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The Wisdom of God and the Tragedy of History:
the Concept of Appearance (*badāʿ*) in Mīr Dāmād’s
Lantern of Brightness

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It is well known in the study of religions that orthodoxy and heterodoxy are purely relative notions, and that the most famous heterodoxies are doctrines often more ancient than the so-called orthodoxies which condemn them. This is true of many Shīʿī Imāmī theological notions which are commonly considered heterodox by Sunni theologians and orientalist alike. The notion of *badāʿ* is certainly one of these. Literally “appearance, emergence” (*ẓuhūr*), it means for the Twelver Imāmī Shīʿah the advent of a divine decree changing a previous one announced to the Prophet or the Imam.¹ Consequently, it concerns the relation between God, in His essential and eternal attributes of knowledge (*ʿilm*), will (*irādah*) and mercy (*raḥmah*), synthesized with wisdom (*ḥikmah*), with sacred history in its obvious contingency and, from the Shīʿī point of view, its highly tragic dimension. Sunni theologians and heresiographers have always seen *badāʿ* as the negation of the omniscience and/or the omnipotence of God, by considering this notion in its human sense as a change of opinion based on a new knowledge or the emergence of new circumstances. In his *Book of Religions and Sects*, al-Shahrastānī (d. 548 AH/1153) distinguishes three modes of divine “appearance” (*badāʿ*) all equally unacceptable from a theological point of view: appearance in God’s knowledge, in His will, and in His command (*amr*).² Moreover, the translations adopted for *badāʿ* by western scholars – “mutability of God”, “divine versatility”, “change of mind in God”, “change in God’s will” – reflect *nolens volens* the negative view of Sunni heresiographers on Shīʿī theology.³ On the other side, the notion of *badāʿ* was strongly defended by the Shīʿī Imams – especially the fifth and the sixth ones – and, during the

¹ Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Badāʿ”, *EI3*.

² al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, ed. Muḥammad Faṭḥallāh Badrān, 2 vols., Cairo, 1375 AH/1956, I, p. 132. Whether Shahrastānī was Ashʿarī or more likely Ismaili, he had theological reasons to reject the notion of *badāʿ*, as the Ashʿarī and the Ismaili doctrines coincide on this point as others. See below.

³ Respectively, Reinhart Peter Anne Dozy, *Essai sur l’histoire de l’Islamisme*, Fr. tr. V. Chauvin, Leiden–Paris, 1879, p. 223: « divine mutability » (“mutabilité divine”); Daniel Gimaret in Shahrastani, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, French transl. Daniel Gimaret and Guy Monnot, 2 vol., Paris, 1986, I, pp. 440s, 469 and 508: “change in God” (“changement en Dieu”); pp. 596 and 600: “versatility” (“versatilité”); Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā*, Albany, 1975, pp. 180–184: “change of mind in God”; Farhad Daftary, *A History of Shiʿi Islam*, London–New York, 2013, p. 40: “change in God’s will”.

occultation (since 260 AH/874), by Twelver Shī'ī theologians like al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 460 AH/1068). More surprisingly, this notion came back in the works of Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040 AH/1631), one of the most prominent figures of the Safavid philosophical renaissance in Iran, who devoted to the demonstration of *badā'* a special epistle entitled *Nibrās al-ḍiyā' wa-taswā' al-sawā' fī sharḥ bāb al-badā' wa-ithbāt jadwā al-du'ā'* (*The Lantern of Brightness and Keeping the Balance in the Exposition of the Issue of Appearance and the Attestation of the Efficacy of the Invocation*).⁴ This surprise dissipates somewhat when we realise that Mīr Dāmād sought to establish a serious philosophical foundation for the theology of Shī'ī Islam, and that he was, as a metaphysician, especially animated by the problem of the relation between God, the Eternal, and His temporal creation. Far from being a marginal opus, this epistle occupies a key place in Mīr Dāmād's oeuvre and plays a notable role in the philosophical renaissance in Safavid Iran, by reintroducing the notion of *badā'* in Shī'ī theology. After a brief historical survey of the notion before Mīr Dāmād, I will analyse this work in its four consecutive approaches of the notion of *badā'*: theological and traditionalist, based on the Qur'an and the Shī'ī *ḥadīth*; historiographical, through the revision of the formative period of Islam; philosophical, by integrating the *badā'* in a metaphysical system originating from Avicenna; last, esoteric and occultist, by evolving a "philosophical alphabet" attributed to the same Avicenna. I will try to show that in doing so, Mīr Dāmād not only gave to *badā'* the dignity of a philosophical concept, but also opened the way to a Shī'ī philosophy of history.

1 A History of Appearance (*badā'*) in Shī'ī Theology

The appearance or emergence of the idea of *badā'* dates from the formative period of Shī'ī Islam, among trends considered as "extremists" or "exaggerators" (*ghulāt*) which are not extant nowadays.⁵ If the *Badā'iyya* left nothing but a name in the historiographical and heresiographical works, we know more about the *Kaysāniyyah*.⁶ The first supporter of *badā'*

⁴ Mīr Dāmād, *Nibrās al-ḍiyā' wa-taswā' al-sawā' fī sharḥ bāb al-badā' wa-ithbāt jadwā al-du'ā'*, ed. Ḥamid Nāji Iṣfahānī, with glosses by 'Alī al-Nūrī (d. 1246 AH/1831), Tehran, 1374 SH/1995. On the philosophical Renaissance in Iran, see Seyyed Ḥossein Naṣr, "Spiritual Movements, Philosophy and Theology in the Safavid Period", in *Cambridge History of Iran Vol. 7*, Cambridge, 1986, vol. VI, p. 656–697.

⁵ Shahrastānī, *Milal*, I, p. 155, mentions four innovations (*bida'*) of the *ghulāt*: anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), appearance (*badā'*), return to life (*raja'ah*), and metempsychosis (*tanāsukh*).

⁶ The *Badā'iyya* are mentioned by 'Alī al-Jurjānī in his *Kitāb al-ta'rifāt*, ed. G. Flügel, Leipzig, 1845, re-ed. Beirut, 2000, p. 44. About this heresiographic spectre, see Josef van Ess, *Frühe mu'tazilische Häresiographie*, Beirut, 1971, p. 64 and p. 75 of the Arabic text; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. Und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, 1–6, Berlin–New York, 1991–1997, sv. About the *Kaysāniyyah*, see Wadād al-Qādī, *Al-Kaysāniyyah fī al-ta'rikh wa al-adab*, Beirut, 1974; idem, "The Development of the Term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the *Kaysāniyya*", in A. Dietrich, ed., *Akten*

seems to have been Mukhtār b. Abī ‘Ubayd al-Thaqafī (d. 67 AH/687), the leader of the main Shī‘ī anti-Umayyad revolt to avenge the blood of the third Imām al-Ḥusayn, or one of his partisans, ‘Abdallāh b. Nawf; after a defeat sustained at the hand of Muṣ‘ab b. Zubayr in 67 AH/686–7, contrary to his prior claim that God had revealed to him his victory, Mukhtār or his friend referred to the Qur’anic verse 13:39: “God blots out and He establishes whatsoever He will; and with Him is the Essence of the Book”,⁷ and said that a new knowledge or a new decree had appeared to God (*badā lahu*).⁸ Later, Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179 AH/795–6) stated that God’s omniscience is not prior, but simultaneous to the coming into existence of the objects.⁹

The notion of *badā’*, with the meaning of an unexpected divine decree, seems to have been passed from Kaysānī theology to that of the proto-Imāmī Shī‘ah with the fifth and the sixth Imams, Muhammad b. ‘Alī al-Bāqir (d. 115 or 119 AH/732 or 737) and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148 AH/765). The doctrine is attested in *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī* by Abū Ja‘far al-Kulaynī (d. 329 AH/940-41), probably the most authoritative testimony of the Shī‘ī Imams’ teaching, compiled before the great occultation.¹⁰ According to a *ḥadīth* of the sixth Imam, the first man to have professed *badā’* had been ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the grandfather of the prophet Muḥammad and of Imam ‘Alī, during the youth of the Prophet, when in particular circumstances, he supposed that the latter had been killed.¹¹ In a special chapter devoted to this notion, many *ḥadīth* reported from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq stress its theological importance, notably by saying: “God has never been so much worshipped (*‘ubida*) as He is through [the belief in] appearance”; “God has never been so much exalted (*‘uzzima*) as He is through [the belief in] appearance”.¹² Other traditions explain that all the prophets have

des VII. Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft, Göttingen, 1976, pp. 295–319, reprinted in Etan Kohlberg (ed.), *Shī‘ism*, Aldershot, 2003, pp. 169–193; also Daftary, *A History of Shī‘i Islam*, pp. 36–39.

⁷ Here and in the following quotations of the Qur’an, I use Arthur J. Arberry’s translation, London–New York, 1955.

⁸ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-Ṭabarī (Ta’rīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk)*, Beirut, 2003, p. 1157, and al-Qāḍī, “The Development of the Term Ghulāt”, pp. 296–297, for what concerns Ibn Nawf; Shahrastānī, *Milal*, I, pp. 132–33; Ignaz Goldziher and A. S. Tritton, “Badā’”, *EI2*, French ed., I, pp. 873–875: p. 874; Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism. The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shī‘ism*, Albany, 1981, p. 153; Mahmoud Ayoub, “Divine Preordination and Human Hope. A Study of the Concept of Badā’ in Imāmī Shī‘i Tradition”, *JAOS*, 106.4 (1986), pp. 623–632, see p. 625; Wilferd Madelung, “Badā’” *EI1*; Amir-Moezzi, “Badā’”, *EI3*.

⁹ ‘Abd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, Beirut, 1408 AH/1987, p. 49. See Wilferd Madelung, “The Shiite and Khārijite Contribution to Pre-Ash‘arite *Kalām*”, in Parviz Morewedge (ed.), *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, Albany, 1979, pp. 120–141, especially pp. 123–125.

¹⁰ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, ed. Ḥusayn al-A‘lamī, Beirut, 1426 AH/2005. On Kulaynī’s personality and works, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qur’an and the Speaking Qur’an*, tr. Eric Ormsby, New York, 2016, chapter 5.

¹¹ Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, Beirut, 1403 AH/1983, ed. offset, 107 vol., XV, bāb 1, *ḥadīth* §85–86, pp. 157–158, quoting *al-Kāfī*, but not the chapter on *badā’*, see next note.

¹² Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, *K. al-tawḥīd, bāb al-badā’*, pp. 84–85: p. 84, *ḥadīth* §1. The notion of *badā’* does not seem to be present in the older *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt* by al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (ed. ‘Alī Riḍā Zākizādah

testified to the general truth of *badā'*, but the knowledge of the particular events, which are cases of *badā'*, is exclusive to God. According to the fifth Imam:

Divine knowledge is of two kinds: a knowledge hidden with God (*'ind allāh makhzūn*) which no one can learn, and a knowledge that He teaches to His angels and messengers. The latter will occur [as it was told], because God does not turn Himself into liar, neither does He turn His angels and messengers into liars. From the former, the knowledge which is hidden with Him, He advances whatsoever He wills, He delays whatsoever He wills, He establishes whatsoever He wills.¹³

And according to the sixth Imam:

God possesses two sciences: one hidden and treasured science which no one knows but He, and it is in it that appearance (*badā'*) occurs; and a science that He teaches to His angels, messengers and prophets; and we [the Imams] too know it.¹⁴

Consequently, the notion of *badā'* does not mean only an unexpected divine decree, but a decree which is not foreseen even by the friend of God (*walī*) who is infallible (*ma'ṣūm*) and has privileged knowledge. Following some later traditions, this notion of *badā'* has been put forward by Imam Ja'far on the historical issue of his succession. As we know, this event was the origin of the Ismailis' separation from the core of the Imāmī Shī'ah. According to various traditions, Ja'far had first designated his eldest son Ismā'īl as the Imam after him, but after Ismā'īl's premature death, he designated a younger son, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, by saying: "something has appeared to/from God about Ismā'īl" (*badā' li-allāh fī amr ismā'īl*).¹⁵ The Ismailis have certainly dismissed this tradition and rejected the notion of *badā'*.¹⁶ It is noticeable that according to al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, the succession of the tenth Imam 'Alī b.

Rinānī, 2 vol., Qumm, 1391 SH/2012–13), the master of al-Kulaynī, which is a monograph about the sacred knowledge of the Imams.

¹³ Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi, ḥadīth* §6, p. 84.

