>26</sup> Seeking knowledge and understanding reality is a specialty of conscious beings like humans. It is due to this reason that humans hold a special status in Islamic Cosmology among other existents [17:70].

The comprehension of the Islamic philosophical conception of cosmology and existence requires an understanding of what Islam believes to be the most fundamental reality of Existence itself. Similar to other religious traditions, Islam also believes that there is a hierarchy of Existence in which immaterial gets precedence over the material. The soul is considered superior and is thought of as having more existential value than the material body per se, with the latter having more multiplicity and non-existence. Because consciousness is perfection and the Necessary Existence, that is God, is the basis of all perfection, then God also is the basis of all consciousness and is consciousness itself.

Therefore, it follows from this that the ultimate consciousness must manifest its infinitude in infinite ways. This argumentation hints toward multiple manifestations of consciousness in the material world such as extraterrestrial life. “And of his signs is the creation of the heavens and earth and what He has dispersed throughout them of creatures. And He, for gathering them when He wills, is competent” [Saheeh International Translation,42:29].

In Islamic Philosophy, the Necessary Existence is absolutely simple in all respects, completely devoid of all multiplicity, and that which is devoid of all multiplicity can not directly create two ontologically different limited existents because it requires a limitation in the cause as well as a multiplicity in it. Therefore, Islamic Philosophers believe in the Intermediaries such as the First Intellect which is called as “al-Haqīqah al-Muhammadiyah” by esoteric Islamic Schools. The First Intellect is different from God only insofar that one is contingent and the other is necessary. The First Intellect causes the next intellect to come into existence and so on. This whole chain of existents is known as the vertical chain of Being. It is in these intermediaries that angels exist as well, as eternal intellects.<sup>27</sup> This chain of Being ends at humans and other conscious agents which are the last spiritual beings in this chain of Being. Extraterrestrial life would also fall in this chain.

Therefore, every element in this chain has more unity and existence than the one which is below it. This is the concept of gradation of Existence. Every lower realm of existence is just an imperfect image of that which is above it. In this way, the perfect existence is the only true existence and everything else is merely an image of it. The universe which is the lowest in this series is also a changing image of the unified reality. Since the universe is weak in its existence and multiple in many respects, it holds the capacity to change.<sup>28</sup> This capacity to change also gives it the potential to be closer to perfection but this perfection can not be sustained because it will be changed because of the changing nature of material reality. The phenomenon and philosophy of substantial motions which suggests that the substances of existents change is also an important doctrine of esoteric and philosophical schools and it is this substantial motion which becomes the cause for consciousness in this material reality.<sup>29</sup> Given that all of the universe has this potential, such life can exist anywhere because all that is required for its existence is substantial motion.

The Qur’ān points out this changing and dynamic nature of material in a verse: “And you see the mountains, thinking them rigid, while they will pass as the passing of clouds” [Saheeh International Translation, 27:88].

For the origin of life, the Qur’ān suggests that every living thing comes out of water [21:30]. Many narrations of Imām also suggest that life is an effect of water and that water is essential for life to exist.<sup>30</sup> It is possible for these traditions to be interpreted in a way that suggests all living things as habitants of the earth are subject to be dependent upon water. This then suggests that wherever water may be found, it is possible for life to exist there given that substantial motion happens. There is also a tradition related to Imām Ja‘far al-Şādiq which hints towards existence and presences of water bodies on other planets.<sup>31</sup> There are other narrations as well that suggest that water also was not present on the Earth at first but then it emerged on the Earth and that is what made life possible.<sup>32</sup> Consciousness, knowledge, and ability to strive are the fundamental elements of life that are found to various degrees in all living things.<sup>33</sup>

The fundamental conception of Islamic Philosophy is that there is only one true reality and that is the reality of God. All that exists apart from it is away from God and its main purpose is to unite with God once again. This notion takes God as the focal point of all existents and other existents as things that are trying to achieve their goal, their union with God.<sup>34</sup> A Quranic verse explains this return journey: “To God we belong and to him we return” [2:156].

The perfection of all existents, including living things, is in their own motion, through which they are moving towards perfection. This inherent desire for perfection in existence is what moves conscious beings to strive for a better stage. This is the element that creates hope and order in a conscious being because they forgo present and existing reality for a reality that might exist in the future which is essentially unseen.<sup>35</sup> Given that this is the universal law of reality, if extraterrestrial life exists, their return would also be to the same origin and this will entail in their nature the same kind of desire and experience as it does in us. If this is the case, then this can be a common point for any probable HEI in future as both of them would be able to relate at a basic conscious level. It also suggests that if extraterrestrial life would have enough intelligence, they would also be able to realize the existence of God by using their essential intellect which would be in them. The proof for their existence can also be argued for from the scripture itself.

### Islamic Shī‘ī Traditions Regarding Space and Extraterrestrial Life

The credible sources of Islam, both textual and rational, have talked about the concept of conscious beings outside of earth, which is a remarkable distinct feature of Islam. The Qur’ān explains the creation of heavens and earth and dispersion of living creations throughout their dimensions.<sup>36</sup> “And of his signs is the creation of the heavens and earth and what He has dispersed throughout them of creatures. And He, for gathering them when He wills, is competent” [Saheeh International Translation, 42:29].

The Qur’ānic verse [Q 1:2] translates as “praise to God, lord of the worlds”. The phrase “lord of the worlds” (rabb al-‘ālamīn) comes many times in the scripture, 42 precisely. The word “worlds” is mentioned about seventy-three times in total, whereas the singular form of it is not even mentioned once.<sup>37</sup> This shows that the scripture gives a concept of multiple worlds which can be used to argue that there would be another world as well which would be similar to the human world. This can be regarded as scriptural evidence for extraterrestrial life.

At several places, the Qur’ān states that the creation of seven earths and seven skies was done in stages. [Q 2:29, 17:44, 23:86, 41:12, 65:12, 67:3, 71:15]. In some sources, these have been taken to mean 7 Earths, all of them are similarly inhabited like this Earth is. While mentioning the superiority that is given to the children of Adam, the Qur’ān talks about their superiority over a great proportion of the creation [17:70]. This verse may also be taken to indicate the possibility of different forms of conscious life where there is a hierarchy and the children of Adam are not superior to all those present within that hierarchy, but only to some of them.

On the authority of the sixth Shī‘ī Imām, Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, a narration mentions the creation of 12,000 worlds that are broader than the seven earths and heavens, and these universes (or the creations within) are not aware of the presence of the other ones.<sup>38</sup> One other tradition from Imām al-Ṣādiq suggests that 40 other suns and



moons (with their surrounding celestial bodies) are present with their own conscious beings who are unaware of the existence of humans.<sup>39</sup> Numbers like 7, 40 or 12000 have been interpreted to merely mean the abundance and not refer to exact amounts.<sup>40</sup>

An interesting tradition attributed to Prophet Muhammad (d.632) goes as follows:

“God created 100,000 lanterns, then hung them from the empyrean [‘arsh]. All the heavens and the earths and everything within them are in one lantern, even paradise and hell. Other than God, no one knows what lies in the other lanterns”.<sup>41</sup>

It is related to Allameh Shahrestani<sup>42</sup> (d.1967) that he interprets this tradition suggesting that the lanterns actually refer to the shape of galaxies because both can resemble the shape of an egg. A lantern is also similar to a galaxy insofar that both have their source of light and illumination in the center. Galaxies, due to their gravitation, have a higher density in the center, which makes their center brighter. The same high luminosity at the center is true for lanterns.<sup>43</sup> This narration can also suggest the existence of a multiverse because it is possible for every lantern to be its own universe. In this way, there would be multiple universes substantiated by the empyrean which in mystical and philosophical terms coincides with one of the intellects in the hierarchical series.