¹⁴ Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi, ḥadīth* §8, p. 84.

¹⁵ *Nibrās al-diyā'*, p. 7. Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, in his *Kitāb al-Ghaybah* (ed. Mujtabā 'Azīzī, 4th ed., Qumm, 1393 SH/2014–15, p. 189), explains that "it appeared to God" (*badā' li-allāh fīhi*) means in reality: "it appeared from God" (*badā' min allāh*).

¹⁶ See Shahrastānī, *Milal*, I, p. 171. The unique mention of *badā'* that I found in Ismaili treatises is in Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker, *An Ismaili Heresiography. The 'Bāb al-shayṭān' from Abū Tammām's Kitāb al-shajara*, Leiden/Boston/Köln, 1998, pp. 112 and 121 of the Arabic text, 102 and 111 of the English translation. The belief in *badā'* is attributed first to *Ghulāt*, secondly to Imāmīs. It seems that Ismaili thinkers such as al-Kirmānī do not talk about *badā'*. What is sure is that this notion is incompatible with Ismaili doctrine according to which God has no will and does not intervene in history. The universal Intellect is the one who manifests itself in the Imams, each of them designating his successor with sovereign power. See Daniel De Smet, *La philosophie ismaélienne. Un ésotérisme chiite entre néoplatonisme et gnose*, Paris, 2012, pp. 55–88. I thank the author of this book for the personal discussion on this issue.

Muḥammad al-Naqī (d. 254 AH/868) has involved a similar case of an apparent change of the divine decree.¹⁷

Finally, the notion of *badā'* as a change of the explicit divine decree has been assumed by the Shī'ī Imams in relation with the great event of the deliverance (*fara*), the return of the master of the order (*ṣāhib al-amr*). The following tradition, reported from the fifth Imam by Ibrāhīm b. Ja'far al-Nu'mānī (d. 345 or 360 AH/956 or 971) in his *Kitāb al-Ghaybah (The Occultation)*, the first book dedicated to the subject of occultation, does not use the term of *badā'* but expresses openly the idea of an alteration in the temporal divine decrees. This idea is stressed in order to prevent the unauthorized predictions of the time of the great event, to encourage patience and to remind the believers the obligation of *taqiyyah* or "pious dissimulation":

God had first determined the time of this order (*hādha l-amr*) [i.e. the deliverance (*fara*)] for the seventieth year. But when al-Ḥusayn was killed [in 61 AH/680], God's anger raged and He delayed [this order] for the one hundred and fortieth year. We [the Imams] have informed you [the Shī'ah] of it. But you have divulged it outside and removed the veil of the concealment. After this, God has not made us know what is determined for this event any more. "God blots out and He establishes whatsoever He wills; and with Him is the Essence of the Book" (Q.13:39).¹⁸

This tradition suggests that God's freedom to apply His will when He wills takes into account – without depending on it – the acts caused by human free will, and that the Imam's knowledge is directly concomitant to God's absolutely free act of will.

Later, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, in his own *Kitāb al-Ghaybah (The Occultation)*, recounts this tradition in a slightly different version and adds this one related from the sixth Imam: "The matter concerned me (*kāna hādha-l-amr fīya*), then God delayed it and turned it about someone of my lineage however He will".¹⁹ Al-Ṭūsī gives for this alteration a rational justification based on the notion of the "common good" (*maṣlahah*): God could have determined the time of the order, but the new events caused by the human free will create new conditions (*sharā'it*) which alternate the common good and necessitate a delay in the execution of the order. He stresses that this argument does not cause any difference of opinion between the "people of Justice" (*ahl al-'adl*), meaning the Imāmī Shī'ah and the Mu'tazila; then he identifies this kind of divine suspension of acting with the notion of *badā'* attested in the Imams' traditions.²⁰

The Sunni heresiographers, however, asserted that this kind of change in the decree of God is unacceptable and that the Shī'ī Imams' doctrine of *badā'*, like that of *taqiyyah*, are

¹⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *Ghaybah*, pp. 187–189, *ḥadīth* §84.

¹⁸ Ibn Abī Zaynab al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghaybah*, ed. Muḥammad Jawād al-Ghaffārī, Tehran, 1385 HS/2006–07, bāb 16, *ḥadīth* §10, p. 410.

¹⁹ al-Ṭūsī, *Ghaybah*, *ḥadīth* §417 and 418, pp. 738–39; *ḥadīth* §422, p. 744.

²⁰ al-Ṭūsī, *Ghaybah*, commentary of *ḥadīth* §418, pp. 739–741.

just theses *ad hoc* forged to justify the contradictions in their claims and the unfulfillment of their predictions.²¹ Shī'ī theologians, in order to neutralize these attacks, particularly supported the analogy between the notions of *badā'* and *naskh*, the latter signifying that God abrogates a revealed law and replaces it by another, a notion based on Q.2:106 and commonly accepted by Sunni theologians.²² According to Ibn Bābūyah (d. 381 AH/991), *badā'* is in the course of creational events what *naskh* is in the course of textual revelations, because God changes His orders and prohibitions from time to time, depending on what serves the welfare of men. He understood that the Sunnis were contradicting themselves by rejecting *badā'* while accepting *naskh*. He develops the point:

Whoever admits that God makes what He wills and annihilates (*ya'dum*) what He wills, creates the place of each thing as He wills, advances what He wills, delays what He wills, and orders what He wills like He wills, has already accepted appearance (*badā'*).²³

Ibn Bābūyah turns the argument against the Jews for that they said: "God has finished with ordering [creation]" (*faragha min al-amr*).²⁴ It could be a kind of tactical dissimulation (*taqiyyah*) consisting in attacking the absent and abstract Jews, instead of the present and strong Sunnis; despite this, one may easily understand that the Sunnis' rejection of *badā'* exposed them to the same mistake as the Jews.²⁵

Even more defensive than Ibn Bābūyah was al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413 AH/1022). He insisted that he used the term *badā'* because revelation permitted it to him, and by giving it a sense that reason cannot deny.²⁶ The evolution of Shī'ī theology concerning *badā'* reflects the process of rationalisation and rapprochement towards Sunnism starting from the Buwayhid period. Al-'Allāmah al-Ḥillī (d. 726 AH/1325) considered that it was impossible to attribute *badā'* as "appearance" (*zuhūr*) to God, unlike *naskh* which was acceptable to reason.²⁷ More ambivalent was the position of Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (d. before 906 AH/1501), the great pre-Safavid theologian and philosopher.²⁸ In his *'Awālī al-la'ālī*, he

²¹ See Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, New York, 1994, p. 157, and below.

²² E.g. al-Ṭūsī, *Ghaybah*, p. 741.

²³ Ibn Bābūyah, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, no place, 1430/2009, bāb 54, *ḥadīth* §9, p. 222.

²⁴ Ibn Bābūyah, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, p. 221–222.

²⁵ Goldziher, "Badā'", *EI2*, p. 875, mentions, however, that the Jews were the more obstinate adversaries of *badā'*. Shahrastānī, *Milal*, I, p. 193, mentions that the Jews rejected *naskh* by considering it equal to *badā'*.

²⁶ Madelung, "Badā'", *EI*; al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Kitāb Awā'il al-maqālāt fī-l-madhāhib wa-l-mukhtārāt*, quoted by Iṣfahānī in his introduction of *Nibrās al-dīyā'*, pp. 34–35; tr. Dominique Sourdel, *L'imamisme vu par le cheikh al-Mufīd*, Paris, 1972, pp. 46 et 73. Sourdel translates *badā'* by « versatilité » (*versatility*).

²⁷ Al-'Allāmah al-Ḥillī, *Nihāyat al-wuṣūl ilā 'ilm al-uṣūl*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Bahādūrī, 2 vol. Qumm, 1425/2004–05, II, pp. 595–597.

²⁸ On him, see Kāmil Muṣṭafā al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣilah bayn al-taṣawwuf wa-l-tashayyū'*, 2 vols., Beirut–Bagdad–Freiberg, 2011, II, p. 312. Wilferd Madelung, "Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī's Synthesis of Kalām,

developed an argument in favor of *badāʾ*, based on both the hermeneutic of Q.13:39 and 55:29 (“Everyday He is upon some labour”), and the distinction between two dimensions of divine knowledge: the eternal and unalterable decree (*al-qaḍāʾ*), inscribed on the “guarded Tablet” (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*) which is the “Essence of the Book” (*umm al-kitāb*) on one hand, and the limited, not absolute nor eternal, determination (*al-qadar*) inscribed on the “tablet of clearing and establishing” (*lawḥ al-mahw wa-l-ithbāt*), on the other hand. Determination is the detailed application of the simple decree in the temporal and sensible world. Cessation of activity (*firāgh*) is acceptable in the divine decree but not in the determination which follows it. The transition from decree to determination is the “labour” (*shaʿn*) evocated in the verse Q.55:29; the determination, which governs all the renewals and the destructions, is the realm where appearance (*badāʾ*) occurs.²⁹ In his *opus magnum*, the *Kitāb Mujlī mirʾat al-munjī fī l-kalām wa-l-ḥikmatayn wa-l-taṣawwuf* (*the Polisher of the Mirror of the Saviour concerning Theology, the Two Wisdoms and Sufism*), Ibn Abī Jumhūr made a distinction between the universal will of God in the eternal decree (*qaḍāʾ*), called *mashīʾah*, and the particular will of God in the determination (*qadar*), called *irādah*: “as certain things occur by judgment of the universal will of God (*bi-ḥukm al-mashīʾah*) without being accompanied by His particular will (*irādah*), like the killing of prophets, the injustice and similar things, because *mashīʾah* is the knowledge attached to things absolutely and *irādah* is the knowledge of these things on the mode of particular attribution (*ʿalā sabīl al-takḥṣīṣ*)”.³⁰ Following this, *badāʾ*, which appears in the realm of determination and seems to be a change of the particular will of God (*irādah*), comes in fact from the divine decree and does not mean any change, nor in the universal will of God (*mashīʾah*), nor in His particular one which is simply suspended. Nevertheless, elsewhere in his *Mujlī* as in his *Zād al-musāfirīn fī uṣūl al-dīn* (*The Provisions of the Travellers about the Principles of Religions*), Ibn Abī Jumhūr defended the notion of abrogation (*naskh*) while rejecting appearance (*badāʾ*) in the sense of the removal of a judgement without any manifestation of common good or general corruption (*li-ghayr maṣlahah ḥadathat wa-lā li-mafsadah zaharat*).³¹ This attitude could be somewhat motivated by the desire of a rapprochement with Ashʿarī and Muʿtazilī theologians, which is one of Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s leitmotifs in his *Mujlī*.³²

Philosophy and Sufism”, in *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, Aldershot, 1985, art. XIII; Sabine Schmidtke, *Theologie, Philosophie und Mystik im zwölftenschiitischen Islam des 9./15. Jahrhunderts. Die Gedankenwelten des Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī (um 838/1434–35 – nach 906/1501)*, Leiden, 2000.

²⁹ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *ʿAwālī al-laʾālī*, quoted in Mīr Dāmād, *Nibrās al-diyāʾ*, introduction, pp. 41–42.

³⁰ Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī, *Mujlī mirʾat al-munjī fī l-kalām wa-l-ḥikmatayn wa-l-taṣawwuf*, ed. Riḍā Yaḥyāpūr Fārmad, Beirut, 1434/2013, II, pp. 751–52.

³¹ Ibid., III, p. 1068; idem, *Rasāʾil kalāmiyyah wa falsafiyah*, ed. Riḍā Yaḥyāpūr Fārmad, Beirut, 1435 AH/2014, I, p. 173.

³² Schmidtke, *Theologie, Philosophie und Mystik*, pp. 268–69. See also Frank Griffel, “Divine Actions, Creation, and the Human Fate after Death in 9th/15th Century Imāmī Shīʿite Theology”, *JAOS* 125.1 (2005), reprinted in Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī, *Mujlī*, vol. 5, pp. xxxix–lxiv.

This brief survey shows that in the course of the pre-modern history of Shī'ī Islam, the notion of *badā'* was defended in a gradually more rationalist and objective manner, but which has never been sufficient to make it acceptable to Sunni theology. In this respect, it is remarkable that at the dawn of modernity, a philosopher reactivated the original Imāmī defense of *badā'* by developing both a rational and esoteric supra-rational argumentation in its favour.

2 Mīr Dāmād and the *Lantern of Brightness* (*Nibrās al-diyā'*)

Mīr Dāmād is one of the most prominent personalities of the Safavid renaissance, as shown by his title of “the third master” (*al-mu'allim al-thālith*) – after Aristotle the first one, and al-Fārābī the second – given to him by his followers. Nevertheless, he remains a little studied and poorly known thinker compared to his former student Mullā Ṣadrā (d. c. 1045 AH/1636).³³ This paradoxical status is certainly due to his ambiguous personality, described sometimes as an ideologist and a courtier and sometimes as a pure gnostic and ascetic;³⁴ to his hermetic style in philosophy, which became notorious;³⁵ and to the fact that most of his treatises remained incomplete. This could also be due to his reputation as the founder of the so-called “philosophical school of Isfahan”, a historiographical construction of the philosopher Henry Corbin, adopted by most scholars.³⁶ In a teleological view of the history of philosophy, Mīr Dāmād is mainly approached as the master who made possible the emergence of his student Mullā Ṣadrā, whose system is supposed to have included and surpassed that of his master in a kind of Hegelian *Aufhebung*.

Mīr Dāmād was indeed a multi-faced personality. As a high-ranking tradent and *mujtahid*, powerful at the court of Shah, he was the worthy grandson of 'Alī al-Karakī (d. 945 AH/1538–39), the founder of Twelver Shī'ī orthodoxy and orthopraxy in Safavid Iran, and played in his turn a major role in the system of religious legitimation of the Safavids, notably by defending the congregational Friday prayer and by writing two practical treatises (*risālah*

³³ See Andrew J. Newman, “Dāmād, Mīr (-e), Sayyed Moḥammad Bāqer”, *Elr*; Sajjad H. Rizvi, “Mollā Ṣadrā Ṣirāzi”, *Elr*.

³⁴ See respectively Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, Chicago–London, 1984, p. 142, for the political and mundane aspect; Seyyed Ḥossein Naṣr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzi and his Transcendent Theosophy*, Tehran, 1978–1997, p. 37; Sayyid Muḥammad Khāmanihī, *Mīr Dāmād*, Tehran, 1384 SH/2005–6, pp. 35–37; Jūyā Jahānbakhsh, *Mu'allim-i thālith*, Tehran, 1389 SH/2010–11, pp. 153–160, for the ascetic and mystical aspect.

³⁵ Mirzā Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Tunkābunī, *Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā'*, ed. Sayyid al-Murtaḍā 'Alam al-Hudā, Tehran, 1257 AH/1886, reprinted 1304 SH/1925–1926, p. 254; Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* Cambridge, 1920–1924, reprinted in 1969, IV, p. 429; Henry Corbin, *En islam iranien. Aspects philosophiques et spirituels*, Paris, 1970–1972, IV, pp. 19–20.

³⁶ See Sajjad H. Rizvi, “Isfahan School of Philosophy”, *Elr*; Mathieu Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shī'ite*, Paris, 2016, pp. 37–40.

‘amaliyyah), that is, manuals of ritual practices, answering questions on particular issue (*masā’il*) that believers should follow in their daily lives.³⁷ As both a Peripatetic philosopher and a Neoplatonic gnostic, by relying upon the philosophical system of Avicenna modified by Suhrawardī’s wisdom of illumination and Ibn ‘Arabī’s theosophy, he was the author of the first modern synthesis between the main currents of Islamic philosophy (*falsafah* or *ḥikmah*). Mīr Dāmād was also a poet, author of a Persian *Dīwān* under the Suhrawardian *nom de plume* of Ishrāq, including numerous panegyrics to Imam ‘Alī.³⁸ Last, according to his student Ashkivarī (or Ishkavarī) (d. between 1088 AH/1677 and 1095 AH/1684), the rationalist philosopher and jurist was also a spiritual visionary who reported two ecstatic experiences, one of both in the style of the *Plotinus Arabus*, that is, the Pseudo-Aristotle of the famous *Uthūlūjīyā* and its mystical report derived from *Ennead* IV, 8, 1.³⁹ Last, and more surprisingly, he seemed to have been a master of “occult sciences” (*‘ulūm gharībah*), specially of the “science of numbers and letters” (*‘ilm al-a‘dād wa-l-ḥurūf*); this aspect of his thought is obvious in some authentic works, and he left a considerable amount of apocryphal manuals of magic very popular even nowadays.⁴⁰

For a general survey of Mīr Dāmād’s multi-dimensional thought, the epistle he devoted to the issue of *badā’*, the *Nibrās al-diyā’*, while constituting part of his *opera minora*, has the advantage of bringing together three dimensions generally more or less separated in his *opera magna*: the religious Shī‘ī tradition (as explored in his *al-Rawāshih al-samāwiyyah*, a kind of introduction to a commentary on al-Kulaynī’s *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*);⁴¹ the “pure” philosophical conceptual speculation (as represented by his famous *Kitāb al-Qabasāt* and

³⁷ His *Risāla fī wujūb ṣalāt al-jum‘ah* (“On the Obligation of the Friday Prayer”) is printed in Amīr Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ḥusaynī al-Mar‘ashī al-mushtahar bi-l-Dāmād, *Ithna‘ashara risālah*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mīrdāmādī, Qumm, 1397 AH/1976–77. See also Mīr Dāmād, *Kitāb al-Qabasāt*, ed. M. Mohaghegh and T. Izutsu, Tehran, 1977, introduction, pp. 38–43 (followed by a fatwa regarding the authority of the *mujtahid*), quoted from Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkivarī’s *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, third part unpublished, Kitābkhānah-yi dānishgāh-i Tehrān, MS 4889, pp. 1089–1091. Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, Chicago – London, 1984, p. 142: “[Mīr Dāmād] puts forward the strongest recorded claim for hierocratic authority prior to the twentieth century”; and n. 101, p. 305. See also Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia. Religion and Power in Safavid Empire*, London – New York, 2004, pp. 71–72. Mīr Dāmād composed one *risālah ‘amaliyyah* in Persian, *Shāri‘ al-najāt fī abwāb al-mu‘āmalāt*, and one in Arabic, *Uyūn al-masā’il*, both unfinished and printed in *Ithna‘ashara risālah*. The philosophical introduction to *Shāri‘ al-najāt* is edited in *Muṣannafāt-i Mīr Dāmād*, ed. ‘Abdallāh Nūrānī, Tehran, 1381 SH/2003, I, pp. 568–80. See ‘Alī Awjabī, *Mīr Dāmād*, Tehran, 1389 SH/2010–11, p. 196.

³⁸ Mīr Dāmād, *Dīwān-i Ishrāq*, ed. Samīrā Pustīndūz, Tehran, 1385 SH/2006.

³⁹ They are quoted by Ashkivarī in the last notice of his *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, one of them is also present in the monumental encyclopedia of *ḥadīths* compiled by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, the *Bihār al-anwār*. See *Qabasāt*, introduction, pp. 34–37; Henry Corbin, “Confessions extatiques de Mīr Dāmād, maître de théologie à Ispahan”, in *En islam iranien*, IV, pp. 9–53; and Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse*, pp. 50–58.

⁴⁰ Mīr Dāmād-i Kabīr, *Khud-āmūz dar ‘ulūm u funūn-i gharībah (Self-Study in Occult Sciences and Arts)*, ed. Shaykh Sayyid Turābī, 7 volumes to nowadays, n.d., n.p., sold in the Iranian streets and now published on line. My thanks to Matthew Melvin-Koushki for the on-line-reference.

⁴¹ Mīr Dāmād, *al-Rawāshih al-samāwiyyah fī sharḥ al-aḥādīth al-imāmiyyah (Celestial Sudations: a Commentary on the Imams’ Traditions)*, Qumm, 1405 AH/1984–85.

Taqwīm al-īmān); the esoteric content of the “science of letters and numbers” (as illustrated in his *Jazawāt wa mawāqīt*).⁴² This work has been written in the middle of his most active period, between 1025 AH/1616–17 (*terminus ante quem* of two epistles quoted here, *al-Imādat* and *Khulsat al-malakūt*) and 1034 AH/1625–26 (date of composition of the *Qabasāt* where the *Nibrās* is quoted).⁴³ The title announces a treatise on the concept of *badā’* and the efficacy of supplication, but the latter issue, which depends of the first, is only briefly approached, maybe because the end of the epistle has disappeared.⁴⁴

The work contains four sections: an introduction on the notions of *badā’* and *taqiyyah* (“pious dissimulation”); a first traditional and historiographical section, mostly composed of *ḥadīth* about the succession of the Prophet and the transmission of the Imamate; a second section dealing with *badā’* from a theological and philosophical point of view, where Mīr Dāmād integrates this notion in his own metaphysical system; last, a third section, attached to the former demonstration, exposes an alphanumeric system leading to an esoteric deciphering of *badā’*.

i) Appearance (*badā’*) and Dissimulation (*taqiyyah*): Two Interdependent Notions

As it appears in the first pages of the *Nibrās al-diyā’*, the historical reason of its composition is the permanent repudiation of the Imāmī notion of *badā’* on the part of Sunni adversaries. Mīr Dāmād deals at length with the objection addressed by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH/1209) – nicknamed “the guide of the skeptics” (*imām al-mushakkikīn*) – in his work *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, to both *badā’* and *taqiyyah*, two key-notions of Shī‘ī theology. Rāzī rehearses a classical objection of Zaydi Shī‘ī origin, addressed by Sulaymān b. Jarīr, who belongs to the same generation as Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, to the proto-Twelvers.⁴⁵

The Imams of the rejectors (*al-rāfiḍah*)⁴⁶ have left two arguments to their followers, which make them invincible in discussion. The first one is the claim of appearance (*badā’*). If they say that the authority will return to them and if things do not happen as they announced, they

⁴² Mīr Dāmād, *Jazawāt wa mawāqīt*, (*Firebrands and Appointed Times*), ed. ‘Alī Awjabī, Tehran, 1380 SH/2001. On the specificity of this work, see Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse*, pp. 54–55, 394–395, 399–401 and 419.

⁴³ *Nibrās*, p. 59, for the reference to these two epistles; *Qabasāt*, pp. 127 and 451, for the reference to the *Nibrās*.

⁴⁴ Mīr Dāmād argues philosophically for the efficacy of the prayer in his *Qabasāt*: see pp. 449–50, a text quoted by Ashkivarī in his *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* (see *Qabasāt*, introduction, pp. 51–53), and 452–55, where he quotes Avicenna’s *Tā’līqāt*. On the relation between *badā’* and the belief in the efficacy of the prayer (*du‘ā’*), see Ayoub, “Divine Preordination and Human Hope”, *passim*.

⁴⁵ The tradition is mentioned for the first time in the *Firaq al-shī‘ah* of the Imāmī theologian Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (d. 310 AH/922–3), ed. Helmut Ritter, Istanbul, 1931, pp. 55–57. See Madelung, “The Shiite and Khārijite Contribution”, pp. 125–126.

⁴⁶ On this term, see Etan Kohlberg, “The Term ‘Rāfiḍa’ in Imāmī Shī‘ī Usage”, *JAOS* 99/4 (1979), pp. 677–679, in *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shī‘ism*, Aldershot, 1991, art. IV. Mīr Dāmād, like the Shī‘ah in general, appropriates the appellation.

reply that something appeared to or in God in this affair. The second argument is the claim of dissimulation (*taqiyyah*). Every time they want to say something, they do, and when someone shows to them that it was a mistake, they reply that they have just said it by dissimulation.⁴⁷

This critical argumentation is interesting by itself. The Zaydi polemist and Rāzī after him, like forerunners of the epistemologist Karl Popper, point the “non-falsifiability” of Shī‘ī tenets as a default, or even as a proof of vacuity.⁴⁸ Far from being impressed by the critique, Mīr Dāmād, as a rigorous philosopher, gives an account of the opponent’s objection before refuting it. But he first reports the response of the philosopher Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672 AH/1274) to Rāzī in his *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*. In his response, Ṭūsī tends to minimise the theological value of *badā’* by saying that a sole Imāmī tradition (*khābar wāḥid*) confirms this idea, which is not enough to make it a tenet for belief and action. This is the tradition quoted before, according to which Imam Ja‘far would have declared, by designating Mūsā as his successor, that “something appeared to/from God about [his eldest son] Ismā‘īl”.⁴⁹ This position contrasts with the insistence of the Shī‘ī Imams and the early Imāmī theologians in defending *badā’*.