For Shias, it is attributed to their first Imām, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, that he said that there are cities similar to those of humans exist in outer space as well.<sup>44</sup> This is particularly notable because this suggests that not only aliens exist but they are intelligent enough to found cities.<sup>45</sup> A further saying of the fifth Shī‘ī Imām, Imām al-Baqir (d.733) suggests that God’s creation is infinite and he will create more creations succeeding humans who will inhabit new earths and heavens. It also suggests that God has created many worlds with many other breeds of humans but this breed is the latest one in the series.<sup>46</sup> This a very clear narration which suggests that there are other human-like existents as well that humans are not in contact with as of yet but can be in contact with. Coming from the philosophical point of view, it also suggests that these lifeforms will also have their Imām who will be guiding them.

Some narrations even suggest that there is a conscious life that has escaped many means of death and will live till the day of judgment and that they are unaffected by Satan.<sup>47</sup> In this context, the judgment day can be regarded as a doomsday event when their living space is destroyed by a mass extinction level event such as the events described in the Qur’ān . [Q 52:9, 82:1, 84:1-2, 69:16, 55:37]

Many further narrations can be referenced from Shī‘ī literature that relate themes which are similar to the ones mentioned above.<sup>48</sup> In order to avoid repetition, all the narrations are not being mentioned here because they fundamentally convey the same meaning of a multitude of conscious existents, while these traditions differ only in their use of the metaphorical language.

These Shī‘ī narrations are in line with the principles of the esoteric schools of Islam which claim that The One principle that is truly infinite in its existence must have infinite manifestations that are finite in their individual existence. In this worldview, it is not only possible that aliens exist but they also argue for their existence. These esoteric schools argue that it is impossible for the manifestations of true infinity to be finite because of the very fact that the cause is infinite and the cause and effect must have some relation with each other. Since the limited existents can not be infinite in their



existence because of their very essence, they must be infinite in their number because that is not essentially impossible. It must also be understood that when a truly infinite reality, whose essence and existence are identical, would self-manifest and reveal itself, having infinite attributes, it would require infinite manifestations to manifest those infinite attributes.<sup>49</sup>

### Implications of Shī'ī View on Extraterrestrial Life

Given the complex philosophical worldview that has been explained so far, we will now try to present one coherent view that can be constructed by the Hikmah doctrines. Monotheism can offer a common ground for any such discovery of alien life, based on its central idea of “one principle” that is the origin of everything visible and invisible. This principle can make us embrace all life that is initially considered as alien.<sup>50</sup> We argue that using the Shī'ī Hikma view one can possibly not only accept the existence of extraterrestrial life but also argue that extraterrestrial life exists as well. In this way, the Shī'ī tradition, in this analysis, can be counted as one of those religious traditions that have an ethical framework for the communication and the treatment of extraterrestrial life as well which is derived using the same moral realism that is used in all Shī'ī Hikma ethical theories. As mentioned before, for the Ḥukamā, reality exists in the form of a hierarchy. The better and more fully an existent manifests the divine names, the more worthy of praise that existence is and the more it has guardianship over those below it in the hierarchy. Given that humans do come in contact with extraterrestrial life, the communication and relation with them would be on a similar basis. At first, it would be determined what the intensity of the intellect in these extraterrestrial life forms is. If it is the case that they have substantial intellectual power, then the Ḥukamā would argue that by the very definition of being an intellectual community, there would be a guide and prophet among them as well because it is impossible for an intellectual community to be left without a guide. Weintraub (2014) notes a similar line of argument, though not directly with regards to Islamic philosophers, that the extraterrestrial life could have their own prophets and religious symbology that can be unified by the universal metaphysical symbols of revelation, prophethood and prayer etc.<sup>51</sup> In this way, they would argue that by the very necessity of nature, just like physical laws, there are metaphysical laws as well that ensure universal instantiations of general principles. The existence of a guide is one such metaphysical principle. This metaphysical law ensures that these intellectual extraterrestrial life forms would also have a religious expression in some form. Not only this, through their view of moral realism, they would also argue that this intellectual extraterrestrial life form would also have moral principles that would be logically equivalent to the human moral principles that have been taught by the guide of humans in this world. This is because, for every intellectual life form, there are two guides, one that is internal and the other that is external. The internal guide is the intellect itself which essentially knows the real moral factors and also has the computational power to bring about a particular instantiation of it as well. The outer guide is the divine guidance in the human form, the Imām, who is a physical manifestation of the metaphysical reality of the First Intellect and exists to guide humanity. This process is done by appealing to the natural human faculty of reasoning that they possess due to having the essence of an intellectual being. Therefore, if the extraterrestrial