Mīr Dāmād first replies to the Sunni theologian that the idea of *badā’* is not peculiar to the holy Imams but is also to be found in the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet reported by authoritative Sunni compilers such as al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others.⁵⁰ But he seems to consider Ṭūsī’s response even more pernicious than Rāzī’s criticism. First, he emphasizes the fact that the tenet of *badā’* is based on ‘lots of traditions’ (*akhbār jammah*) and that the two most eminent Abū Ja‘fars (al-Kulaynī and Ibn Bābūyah) have devoted to *badā’* a special chapter in their works. Then he rejects the ‘sole tradition’ quoted by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī – and before him by al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, called “the master of the sect” (*shaykh al-ṭā’ifa*) – by referring again to the authority of al-Kulaynī and Ibn Bābūyah. He asserts that the Prophet knew the names of all his heirs which had been revealed to him by the angel Gabriel, and that this knowledge was transmitted to the Imams.⁵¹ By doing so, he restores the truth of the Twelver position against Ṭūsī’s skeptical attitude towards *badā’*.

Mīr Dāmād quotes from Ibn Bābūyah’s *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* two alternative and valid versions of the alleged *ḥadīth* given by Ṭūsī. According to the first one, the sixth Imam said : “Nothing ever appeared to/from God in any affair as it was the case concerning Ismā‘īl, my son, when He took him before me to make it known by this that he shall not be Imam after me”, which aims directly at destroying the foundation of Ismaili doctrine. According to the second version of the *ḥadīth*, the Imam said: “Nothing ever appeared to/from God in any

⁴⁷ *Nibrās*, p. 6. Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, Beirut, 1405 AH/1984–85, pp. 421–22. Also Shahrastānī, *Milal*, I, pp. 141–42.

⁴⁸ Karl Popper, *The Logic of the Scientific Discovery*, London–New York, 2002, pp. 10–24, addressed notably this critic to Freudism and Marxism.

⁴⁹ *Nibrās*, p. 7. Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 422.

⁵⁰ *Nibrās*, pp. 7–8.

⁵¹ *Nibrās*, pp. 8–9.

affair as it was the case concerning Ismā‘īl my father, when God ordered his father [Abraham] to slay him, then ransomed him by a “sublime victim” (*dhibh ‘azīm*), in allusion to Q.37:107.⁵² It is noticeable that in a *ḥadīth* related by the eighth Imam ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā (d. 203 HA/818), this “sublime victim” was no one else but the third Imam al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī.⁵³

Then Mīr Dāmād refutes Rāzī’s objection against *taqiyyah* by claiming:

Our pure Imams have never avoided manifesting their rank and proclaiming their dignity for fear of anyone. Their slowness in reclaiming their right, in rising with the power over their subjects, in retaking their position from the hands of the usurpers of their rights, because of the weakness of their followers and of the loss of their supporters, was by acceptance of what the supreme pen (*al-qalam*) had written, by submission to the divine determination (*al-qadar*) and by execution of the Prophet’s testament. Not one of them has never given up bringing to light the mysteries of the real sciences and the obscurities of divine knowledge, explaining the rules of religious duties and divine penalties, following the way of exoteric revelation (*tanzīl*) and the path of esoteric interpretation (*ta’wīl*), carrying the torch of science and wisdom (*miṣbāḥ al-‘ilm wa-l-ḥikmah*), the lamp of sanctity and infallibility (*mishkāt al-quds wa-l-‘iṣmah*).⁵⁴

It is a clear allusion to the political quietism of the Imams under the three first caliphs, then under the Umayyads and the Abbasids, meaning that on the part of the Imams, this attitude was not a dissimulation but a perfect submission to the decrees of the divine will, a real understanding of God’s wisdom, a pure fulfillment of their mission which was a spiritual guidance and not a temporal one. Unless this development is not immediately related to the notion of *badā’*, the first section of the epistle will show that the two questions are closely related to each other.

ii) Appearance (*badā’*) in the Sacred History: a Shī‘ī Review of the Foundations of Islam

In the first section of the epistle, implicitly addressed to Sunni opponents, Mīr Dāmād goes back at length on the succession of the prophet Muḥammad and the political violence used against members of his sacred family (*ahl al-bayt*). Thus, he reactivates the primitive Shī‘ī version of the history which was generally hushed up by the *fuqahā’* after the great occultation. But in doing so, he continues to observe a kind of *taqiyyah* by founding his

⁵² Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, Beirut, 1430 AH/2009; bāb 54, *ḥadīth* §10 and 11, p. 222. The same discussion is resumed by Mullā Ṣadrā in his *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Khwājavi, 4 vol., Tehran, 1383 SH/2004-2005, IV, pp. 178-181. I follow the French translation of Jacques Berque who understood *dhibh* as “victim” and not as “sacrifice”.

⁵³ Ibn Bābūyah, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. M. Rāḥatī Shāhriḍā, Qumm, 1391 SH/2012-13, bāb 17, *ḥadīth* §1, I, p. 185.

⁵⁴ *Nibrās*, p. 10.

argumentation not on ancient Shīʿī sources like the famous book attributed to Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī (d. c. 76 AH/695–96),⁵⁵ as one could have expected, but on authoritative Sunni sources.

Imam ʿAlī is the first example of the attitude mentioned above, indeed a suspension of the action without any dissimulation of the claim. Mīr Dāmād stresses the fact that he adopted this attitude when the caliphate was literally stolen from him by Abū Bakr and ʿUmar just after the death of the Prophet in 11 AH/632, according to the original Shīʿī conviction. Mīr Dāmād comments: “The prince of the believers, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, in the very beginning of the affair, did not stand up for the sacred fight (*jihād*) in order to recover the caliphate, without giving up claiming his right and defending his position.”⁵⁶ It can be noticed that *jihād* is mentioned here as a legitimate sacred fight for the right of the Imam against nominal Muslims; it is in this sense that ʿAlī’s fight in the battle of the Camel and moreover in the one of Ṣiffīn is called *jihād* in Shīʿī sources; but at the time described here, the balance of power did not make it possible for him to declare the *jihād*.⁵⁷

Mīr Dāmād points out the contradictions of the Sunnis, designated them as “the commonality” (*al-jumhūr*), whose authorities – from al-Bukhārī to al-Ghazālī – acknowledged that “ʿAlī is with the Truth and the Truth is with ʿAlī, going with him wherever he goes” and that “ʿAlī is the judge (*dayyān*) of this community after its Prophet”, but whose scholars delegated the choice of the guide (*imām*) to human arbitrariness, without making it depending on the consensus of the loyal people (*ijmāʿ ahl al-ḥall wa-l-ʿaqq*), but on the allegiance (*bayʿa*) of one single man.⁵⁸ He reports from al-Bukhārī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, two authoritative Sunni scholars, that ʿAlī swore allegiance to Abū Bakr only after a time of abstention (*tawaqquf*) and that Abū Bakr’s caliphate has never been object of consensus. He concludes that each time the Imams practiced concealment (*taqiyyah*) and dissimulation (*tawriyah*), for fear and for the common good (*maṣlahah*), this was preceded and accompanied by clear words of truth addressed to their followers.⁵⁹

Mīr Dāmād reports at length, always from Sunni sources, prophetic traditions about the superiority of the sacred family of the Prophet, like the *ḥadīth* of “the two weighty

⁵⁵ On this book, see Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qurʿan*, chapter one.

⁵⁶ *Nibrās*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ On this question, see Etan Kohlberg, “The Development of the Imāmī Shīʿī Doctrine of *jihad*”, *Zeitschrift der Deutsche Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 126.1 (1976), pp. 64–86; Mathieu Terrier, « Le combat sacré des vaincus de l’histoire : expérience et représentation du *jihād* dans le shīʿisme imāmite ancien », *Journal Asiatique*, 305.1 (2017), p. 23–31.

⁵⁸ *Nibrās*, pp. 12–15, quoting al-Taftazānī’s *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* and al-Ījī’s *Mawāqif*, two authoritative Sunni *mutakallimīn*.

⁵⁹ *Nibrās*, pp. 12–16. See also Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, XXVIII, p. 364.

objects” (*al-thaqalayn*)⁶⁰ and the *ḥadīth* of “the Ark” (*al-safīnah*),⁶¹ the number of twelve chiefs announced by the Prophet for the time after him,⁶² the attributes of the Redeemer (*al-qā'im*),⁶³ the lofty virtues of ‘Alī, Fāṭima and the Imams after them.⁶⁴ Commenting upon a claim of Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī according to which “We the Sunnis embarked on the ark of the love of *ahl al-bayt*”, our philosopher gives evidence of his sense of humour and recalls his philosophical position by saying:

This is just like if the people of the Book, among the Jews or the Christians, were saying that they are those who love Muḥammad and care for him, instead of the community of Muslims who believed in his prophecy and adopted his religion. Or it is just like if the Ash‘ari theologians, for example, were saying that they are those who follow the way of the eminent philosophers like Plato and Aristotle in metaphysics, instead of the chief philosophers of Islam like Abū Naṣr [al-Fārābī] and Abū ‘Alī [Ibn Sīnā] [...].⁶⁵

Finally, he quotes a long narrative from al-Bukhārī that he rewrites in some parts.⁶⁶ First, it reminds us of the despoiling of Fāṭimah from her right on the oasis of Fadak and her premature death six months after her father. Then it relates how ‘Alī buried Fāṭimah by night, without informing Abū Bakr of her death, and how, at that very time, he found himself abandoned by everybody and resigned himself to make peace with Abū Bakr and to swear allegiance to him, something that he had obstinately refused before. He asked the father of ‘Ā’ishah to come alone to his house in order to avoid the presence of ‘Umar, something that Abū Bakr accepted despite the latter’s advice. There, ‘Alī reminded him his own proximity

⁶⁰ *Nibrās*, pp. 17–18: “I leave you two weighty objects; if you take care of them, you will never go astray after me. The first one is the book of God, a rope tight from the sky to the earth. [The second one] is my familiars, the people of my family (*‘ītratī ahl baytī*)”. This *ḥadīth* can be found in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s *Musnad*, Beirut, 1418 AH/1997, XVII, pp. 170 (*ḥadīth* §11104), 211 (*ḥadīth* §11131), 309 (*ḥadīth* §11211); XVIII, p. 114 (*ḥadīth* §11561); XXXII, p. 11 (*ḥadīth* §19265); according to Ḥamid Nāḥī Iṣfahānī, it can also be found in Muslim’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Fu‘ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī, 5 vols., Beirut, no date, IV, p. 183, and Ibn al-Maghāzīlī’s *Manāqib ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib*, ed. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Bihbūdī, Tehran, 1394 AH/1974–75, pp. 236 and 284.

⁶¹ *Nibrās*, pp. 18–19: “The people of my family are for you like Noah’s ark (*mathala ahl baytī fikum mathalu safīnat nūḥ*): who embarks on it is saved, who stays at the back is lost”. This *ḥadīth* is to be found in Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Mishkāt al-maṣābīḥ* (Cairo, no date, III, p. 265) as in Ibn al-Maghāzīlī’s *Manāqib*, pp. 131–34 See also Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, XXIV, bāb 7, pp. 120–24, *ḥadīth* §41–44 and 48, quoted from al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī’s *Āmālī*, and §49–51, reported from Ibn al-Maghāzīlī.

⁶² *Nibrās*, pp. 19–21. Notably: “There will be after me twelve chiefs (*amīr*)”, which can be found in al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Cairo, third ed., 11 vol., 1414 AH/1994, *Kitāb al-aḥkām*, *ḥadīth* §6457, XI, p. 70.

⁶³ *Nibrās*, p. 21: “The Mahdī will be among my descendants from the children of Fāṭima, he will cover the earth by equity and justice like it was covered by oppression and injustice (*yamlā’u l-ard qisṭan wa ‘adlan kamā mulī’at jawran wa-zulman*).” This *ḥadīth* is found in Ibn Mājah’s *Fitan*; a variant exists in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s *Musnad*, *ḥadīth* §645, p. 74; few pages before, *ḥadīth* §641, p. 71, is reported the *ḥadīth* about Ghadīr Khumm (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-‘Alī mawlāhu*).

⁶⁴ *Nibrās*, pp. 22–36.

⁶⁵ *Nibrās*, p. 36.

⁶⁶ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *K. al-Maghāzī*, *bāb ghazwat khaybar*, VI, pp. 395–397, *ḥadīth* §3701. Surprisingly, this *ḥadīth* is reported from ‘Ā’ishah, Muḥammad’s widow and ‘Alī’s adversary at the battle of the Camel.

with the Prophet and made him cry tears of remorse. Both agreed to meet at the nightfall for the allegiance and at that very time, “something appeared for Abū Bakr” (*badā li-Abī Bakr*). This mysterious formula, an obvious reference to the concept of *badā*, is added by Mīr Dāmād to the original text of Bukhārī. Then it reports that in the time of midday prayer, Abū Bakr gave a speech on the chair of the mosque, announcing the ending of ‘Alī’s reluctance to swear allegiance to him and attesting to the reconciliation. ‘Alī gave a speech in his turn, acknowledging Abū Bakr’s virtues but reaffirming his conviction of his own rights. Ending the quotation, Mīr Dāmād stresses the fact that al-Bukhārī did not say anything about the actual moment of ‘Alī’s allegiance to Abū Bakr.⁶⁷

Thus, in an implicit manner, Mīr Dāmād presents this event as a case of *badā*, that is to say an apparent change of the divine decree expressed by a sudden change in the attitude of the man commissioned by God, the Imam. Of course, this is not to say that God changed His election from ‘Alī to Abu Bakr, but that He postponed the application of His decree, and that ‘Alī’s renunciation was the very expression of the divine postponement. *Badā* is not in any case a change of the will of God, but only a delay in His execution because of circumstances created by human free will and disobedience.

As it appears, the agent of the divine will, the depositary of divine knowledge which is not hidden with God (*‘ind Allāh makhzūn*), meaning the Imam or the Prophet, can neither be completely informed, nor completely ignorant of the events caused by *badā* before their actual occurrence. Following this idea, Mīr Dāmād shows how the prophet Muḥammad previewed and announced, from a special mode of revelation, the drama of his succession and of the whole history of Islam. According to Sunni and Shī‘ī authorities alike, the Prophet saw in a dream men jumping like monkeys on the chair of his mosque and urging Muslims to deny Islam. This vision is said to have been the circumstance of the revelation of the verse Q.17:60: “And We made the vision that We showed thee and the tree cursed in the Qur’an to be only a trial for men.” According to the Shī‘ī interpretation, the “tree cursed in the Qur’an” means none other than the Umayyads.⁶⁸ For Mīr Dāmād, this evil lineage not only goes back to Mu‘āwiyah, but also to ‘Uthmān, ‘Umar and Abū Bakr, whom he curses unrestrainedly for they sowed the seeds of all the evils to come.⁶⁹ Then he relates, always based on al-Bukhārī, the famous *ḥadīth* of “pen and paper”, when the Prophet, on his deathbed, asked for paper and pen by saying: “I leave you a scripture in order that you don’t go astray after me”; ‘Umar opposed this will and the Prophet should give up, a fact that Ibn ‘Abbās qualified as a “great disaster”.⁷⁰ The Shī‘ah have always been convinced that the Prophet, by this scripture,

⁶⁷ *Nibrās*, pp. 36–38, see bottom of p. 37 for the formula with *badā*; in *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VI, p. 396.

⁶⁸ *Nibrās*, p. 40.

⁶⁹ *Nibrās*, p. 46.

⁷⁰ *Nibrās*, p. 49. See Shahrastānī, *Milal*, I, p. 29. On this subject, see Gurdofarid Miskinzoda, “The Story of ‘Pen and Paper’ and its Interpretations in Muslim Literary and Historical Tradition”, in Farhad Daftary and Gurdofarid Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shī‘ī Islam. History, Theology and Law*, London–New York, 2014, pp. 230–249. As it is a classical element of the anti-Sunni polemic, we find it

wanted to confirm that ‘Alī was his successor. Thus, his renunciation, under duress and for the common good, can be interpreted, like ‘Alī’s final allegiance to Abū Bakr, as an expression of *badā’*, meaning a suspension of the fulfillment of God’s will, and from a human point of view, the advent of an inevitable drama.

Other historical traditions quoted by Mīr Dāmād are also taken from Sunni authorities, not by way of ecumenism, but in order to force his Sunni opponents, the winners of the original historical conflict, to acknowledge, with the proof of *badā’*, the injustice of their victory. Beyond the Shī‘ī–Sunni polemic, this argumentation has already a philosophical interest. Mīr Dāmād aims to present the history of early Islam as a series of accidents which God did not want to happen but allowed by suspending the fulfillment of His will; in terms of *irādah*, the particular divine will corresponding to the temporal determination (*qadar*), and *mashī‘ah*, the universal divine will corresponding to the eternal decree (*qaḍā’*), it happened by the latter without the former.⁷¹ The tragedy of the nascent Islam, from the Shī‘ī point of view, could be entirely understood like a consequence of *badā’*: the events were unpredictable and incomprehensible to the commonality of believers or unbelievers; they were confused by the prediction of the messengers from that knowledge that God shares with them; they have always been contained in secret knowledge hidden with God, from which signs appear in the Qur’an. Consequently, there is no deficiency in the omniscience or the omnipotence of God, there is no “divine versatility” or “change of mind in God”, since God’s science, will and power are always the same. Also, there is no resignation or dissimulation on the part of God’s friends (*awliyā’*): they only want what God wants, they are informed of what God wants them to know, and they forgo their firm resolution only when the necessary postponement of the divine decree appears to them; their knowledge and their decision are simultaneous and coincident with the act pending from God. Even more paradoxically, the whole history of Islam takes place in this suspension of God’s will, a suspension foreseen by God from eternity – together with the conception of the twelve Imams – and extended by God till the end of the time – with the return of the Redeemer (*al-qā’im*).⁷² This sketch of a Shī‘ī philosophy of history, giving an account of both the wisdom

quoted and commented at length in Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-ṣāfi*, ed. Sayyid Maḥmūd Imāmiyān, 2 vol., Qumm, 1388 SH/2009–2010, II, pp. 51–52, like in *Biḥār al-anwār*, LV, bāb 13, p. 350.

⁷¹ Mīr Dāmād did not take up explicitly Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s distinction between *irādah* and *mashī‘ah*, but in *Qabasāt*, pp. 324–26, he separated the particular will of God (*irādah*) from His universal knowledge (*‘ilm*); in *Qabasāt*, pp. 416–17 and 473, he made implicitly coincide the distinction between *qaḍā’* and *qadar* with the one between *mashī‘ah* and *irādah*. See Sayyid Aḥmad al-‘Āmilī al-‘Alawī, *Sharḥ kitāb al-Qabasāt*, ed. Ḥāmid Nāji Iṣfahānī, Tehran, 1376 Sh/1997, p. 694. Last, in his *Risālat al-iqāzāt fī khalq al-a‘māl (the Awakenings on the Creation of Actions)*, ed. Ḥāmid Nāji Iṣfahānī, Tehran, 1391 SH/2012–13, pp. 72–76, on the base of *ḥadīth* mostly taken from al-Kulaynī’s *Uṣūl al-Kāfi, Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, bāb al-mashī‘ah wa al-irādah*, pp. 86–87, Mīr Dāmād distinguished between the universal *irādah ḥatm* and the particular *irādah ikhtiyār*; which mirrors the distinction between *mashī‘ah* and *irādah* on the one hand, *qaḍā’* and *qadar* on the other hand.

⁷² On the pre-existence and the post-existence of the Imam, see Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, second and fourth parts.

of God and the tragedy of history, will receive its metaphysical and rational foundation in the second section of the epistle.

iii) Appearance in the System of Being: a Rational Explanation of *badā'*

In a section entitled “Resolution of the problem of appearance” (*taḥlīl mas'alat al-badā'*), Mīr Dāmād aims to explain the sense of this concept in the Imāmī traditions collected by “the chief of tradents” (*ra'īs al-muḥaddithīn*) al-Kulaynī in the chapter devoted to the *badā'* in *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*.⁷³ He presents his argumentation as “the refutation of the Jews concerning their negation of the book of clearing and establishing (*kitāb al-maḥw wa-l-ithbāt*) in the engendering decrees (*aḥkām takwīniyyah*) and [their negation of] the possibility of abrogation (*naskh*) and substitution (*tabdīl*) in the law-giving decrees (*aḥkām tashrī'iyyah*)”. Between the lines of this announce, one may read the refutation of the Sunnis concerning their negation of *badā'* and their acceptance of *naskh*.⁷⁴ The first explanation is strictly linguistic. Following the lexicographer Majd al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 606 AH/1210) in *al-Nihāyah fī gharīb al-ḥadīth*,⁷⁵ Mīr Dāmād defines the *badā'* as the apparition of a new view without regret for the previous one; the purpose of the common good remains the same, only the determination of the means is changing according to the variable circumstances.⁷⁶ One shall understand that attributed to God, *badā'* is not a kind of versatility or irresolution, but what would better be called prudence in the sense of Aristotle's *phronesis* or practical wisdom: a virtue of convenient action following the contingency of the sublunary world.⁷⁷ In the ethics of Aristotle, prudence is a virtue of man and not a virtue of God, who seems powerless to govern the world in the detail.⁷⁸ In a metaphysics which integrates Aristotelian cosmology into the frame of a rigorous theology which maximize the power of God, prudence becomes the expression of God's wisdom into the contingency of His lower creation.

Indeed, the second explanation resumes the classical theological argumentation, the distinction between the decree (*qaḍā'*) and the determination (*qadar*) on one hand, the analogy between appearance (*badā'*) and abrogation (*naskh*) on the other hand, in the frame of Mīr Dāmād's metaphysical system. The very axis of this system, based on some brief definitions given by Avicenna, is the distinction between the time (*zamān*) of the physical world; the relative eternity (*dahr*) of the intelligible world and the creation as a whole, emerging from the real non-existence; and the absolute eternity (*sarmad*) of the Creator in

⁷³ *Nibrās*, p. 54.

⁷⁴ *Nibrās*, p. 55.

⁷⁵ See Franz Rosenthal, “Ibn al-Athīr”, *EI2*, III, pp. 746–747, at p. 746.

⁷⁶ *Nibrās*, p. 55. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāyah*, I, p. 104.

⁷⁷ See Pierre Aubenque, *La prudence chez Aristote*, Paris, 1963.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 84–91.

His essence.⁷⁹ For these three key-concepts, I adopt Toshihiko Izutsu's translation of time (*zamān*), meta-time (*dahr*) and no-time (*sarmad*).⁸⁰ Following this ontological partition, and according to a metaphor frequently used by Mīr Dāmād, time is the container (*wa'ā*) of the determined existence and non-existence of the natural ever-changing things; meta-time is the container of the pure existence, preceded by pure non-existence, of the intellects and Platonic forms; no-time is the container of the pure, real and immutable existence of God, not preceded by any non-existence, a pure activity without any potentiality.⁸¹ No-time contains meta-time and pours out primary existence into it, meta-time contains time and pours out secondary existence into it. The universal and simple decree, concerning the cosmological and meta-historical principles, corresponds to meta-time, while the determination of the particular events in the sublunary world and the human history corresponds to time. Consequently, the realm of determination is the proper abode of appearance when the realm of decree is absolutely free of it. In the following passage, Mīr Dāmād resumes the analogy between appearance and abrogation by making it a real metaphysical parallelism:

In the technical sense, appearance is in the engendering process (*takwīn*) what abrogation is in law-giving activity (*tashrī*). What abrogation is in the law-giving commandment, in the prescriptive decrees of the divine law, in relation to the actions of responsible subjects, is what appearance is in the engendering commandment, in the generating effusions on the engendered objects of knowledge and on the temporal products of engendering. Abrogation is like a law-giving appearance (*badā' tashrī*), and appearance is like an engendering abrogation (*naskh takwīn*).⁸²

The analogy between appearance and abrogation could also be based on the idea of a correspondence between the two "books of being and letters" (*al-kitābayn al-wujūdī wa-l-ḥarfī*), it means the whole world and the Qur'an. According to this *Weltanschauung*, the apparent change in the divine decrees is called *naskh* when it occurs in the "book of letters", including the precedent revelations, and *badā'* when it occurs in the "book of being".⁸³ Mīr Dāmād goes on:

⁷⁹ For the Avicennian sources, see e.g. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā' (al-Ṭabī'īyyāt)*, ed. Sa'īd Zāyid, Qumm, 1404/1983–84, I, pp. 166–173; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, Beirut, 1404 AH/1983–84, pp. 43 and 141–142. On this conception, see Fazlur Rahman, "Ḥudūth-i dahrī-yi Mīr Dāmād", in Mīr Dāmād, *Qabasāt*, introduction, pp. 121–143; Sajjad H. Rizvi, "Mīr Dāmād and the Debate on ḥudūth-i dahrī in India", in Denis Hermann and Fabrizio Speziale (eds.), *Muslim cultures in the Indo-Iranian World*, Berlin, 2010, pp. 449–473, at pp. 452–457; Mathieu Terrier, "De l'éternité ou de la nouveauté du monde. Parcours d'un problème philosophique d'Athènes à Ispahan", *Journal Asiatique*, 299.1 (2011), pp. 369–421, at pp. 401–411.