life forms are truly intellectual beings, they would also have a similar reality as that of humans', even though the particularities of it would be suited according to their biological, ecological, economic, and psychological realities. If the reality of this life form is similar to humans, there can be potential communication between humans and this life form. If this life form would be intellectual, then it would be considered a human specimen because according to Islamic philosophers a human is a rational animal (Ḥaywān al-Nātiq).<sup>52</sup> If it is not the case that this extraterrestrial life form is an intellectual animal, then this life form would fall under the definition of animal or plant or similar. Islamic philosophers also agree with the tripartite Aristotelian model of the soul in which the Soul has a nutritive, sensitive, and rational component.<sup>53</sup> Given what components the life form would have, it would be categorized accordingly.

## Conclusion

The concept of extraterrestrial life is one of the extensively discussed topics and while its resonance in human thought goes back at least two and a half millennia,<sup>54</sup> in this paper, we have made an effort to sketch a critical overview of this concept from Shī'ī Imāmī School of thought, that includes the philosophical, mystical, traditional and to some extent moral perspectives. This needs a fundamental understanding of how the phenomena of existence and life are considered in this school, and without such comprehension, one cannot properly delve into the topics such as extraterrestrial life, which demand a deeper and systematic approach to the foundations of the doctrine. Therefore our focus in this paper was also on dealing with the subjects of existence and life, where we discussed how a plurality of existents emanate from a single source and how this hierarchy leads to the creation of material Cosmos, according to Shī'ī thought. Here the Shia Hukma argue that the multiplicity of the material universe paves the way for its perpetual motion, which leads to the flourishing of life in this world. The attributes of God manifest in the form of various creations that are scattered throughout the material realm, as certain traditions highlight this notion, some of them being discussed in the paper. This approach sheds light on a mostly unexplored domain of the Shī'ī viewpoint regarding life, its source, and its probable presence elsewhere in the universe. This paper finally tries to argue that based on the nature of extraterrestrials and their intelligence, they can be categorized accordingly. Considering all this, the Shī'ī school gives a fundamental framework to astrotheology through its analysis of existence, motion, and life.

## Notes

1. Sayyed Ḥaider Āmolī (1319–1385) was a Shī'ī philosopher, mystic and exegete, who is known for his commentaries on works of Islamic mystic Ibn 'Arabī. His elucidation of Shī'ī mystical positions served as basis for further developments in Shī'ī mysticism ('Irfān). His famous works include *Jāme'al-Asrār wa Manba' al-Anwār* and *Naṣṣ Al-nuṣūṣ Fi Sharh Fuṣūṣ*.
2. Ṣadr ad-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī, also known as Mullā Ṣadrā, (1571–1636) is often called the most significant Islamic philosopher after Ibn Sina. He is known as Ṣadr al-Muta'allihin (Master of the theologians) for his philosophical framework that synthesized philosophy, mysticism and textual traditions. His most famous work is *Asfār al-arba'a*.