⁸⁰ Toshihiko Izutsu, "Mīr Dāmād and his Metaphysics", in Mīr Dāmād, *Qabasāt*, introduction, pp. 4–5.

⁸¹ See *Qabasāt*, p. 7.

⁸² *Nibrās*, pp. 55–56.

⁸³ *Jazawāt wa mawāqīt*, pp. 161 and 236.

There is no appearance in the decree, in relation to the Real Holy One (*al-quddūs al-ḥaqq*) and the pure separated beings among His angels. There is no appearance on the plane of meta-time (*matn al-dahr*) which is the envelope of stable occurrence and pure immutability (*ẓarf al-ḥuṣūl al-qārr wa-l-thabāt al-batt*), the container of the whole system of existence. There is appearance only in the determination as an extension of Time which is the horizon of extinction and renewal, the envelope of anteriority and posteriority, of gradualness and alternation [...], in relation to the people of the worlds of space and time, the countries of matter and nature.⁸⁴

The distinction between the two realms is rigorously Platonic, while including the Aristotelian conception of nature (*phusis*). The decree is the innovation of the intelligible world in meta-time, while the determination is the continual causation of the sensible world in time, by generation and corruption of its extant beings. *Badā'* as appearance or newness happens only in the sensible world which is the image of the intelligible one, where the archetype remains immutable. In this metaphysical meaning, the concept of *badā'* allows for divine intervention in human history without attributing to God any versatility or change of mind. The philosopher goes on:

Just as the truth of abrogation is the ending of the law-giving judgment, the interruption of its continuity, not its removal from the container of actuality (*wa'ā' al-wāqī'*), the truth of appearance [...] is the interruption of the continuity of the engendering commandment, the end of the connection with the emanation [of existence] (*ifāḍah*), the exhaustion of the long-time overflowing (*fayḍān*) on being which is created by generation and caused in time. [Appearance] concerns the delimitation of the time of engendered being, the specification of the moment of effusion, following the requirement of its conditions and preparations, the difference of abilities and predispositions. This is not a removal of caused and engendered being from the time of its engendered existence nor its cancellation in the very limit of its occurrence. This is in accordance with the perception (*madhāq*) of spiritual reality and the method of spiritual realisation.⁸⁵

Badā' is consequently defined as a discontinuity in the process of creation as emanation and, for what concerns directly mankind's history, as a suspension of the provident action of God. Mīr Dāmād effectuates here a real innovation in Neoplatonic philosophy, by introducing the possibility of an inessential interruption of the effusive process from the higher world to the lower one. This amendment to the Plotinian principle of continual emanation is certainly necessary to its conciliation with the foreseen Shī'ī

⁸⁴ *Nibrās*, p. 56. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, IV, pp. 182–183, quotes this passage after saying: “What taught our glorious master, our honored lord surnamed by ‘Bāqir al-Dāmād al-Ḥusaynī’, his secret be sanctified, when we were at his service, in the epistle he devoted to the examination of the question of *badā'* and entitled *Nibrās al-diyā'*...”, informing us that by the time Mīr Dāmād wrote this epistle, Mullā Ṣadrā was still his student.

⁸⁵ *Nibrās*, pp. 56–57. On this passage, see Khāmanihī, *Mīr Dāmād*, pp. 137–140.

conception of history. From a metaphysical point of view, it means that all the tragedy of history and its obvious accidents are only due to temporal interruptions of divine emanation on the natural world, without any alteration, neither in the ontological order nor in the essential providence of the superior to the inferior. To explain the tragedy of history in the frame of the Neoplatonic monism is what seems to be the main philosophical focus of Mīr Dāmād's treatise on *badā'*.

In order to reply to Sunni heresiography, but also to satisfy his own requirement of rationality, the Shī'ī philosopher firstly aims to rule out any temporality from the correct conception of God. In His essence, His attributes, His operations and His names, God transcends any gradualness and alternation which are functions of time as the envelope of ever-changing things (*ẓarf al-mutaghayyirāt*). There is no extinction and renewal in God, who transcends meta-time and time,⁸⁶ something that excludes *a priori* any kind of change in His science or His will.

Mīr Dāmād then goes back to the conception of the creation of the world which is the heart of his system. He distinguishes between origination (*ibdā'*), invention (*ikhtirā'*) and generation (*takwīn*): the existents which originated in meta-time are the Platonic forms and the celestial intellects; the existents which are generated in time are the natural and sensible beings; between the two, the invented existents which are the celestial bodies ensure the connection between meta-time and time.⁸⁷ Anteriority and posteriority, advance and delay, do not have any sense out of time, not in meta-time and even less in no-time as the pure eternity of the All-Encompassing (*bi-kulli shay' muḥīṭ*).⁸⁸ Thus, appearance in its literal sense happens only in the world of generation.

The philosopher will later make this distinction even more intricate. In the meantime, he devotes a chapter to the divine attributes, taking up a view of Ibn 'Arabī in order to find the happy medium between anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) and denial of God's attributes (*ta'tīl*):⁸⁹ the divine essence, which is beyond all definition, manifests itself by the essential name of the necessary essence (*ism al-dhāt al-wājibah*). This name in his turn expresses itself in the names referring to attributes of reality and perfection (*asmā' al-ṣifāt al-ḥaqīqiyyah al-kamāliyyah*).⁹⁰ The same holds good for the names of relational attributes and for the names of actions (*asmā' al-ṣifāt al-iḍāfiyyah wa-asmā' al-af'āl*).⁹¹ God's actions and relations have nothing to do with actions and relations in the empirical and natural meaning, or with their negation. Consequently, commandment (*amr*), origination (*ibdā'*), existentiatio (*ijād*) and generation (*takwīn*) are in God immutable and absolute actions, neither instantaneous nor progressive, completely out of time, unlike the actions of willing

⁸⁶ *Nibrās*, pp. 58–59.

⁸⁷ *Nibrās*, p. 60. See also *Qabasāt*, pp. 119–120.

⁸⁸ *Nibrās*, p. 59.

⁸⁹ *Nibrās*, pp. 61–67.

⁹⁰ *Nibrās*, p. 63.

⁹¹ *Nibrās*, p. 64.

choosers. Here Mīr Dāmād arrives at an issue which may have been implicit from the beginning: “God’s will (*mashīyyatuhu*) for human actions is between two cases, out of the limits of compulsion on human acts (*jabr*) as of the ones of delegation of powers (*tafwīd*).”⁹² This is the classical predestination versus free will problem, on which Mu‘tazilī theologians opted for free will and responsibility, Sunni theologians for compulsion on human actions, and the Shī‘ī Imams for a third way: “Neither compulsion nor human delegation but something between (*amr bayna amrayn*).”⁹³ This very happy medium allows appearance as a suspension of the necessary application of the divine will and explains that the events which are objects of *badā’* are both announced and unpredictable.

In the following chapter, Mīr Dāmād bases himself on Avicenna’s *al-Risālah al-Nayrūziyyah* (*Epistle of the New Year*), which Louis Massignon estimated as being part of his “oriental philosophy”.⁹⁴ Although Avicenna, in the fifth *namaṭ* of his *Ishārāt*, distinguishes three modes of divine action – origination (*ibdā’*), generation (*takwīn*), and innovation (*iḥdāth*)⁹⁵ –, in this work he distinguishes four modes. This is one reason to think that this epistle could be apocryphal,⁹⁶ but Mīr Dāmād prefers thinking it is authentic, as he does for the *Theology* of Pseudo-Aristotle. Furthermore, he estimates this quadripartition being much better than the tripartition between origination (*ibdā’*), invention (*ikhtirā’*), and generation (*takwīn*), that he used before,⁹⁷ probably in order to integrate in his system the concept of *badā’* which was completely ignored by al-shaykh al-ra’īs. It suggests that the discovery of this epistle transformed Mīr Dāmād’s Avicennian heritage, Avicenna’s influence on him, and his own metaphysics as well.

All the men firmly rooted in knowledge (*al-rāsikhīn fī-l-‘ilm*), all the metaphysicians of Yemeni wisdom and of Greek philosophy, have distinguished four types of causation (*ja’l*), existentionation (*ijād*), or emanation (*ifāḍah*); origination (*ibdā’*) and invention (*ikhtirā’*), related to beings occurring in meta-time (*al-ḥawādith al-dahriyyah*), which have two kinds

⁹² *Nibrās*, pp. 66–67.

⁹³ Mīr Dāmād has devoted to this question his *Risālat al-Īqāzāt*, see pp. 5–6 and 35–37 for this tradition. Al-‘Allāmah al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, eds. Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Bahādūrī and Shaykh Muḥammad Hādiyubah, Qumm, 1413 HA/1992-93, I, p. 310; Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 334.

⁹⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Risālah al-Nayrūziyyah fī ma‘ānī al-ḥurūf al-hijā’iyya*, in *Tis‘ rasā’il fī l-ḥikmah wa-l-ṭabī’iyyāt li-l-shaykh al-ra’īs Ibn Sīnā*, ed. ‘A. Nafaqah and A. Hindiyyah, Cairo, 1326 AH/1908 and 1328 AH/1910, pp. 144–151. Louis Massignon, “La philosophie orientale d’Ibn Sina et son alphabet philosophique”, Beirut, 1963. See also Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science: the Occult Philosophy of Ṣā’in al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī (1369-1432) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran”, Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2012, pp. 204–9, and his chapter in this volume; my thanks to him for its communication.

⁹⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, ed. Muḥtabā al-Zāra‘ī, Qumm, 1381 SH/2002–03, p. 286.

⁹⁶ Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 2d ed., Leiden – Boston, 2014, p. 508, considers that the authenticity of the treatise has to be verified.

⁹⁷ *Nibrās*, p. 74, where he mentions his *Taqwīm al-īmān* (ed. ‘Alī Awjabī, followed by its commentary by Sayyid Aḥmad al-‘Alawī, *Kashf al-ḥaqā’iq*, Tehran, 1382 SH/2003) and his *al-Rawāshih al-samāwiyyah* (ed. lith. Qumm, 1405 AH/1984–85, see p. 12–15). In *Jazawāt*, pp. 101–102, Mīr Dāmād effectuates the same rectification.

of newness (*ḥudūth*), one by essence (*dhātī*) and another in meta-time (*dahrī*); fashioning (*ṣun*) and generation (*takwīn*), related to beings occurring in time, which have three kinds of newness, one by essence, one in meta-time and one in time.⁹⁸

Our philosopher then comments that:

1) Origination (*ibdā*) is the causation of the essential substance of quiddity (*māhiyyah*), pulled out of pure meta-temporal nothingness, without any preexistent matter or duration. This is how the first Intellect has been brought into existence. Here Mīr Dāmād criticises and justifies at the same time the disciples of Proclus and Aristotle for having defended the eternity of originated beings (*qidam al-mubdāʿāt*) without having vouched for the truth of meta-temporal precedence of pure nothingness with their origination.⁹⁹

2) Invention (*ikhtirā*) is the causation of the essential substance, pulled out of essential non-being (*al-laysiyyah al-dhātiyyah*) and meta-temporal nothingness, essentially preceded by a matter but not by any duration. This is how celestial spheres, as well as universal and simple elements, are brought into existence.¹⁰⁰

3) Fashioning (*ṣun*) is the causation of the substance of any new natural being, its essential newness (*ḥudūth dhātī*) proceeding from non-being and its meta-temporal newness (*ḥudūth dahrī*) preceded by matter. One may think of the action of the Demiurge in Plato's *Timeous*, who fashions the natural world from the archetypes and the chaotic prime matter, as the name of God *al-ṣāni* generally designates His demiurgic agency.¹⁰¹

4) Last, generation (*takwīn*) is the extraction of the ipseity (*huwiyyah*) of a natural being from the extension of nothingness, and the positioning of its existence at a moment of time, preceded in time by a matter which bears its possibility and by a continuous nothingness.¹⁰² Then, generation happens in the natural world caused by fashioning.

In this emanationist system, the first entity effused from the One is the world of Intellect. The second one is the world of Soul, which is not absolutely separated from matter and moves by desire for Intellect. The third one is the world of Nature. The fourth one is the corporeal world (*al-jismānī*), divided in ethereal (superlunary) and elementary (sublunary),¹⁰³ according to Aristotle's *Physics*. The four primordial entities, which are God the true One, Intellect, Soul and Nature, can be considered under two rubrics: in themselves and in relation

⁹⁸ *Nibrās*, pp. 71–72.

⁹⁹ *Nibrās*, p. 72. The resolution of the problem of eternity or newness of the world, with the harmonization of the positions of Plato and Aristotle, is the main focus of numerous works of Mīr Dāmād, e.g. *al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm (The Straight Path)*, ed. ʿAlī Awjabī, Tehran, 1381 SH/2002. On this issue, see Terrier, “De l'éternité ou de la nouveauté du monde”, pp. 395–411.

¹⁰⁰ *Nibrās*, p. 73.

¹⁰¹ *Nibrās*, p. 73. *Timaeus*, in Plato, vol. IX, tr. R. G. Bury, London, 1929. See also Daniel Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam*, Paris, 1988, pp. 304–305.

¹⁰² *Nibrās*, p. 73.

¹⁰³ *Nibrās*, pp. 75–76. Ibn Sīnā, *Nayrūziyyah*, pp. 145–146 in original pagination.

with the lower or upper entity. It leads to a second tetrad: the first relation is origination (*ibdā'*), the way by which the Intellect proceeds from the One; then comes commandment (*amr*), the way by which the Soul effuses from the Intellect; then comes creation (*khalq*), the way by which elements and sphere are created; the final relation is generation (*takwīn*), the way by which perishable beings are coming to be.¹⁰⁴ On the base of this metaphysical system, and following the same Avicenna's *opus*, Mīr Dāmād will now explore a new way of speculation which will bring us back to the issue of *badā'*.

iv) Appearance in the World of Letters and Numbers: an Esoteric Deciphering of *badā'*

A large section of *Nibrās al-ḍiyā'* is devoted to speculations on letters and numbers, according to a trend towards occult sciences which was not particular to Mīr Dāmād in Safavid Iran but is particularly remarkable in his works.¹⁰⁵ Mīr Dāmād bases himself on a system introduced by Avicenna in his *al-Risālah al-Nayrūziyyah*, where al-shaykh al-ra'īs joints summarily the classical Neoplatonic hierarchy to an alphanumeric system assigning each Arabic letter a number.¹⁰⁶ According to Louis Massignon, this system may have originated in some Shī'ī current among the early "extremists" (*ghulāt*), especially the Ismailis, a fact that suggests that with Mīr Dāmād, Shī'ī thought recovers here its classical heritage.¹⁰⁷ At any case, Avicenna sketches a "philosophical alphabet" mapping each letter and number to a level of reality or an ontological relation in order to explain the letter combinations that appear in the beginning of twenty-nine *sūrahs* called *al-muqaṭṭa'āt*.

Mīr Dāmād resumes this system by first giving to it a metaphysical foundation. He writes:

What is addressed by the command "Be!" (*kun*), the receiver of the order of procession, is the very substance of quiddity in the name, and what follows is its very substance occurring as a real quiddity [in the extraneous reality]. Thus, letters and numbers are the mind of concrete existents (*dhihn al-a'yān*), the conscience and the imagination of the extra-mental reality (*al-khārij*). When a quiddity is imprinted and reflected [in a name], the making of the latter causes the occurrence of the former in the

¹⁰⁴ *Nibrās*, pp. 76–77. Ibn Sīnā, *Nayrūziyyah*, p. 137.

¹⁰⁵ *Nibrās*, pp. 80–109. This third section has circulated as an independent work entitled *al-Ḥurūf wa-l-a'dād* (*Letters and Numbers*). See Awjabī, *Mīr Dāmād*, p. 187.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *Nayrūziyyah*, al-faṣl al-thānī, pp. 138–140, integrally quoted by Mīr Dāmād in *Jazawāt*, pp. 162–164.

¹⁰⁷ Massignon, "La philosophie orientale", pp. 594–97, mentions only non-Imāmi sources : the Ismaili opuscle *Gushāyish va ruhāyish*, Druze and Nuṣayri traditions. One can think to Jābir Ibn Ḥayyān's doctrine of the Balance (*mīzān*), notably in the *Kitāb al-Mājid* (*Book of the Glorious*) – see Henry Corbin, *L'alchimie comme art hiératique*, Paris, 1986 –, the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq being considered as his master and as the initiator of the "science of letters". The fourteenth epistle of the Ikhwān al-ṣafā' also deals with this kind of alphabet and the *muqaṭṭa'āt*: see *Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, Beirut, 2006, III, pp. 376–83. The most ancient Shī'ī source of it could be al-Mughīra (d. around 119/737), according to Henry Corbin (*Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, Paris, 1986, p. 117 and s.v. index).

extraneous reality. This is one reason for the efficacy (*istithmār*) of prayers and invocations in gathering the requests in the container of occurrent reality (*wa‘ā’ al-ḥuṣūl*)¹⁰⁸

In this conception, letters and numbers have a performative power, and are not merely passive entities to be manipulated.¹⁰⁹ This is the foundation of the efficacy of prayer, which is the second topic announced in the title of the epistle. Later, Mīr Dāmād justifies the belief in the power of Arabic letters by three prophetic *ḥadīth* saying that “God did not reveal to Adam anything but twenty-nine letters”, “*Lām-alif* is one sole letter God revealed to Adam in one sole scroll (*ṣaḥīfa*) accompanied by one thousand angels. Who denies it and does not believe in it, does not believe in what God has revealed to Muḥammad”; and “Who does not believe in letters – in the number of twenty-nine – will never escape from hell”. The source of these *ḥadīth* remains unknown.¹¹⁰ Before this, the philosopher has ascribed this theory to all the ancient sages while declaring:

The pillars of the sages and metaphysicians (*asāṭīn al-ḥukamā’ al-ilāhiyyīn*) agree that the world of letters is like the body and the world of numbers like the spirit in it. Both, for what they contain of harmonies (*ta’līfāt*) in relations and co-mingling of particularities, apply to the worlds of generation for what it contains of relations between engendered beings and of productions by fashioning. [Letters and numbers] are like shadows, reflections, fruits and branches of the radiances coming from the world of intelligible lights.¹¹¹

The system originated from Avicenna is then presented by Mīr Dāmād with long hermetic comments that I mostly omit:

- *Alif*, “whose spiritual rank is the One”, denotes the essence of the Creator without relation to anything else. Mīr Dāmād remarks that the scriptural form of the *alif* is the principle of the forms of all the letters.
- *Bā’*, “whose rank is two, the first pair and the first doubling of the One for spirit”, denotes the first Intellect expressed by “the supreme pen” and “the right hand”.
- *Jīm*, whose spirit is the three, denotes the universal Soul.
- *Dāl*, whose spirit is the four, the last of the first ending of letters, denotes the substantial Nature, the last of the active entities.

¹⁰⁸ *Nibrās*, pp. 78–79.

¹⁰⁹ It is well known that John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, Oxford, 1962, theorises this notion of “performative” (or illocutionary) power of signs in human speech.

¹¹⁰ *Nibrās*, p. 109, n. 4. Notably, they are not found in *Biḥār al-anwār*.

¹¹¹ *Nibrās*, p. 80.

- *Hā'*, whose numerical value is five, means the Creator, the Self-Abiding (*al-qayyūm*), not in His very essence, but in His relation to the whole existence proceeding from Him – by origination (*ibdā'*) or any other way of existentionation (*ījād*). Mīr Dāmād here remembers that five is the number of the daily prayers and the sacred people of the mantle (*aṣḥāb al-kisā'*), which form together a sole being (*fard*) or pleroma.¹¹² He refers to a theory of seven cycles of five attributed to both the “guide of the wise men” (*imām al-ḥukamā'*) Plato in his *Tablets (al-Alwāḥ)* and the master of the Greek Peripatetics Aristotle in his *Conjunctions (al-Iṣṭikākāt)*, two apocryphal works of alchemy and astrology.¹¹³ He stresses that *hā'*, with its follower *wāw*, composes the name *huwa* (“He”), which is the supreme name of God (*al-ism al-a'zam*), and affirms that *hā'* is the root of the name *Allāh*.¹¹⁴

- *Wāw*, equivalent to six, means the Intellect, not in the substance of its essence, but in its relation of illumination (*isḥrāq*) on the lower worlds.¹¹⁵

- *Zā'*, equivalent to seven, means the Soul, not in itself, but in its relation with all the classes and worlds over which it has dominion (*sultān*), direction (*tadbīr*) and influence (*ta'thīr*).

- *Ḥā'*, equivalent to eight, means the Nature in its relation to all on which it exercises its guardianship (*wilāyah*) and disposal (*taṣarruf*).

- *Ṭā'*, equivalent to nine, means the prime matter (*hayūlā*, from the Greek *hylē*) and the world of material things, which is the last degree of the hierarchy of origin (*al-silsilah al-bada'iyyah*), without relation to anything subordinated.¹¹⁶ Mīr Dāmād notices here that the product of $\tau\bar{a}' = 9 =$ the prime matter, by $h\bar{a}' = 5 =$ the Creator in its creating agency, gives forty-five, which is the number of Adam ($\bar{a}l\bar{i}f = 1 + d\bar{a}d = 4 + m\bar{i}m = 40$).¹¹⁷

¹¹² *Nibrās*, p. 83. The people of the mantle refers to Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn.

¹¹³ The first one is conserved in a collection of the Vatican, n. 1088, p. 141 of Levi della Vida's catalogue, pp. 241v–250r. See Abdurrahmān Badawī, *La transmission de la philosophie grecque au monde arabe*, Paris, 1987, p. 45. Mīr Dāmād mentions these two works in his *Jazawāt*, p. 143, and gives a quotation of the second one p.146. It is notable that for Mīr Dāmād, consequently, Plato and Aristotle were rational philosophers, mystics and magicians alike, a combination that he tried to realise himself.

¹¹⁴ *Nibrās*, p. 84. This passage is quoted from the *Tafsīr āyat al-kursī* of Shams al-Dīn Khafrī (d. 942 AH/1535). See in Manūchihr Ṣadūqī Suhā (ed.), *Tafsīr 'aqliyyah li-falāsifah ilāhiyyah*, Tehran, 1389 SH/2010–11, pp. 267–90, the passage quoted is at p. 277. Mīr Dāmād also mentions it in *Jazawāt*, pp. 167–68. On this philosopher and astronomer, see George Saliba, “Kafri, Šams al-Dīn”, *Elr*.

¹¹⁵ *Nibrās*, pp. 84–85.

¹¹⁶ The same system from the beginning appears shortly in Khafrī, *Tafsīr āyat al-kursī*, in *Tafsīr 'aqliyyah*, p. 277: “For the intellects (*li-l-'uqūl*) considered in their influence on what is subordinated to them, the [number] six and [the letter] *wāw*”

¹¹⁷ *Nibrās*, p. 86.

The following letters and numbers correspond to relations or combinations between the previous entities. Mīr Dāmād quotes *in extenso* Avicenna's brief exposé before giving his own interpretation of each letter and number.¹¹⁸

- *Yā'*, equivalent to ten, the product of two by five, means origination (*ibdā'*) as the relation of the Creator (=5) to the Intellect *per se* (=2).¹¹⁹
- *Kāf*, equivalent to twenty, the product of four by five, means generation (*takwīn*) as the relation of the Creator (=5) to the Nature in itself (=4).
- *Lām*, equivalent to thirty, the product of six by five, means commandment (*amr*) as the relation of the Creator (=5) to the Intellect as effused and effusing (=6).
- *Mīm*, equivalent to forty, the product of eight by five, means creation (*khalq*) as the relation of the Creator (=5) to the Nature in its governmental dimension or *natura naturans* in Spinoza's words (=8).¹²⁰
- *Nūn*, equivalent to fifty, means the sum of generation (=20) and commandment (=30).
- *Sīn*, equivalent to sixty, means the sum of generation (=20) and creation (=40).
- *'Ayn*, equivalent to seventy, means the sum of commandment (=30) and creation (=40).
- *Fā'*, equivalent to eighty, without any explanation, as in Avicenna's epistle.
- *Ṣād*, equivalent to ninety, means the sum of commandment (=30), creation (=40) and generation (=20).
- *Qāf*, equivalent to one hundred, means the sum of commandment (=30), creation (=40), generation (=20) and origination (=10).
- *Rā'*, equivalent to two hundred.