3. Ḥoṣein Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1904–1981) was a Shī'ī mystic, philosopher, and exegete. He was a commentator of Mullā Ṣadrā and famously wrote a voluminous 27-volume commentary of Quran titled *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*. He was also the teacher of Hosein Nasr and held sessions with French philosopher Henry Corbin.
4. Sayyed Jalāl-ed-Dīn Āshtīānī (1925–2005) was a student of Ḥoṣein Ṭabāṭabā'ī and a mystic and philosopher in his own right. He taught mysticism and philosophy to contemporary experts of mysticism including Chittick. His main works include commentaries on works of Mullā Ṣadrā and Ibn 'Arabī, refutation of Ghazālī and anthology of works of Iranian philosophers (which he collected with French philosopher Henry Corbin).
5. D.A. Weintraub, "Islam," in *Religions and Extraterrestrial Life. Springer Praxis Books* (Cham: Springer, 2014). doi:10.1007/978-3-319-05056-0\_15
6. Muzaffar Iqbal, "Islamic Theology Meets ETI," in *Astrotheology: Science and Theology Meet Extraterrestrial Life*, ed. Ted Peters (Eugene: Cascade, 2018), 216–27.
7. Jörg Determann, *Islam, Science Fiction and Extraterrestrial Life: The Culture of Astrobiology in the Muslim World* (2020), 11. doi:10.5040/9780755601288.
8. Weintraub, "Islam."
9. Imāms in Shī'ī theology are considered to be guides appointed by God to guide the people on Earth and an Imām is to be present in every era to guide the people to God's message and interpret Islam correctly for them. The Shī'ī Imāms in the Twelver tradition consider 12 infallible Imāms from the progeny of Prophet Muhammad to be the successors of the Prophet and those that carry forward his message. The sixth Imām is Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who was an influential scholar, jurist and Imām in the eighth century CE. For more details on Shī'ī Imāms, refer to: Momen's *An Introduction to Shī'ī Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelve* and Pierce's *Twelve Infallible Men: The Imāms and the Making of Shī'ism*, etc.
10. Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi* (Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1983), 8/95 & 153. Also see: 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, and Jazā'irī Ṭayyib al-Mūsawī, *Tafsīr Al-Qummī* (Mu'assasat Dār Al-Kitāb Lil-Ṭibā'ah Wa-Al-Nashr, 1404 AH). 1/25.
11. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Bidāyat al-Ḥikmah*, "Mu'assasat Al-Nashr Al-Islāmi," 1416.
12. Mukhtar H. Ali, "Review of Treatise on Spiritual Journeying and Wayfaring, by Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī Baḥr al-'Ulūm, edited by Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Ḥusaynī Ṭihranī, translated by Tawus Raja," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2014): 105–109.
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15. Khalil Andani, "Metaphysics of Muhammad," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 8, no. 2 (2020): 99–175.
16. Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World: A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps, Volume 3* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 323.
17. *Ibid.*, 68.
18. *Ibid.*, 68.
19. al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi*, 8/95 & 153. Also see: al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, 1/21.
20. Dāwūd ibn Maḥmūd Qayṣarī, *The Horizons of Being: the Metaphysics of Ibn al-'Arabī in the Muqaddimat al-Qayṣarī*, trans. Mukhtar Ali (2020), 33.
21. Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World*, 198.
22. William C. Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought* (SUNY Press, 2012), 145.
23. Averroës, *The Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth, Epistle dedicatory (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 6.
24. al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi*, 8/95 & 153. Also see: al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, 1/21.
25. Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Ibn Bābawayh, *Al-Khiṣāl*, ed. 'Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Qum: Jāmi'a-yi Mudarrisin, 1362 AH), 25. Also see: Muḥammad ibn 'Alī Ibn Bābawayh, *d. 991 or 2. Al-Tawḥīd* (Manshūrāt Jamā'at Al-Mudarrisin fī Al-Ḥawzah Al-'Ilmiyah, 1978), 95, etc.

26. There are multiple narrations mentioning the Qur'an having many layers. A hadith states that the Prophet said, "every verse of the Qur'an has an exoteric and esoteric meaning." Another report from the fourth Imām, 'Ali b. al-Husayn (659-713), states that "the Qur'an has 4 layers and the truths are for the Prophets." See: Reyshahrī, Mizān al-Ḥikmah, Dār Al-Ḥadīth, 2001. 3/2532 & 3/3316, Muḥammad Bāqir Ibn-Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār* (Dār Iḥyā' At-urāt Al-'Arabī, 1983), 89/20 & 103.
27. Ṭabāṭabā'ī Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Bidāyat al-Ḥikmah* (Mu'assasat Al-Nashr Al-Islāmī, 1416), 173-4.
28. Ibrahim Kalin, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mulla Sadra on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition* (OUP, 2010), 101. See also: Muhammad'Abdul Haq, "Mullā Ṣadrā's Concept of Substantial Motion," *Islamic Studies* 11, no. 2 (1972): 82.
29. Haq, "Mullā Ṣadrā's Concept of Substantial Motion," 86.
30. al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi*, 8/95 & 153. Also see: al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, 2/69.
31. Ibn Bābawayh, *Al-Tawḥīd*, 281. This meaning can be found in multiple reports where the sky is mentioned as containing oceans and seas of waters.
32. al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfi*, 8/95 & 121, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Mufid, *Al-Irshād fi ma'rifat hujaj Allah 'ala l-'ibād* (Qum, 1413 AH), 2/165.
33. Muhammad Taqī Falsafī, *Āyatul Kursī Āsmānī Paghām-i-Tawḥīd* (Lahore: Misbahul Qur'an Trust, 2002), 47-8.
34. Murtaza Mutahhari, *Islām aur Kāināt*, trans. Riyaz Husain Jafari (Lahore: Idarah Minhaj al-Salihin. 2000), 92.
35. *Ibid.*, 93.
36. Determann, *Islam, Science Fiction and Extraterrestrial Life*, 11.
37. *Ibid.*, 10.
38. Ibn Bābawayh, *Al-Khiṣāl*, 639.
39. al-Ṣaffār, Baṣa'ir al-darajāt, 1404 AH, 510-13.
40. Husayn Ansariyan, Sharḥ Duā-i-Kumayl, Dār al-'Irfān, 1382 AH, 110-11.
41. *Ibid.*, 110. Also see: Abu-'t-Tana' Ṣihāb-ad-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī, and 'Alī 'A. 'Aṭīya, Rūḥ Al-ma'ānī fi tafsīr Al-Qur'an Al-'aẓīm Wa-'s-Sab' Al-maṭānī (Dār Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyya, 1415 AH), 1/82.
42. Allameh Hibatuddīn Shahrestani (1884-1967) was an Iraqi philosopher and jurist. His works include Sirāj al-Mai'rāj, a treatise on ascension of the Prophet, and Al-Riwāyāt.
43. *Ibid.*, 110-11.
44. al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, 2/219.
45. Taqī Falsafī, *Āyatul Kursī Āsmānī Paghām-i-Tawḥīd*, 49.
46. Ibn Bābawayh, *Al-Tawḥīd*, 277, also see: Ibn Bābawayh, *Al-Khiṣāl*, 652.
47. Quṭb al-Dīn Sa'īd b. Hibat Allah Rāwandī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā*, ed. Ghulām Riḍā 'Irfānīyān. (Mashhad: Majma'al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyya, 1409 AH), 41.
48. al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, 55/97.
49. Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart*, 145.
50. John F. Haught, "Theology after Contact: Religion and Extraterrestrial Intelligent Life," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 950, no. 1 (2001): 297.
51. Weintraub, "Islam."
52. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Bidāyat al-Ḥikmah*, 74.
53. Ishraq Ali and Qin Mingli, "On the Relation of City and Soul in Plato and Alfarabi," *Journal of Arts and Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2019): 27-34.
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### **Disclosure Statement**

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