¹¹⁸ *Nibrās*, p. 91. Ibn Sīnā, *Nayrūziyyah*, pp. 139–140.

¹¹⁹ *Nibrās*, p. 87.

¹²⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, I, prop. XXIX.

Mīr Dāmād concludes his speculations by saying that these twenty letters are the mothers of the letters and that the principles of the letrist world (*al-‘ālam al-ḥarfī*) are the fourteen letters which open twenty-nine sacred *sūrahs* of the Revelation, the same as the number of the letters.¹²¹

In the end of the epistle as it remains, Mīr Dāmād ties the threads of his conceptual demonstration and his alphanumeric system, by coming back to the notion of *badā’*.¹²² He establishes that the number of the verbal name (*maṣḍar*) *badā’* is eight (2+4+1+1), corresponding to the world of Nature (*ḥā’*). The number of the past tense of the verb *badā’* is seven (2+4+1), corresponding to the world of Soul (*zā’*). The number of the imperfect of the verb *yabdū* is twenty-two (10+2+4+6), corresponding to the number of the world of generation (*kāf’*). This confirms that appearance (*badā’*) as novelty only occurs in the worlds of Nature and Soul, in the world of generation, that is to say in time, and never happens in the world of the existentiating commandment or in the container of pure existence, that is to say in meta-time, nor in relation to God’s essence which is beyond time and meta-time.¹²³

Last, the number of the verbal name (*maṣḍar*) *buduww* is twelve if we count the sole written letters, eighteen if we count the gemination of the letter *wāw*. In the latter case, the number eighteen corresponds to the product of *wāw* (=6), the letter of the world of Intellect in its effusive and illuminative agency, and *jīm* (=3), the letter of the world of Nature as a substantial essence receiving the light of the Lord. Consequently, eighteen is the number of the worlds’ hierarchies of the universal system. In the former case, twelve corresponds to the product of *bā’* (=2) and *wāw* (=6), which are the two letters of the world of Intellect, or to the product of *jīm* (=3), the letter of the world of Soul, and *dāl* (=4), the letter of the world of Nature, both faces-turned toward the world of Sovereignty. Not surprisingly, Mīr Dāmād recalls the high rank of twelve as the number of the signs of the zodiac, the months of the year, the numerical classes (from 1 to 10, then 100 and 1000), the deputies of Israel’s tribes, and the heirs of the Seal of the prophets which are the twelve Imams; but also, by adding numeric values of the letters, the number of the word (*kalimah*) of Islam which is “Muḥammad is the messenger of God” (*Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*), of the word of faith (*īmān*) which is “Alī is the legatee of the Messenger” (*‘Alī waṣī al-rasūl*), “Alī is the epiphanic form of the guidance” (*‘Alī maḥzar al-hudā*), or “Alī is the guide of mankind” (*‘Alī imām al-warā’*), as of two formulas designating the Imams, “The heirs of the lord of the messengers”

¹²¹ *Nibrās*, p. 107. Mullā Ṣadrā and others in the Safavid period tie an esoteric reading of these fourteen letters at the beginning of various *sūrahs* (*ḥurūf muqatta‘āt*) into a formula, *‘Alī ṣirāt ḥaqq numsikuhu* (‘Alī is the path of the truth/God to which we cleave) – see Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-karīm*, ed. Muḥammad Khwājawī, Tehran, 1389 SH/2010, I, p. 207. Mīr Dāmād, *Jazavāt*, p. 141 has the variant *ṣirāt ‘Alī ḥāqq numsikuhu* (the path of ‘Alī is the truth to which we cleave).

¹²² *Nibrās*, pp. 115–118.

¹²³ *Nibrās*, p. 115.

(*warathat sayyid al-rusul*) and “The princes of the people of heaven” (*sādat ahl al-janna*).¹²⁴ It is worthy to note that such a deciphering of Shī‘ī formulas of praise can also be found in the *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn* of Rajab al-Bursī (d. after 813 AH/1410–11 CE), one of the scholars which introduced the science of letters and numbers in Shī‘ī gnosis in the 8th / 14th century, without dealing with *badā’*.¹²⁵ Mīr Dāmād’s discourse here takes place in this Shī‘ī esoteric and mystic tradition which stands far from the rationalist Avicennism or Mu‘tazili heritage.

Mīr Dāmād then comes back on the distinction between decree (*qaḍā’*) and determination (*qadar*), the latter being the detailed and temporal application of the former which is absolutely simple and timeless. Both have many degrees. Each degree is determination when related to the upper and decree when related to the lower, except the pure decree at the upper limit – which isn’t determination in any respect and has no decree beyond itself – and the pure determination at the lower limit – which isn’t decree in any respect and has no determination after itself. He recalls Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s analogy by saying that among the degrees of the decree and the determination, there is the “Essence of the Book” (*umm al-kitāb*) and the “tablet of clearing and establishing” of the verse 13:39.¹²⁶ This last expression has two meanings: 1) The “throne of extinction and renewal” (*‘arsh al-taqaddī wa-l-tajaddud*), means time, pure actual determination vis-à-vis the “Essence of the Book” in the frame of meta-time. In this sense, the “tablet of clearing and establishing” is the decree in relation to the actual temporal beings and the determination in relation to the decree of divine knowledge. 2) The “faculties of perception among the celestial souls” (*al-quwā l-mudrikah min al-nufūs al-samāwiyyah*), in which the forms of the particular beings of the world of generation and creation are imprinted like they are in the determination. In this sense, the “tablet of clearing and establishing” is a decree through knowledge (*qaḍā’ ‘ilmī*) when related to the intelligible world and a determination through knowledge (*qadar ‘ilmī*) when related to Nature. The “Essence of the Book” is the “guarded Tablet” or the intelligible world of illuminating and separable substances, in which the forms of all beings are imprinted. Appearance occurs only in the degrees of determination, in the “tablet of clearing and establishing”, in the *possibilia* of the world of change, meaning in time. Appearance does not occur, neither in the pure decree, the Essence of the Book, the sent natures and the world of the existentiating order (*kun*), nor for inhabitants of the earth of

¹²⁴ *Nibrās*, pp. 115–116. The implicit conception of a word as being not just a concatenation of letters, but a single whole identical with its meaning, and of the letter as being such a single whole bearing a meaning, can be compared with the *sphota* theory of classical Indian philosophers like Patañjali and Bhartr̥hari. See Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Word and the World. India’s Contributions to the Study of Language*, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 77–98.

¹²⁵ al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn fī asrār amīr al-mu’minīn*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ghaffār Ashraf al-Māzindarānī, Qumm, 1384 SH/2005–06, see pp. 194–195: the first and the two last formulas are given for they count twelve letters.

¹²⁶ *Nibrās*, p. 116.

life and the lights of the angelic realm (*malakūt*).¹²⁷ Applied to the sacred history and its figures, it means that appearance occurs to the Imams only in their historical and physical existence, not in the meta-historical and metaphysical existence which characterises them as divine guides.¹²⁸

Then Mīr Dāmād distinguishes between two meanings of appearance (*badāʾ*) and abrogation (*naskh*) alike. Abrogation of a legislative prescription may occur after or before the execution of this prescription by the subjects of obligation. In the same way, appearance as a change in prescriptions of generation and determination may occur after or before the bringing into existence in time. Just as one does not call abrogation (*naskh*) the foreseeable ending of a legislative prescription, one shall not call appearance (*badāʾ*) the usual and natural extinctions of things, but only their annihilation out of their natural limits; nor the renewal of generation and corruption, but only the “breakings of the habits of Nature” (*khawāriq al-ʿādāt*), in other words miracles. The epistle stops suddenly on this definition of *badāʾ* as the principle of miracles, justified by reason, maybe causable by invocation and knowledge of letters and numbers. Although the first section presented appearance as the principle of the tragedy of history, this last section suggests that it could be also the *raison d’être* of hope.¹²⁹

3 Conclusion: Appearance (*badāʾ*) after Mīr Dāmād

Mīr Dāmād’s *Nibrās al-ḍiyāʾ* certainly reintroduced the notion of *badāʾ* into Shīʿī theology. Mullā Ṣadrā treated this concept in his commentary of al-Kulaynī by referring to *Nibrās al-ḍiyāʾ* for the analogy between *badāʾ* and *naskh*, but without using his concept of *dahr* nor his alphanumeric system, thus ignoring, without doubt intentionally, the most original part of Mīr Dāmād’s speculation.¹³⁰ After him, his disciple Fayḍ Kāshānī treats *badāʾ* in his gnostic opus *Kalimāt maknūnah* (*Hidden words*), resuming the same *ḥadīths* from *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī* and making the concept of *badāʾ* the condition of possibility of the human free will, without any regard towards Mīr Dāmād, for which he seems to have kept little esteem.¹³¹ Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkivarī, a former student of Mīr Dāmād, uses the alphanumeric system and exalts the science of letters and numbers in many instances in the first part of his history of the sages, the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* (*the Beloved of the Hearts*), notably in two notices respectively devoted to Adam and Pythagoras, and quotes the *Nibrās al-ḍiyāʾ* in the last part

¹²⁷ *Nibrās*, p. 117.

¹²⁸ Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*.

¹²⁹ See the analysis of Ayoub, “Divine Preordination and Human Hope”.

¹³⁰ Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, IV, pp. 177–196; idem, *al-Ḥikmah al-mutaʿāliyah fī-l-asfār al-ʿaqliyyah al-arbaʿah*, ed. M. ʿAqīl, 3 vol., Beirut, 1432 AH/2011, p. 648 only. See Raḥman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā*, pp. 180–184.

¹³¹ Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūnah*, ed. ʿAlī ʿAlīzādah, Qumm, 1390 SH/2011–12, chapter 48, pp. 117–20.

of it, in the notice devoted to the sixth Imam.¹³² In a work of his youth, he also uses the equivalences between letters and numbers in order to interpret the names and titles of the twelve Imams¹³³. Sayyid Aḥmad ‘Alavī, the most famous disciple of Mīr Dāmād and his son-in-law, devoted to the issue of *badā’* some pages of his commentary on the *Qabasāt*.¹³⁴ Even Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, the guardian of the new Shī‘ī orthodoxy quotes Mīr Dāmād’s *Nibrās al-diyā’*’s analogy between *badā’* and *naskh* in his *Bihār al-anwār*.¹³⁵

In conclusion, it can be said that the notion of *badā’* lived through the whole history of Shī‘ī thought from the original esoteric doctrine of the Imams to rational theology and from there, as a synthesis of these two tendencies, to the Shī‘ī gnosis of Mīr Dāmād. From a tenet of dialectic theology, he transformed *badā’* into a real philosophical concept and a key element of a metaphysic, giving account of both cosmic time and human history, including the tragic dimension of sacred history in a monist and emanationist system which postulates that everything has to be good in accordance with the wisdom of God.

Indeed, with this concept, Mīr Dāmād opened the way to a Shī‘ī philosophy of history, something without precedent in the history of Islamic philosophy, and which remained unexplored after him. His theory of *badā’* allows us to justify both the wisdom of God as manifested in the course of events and the ‘vale of tears’ of the Shī‘ī history, both the universal and all-powerful will of God (*mashī‘ah*) and the human limited free will. *Badā’* is the name of a very special and paradoxical kind of providence: far from the “eternal Providence” (*al-‘ināya al-azaliyya*) which commands the cosmic perpetual order and its influence on the sublunary world, it indicates an irregular and unforeseeable divine intervention in the mundane world. The paradox lies in the fact that God, while acting by *badā’*, does not accomplish but mostly suspends the fulfillment of His will. Such a suspension, manifested in Prophet’s or Imam’s acts of renunciation, does not mean any versatility or change of mind in God. But it involves, from a human point of view, the advent of dramas which can make the commonality doubting Providence. And this way of God’s acting is far from being marginal: all the sacred history, in a Shī‘ī point of view, appears as the effect of God’s suspension of His will, beginning with Abraham’s renunciation to slay his son Ismā‘īl,¹³⁶ followed by Muḥammad’s renunciation to order pen and paper, and ‘Alī’s renunciation to fight for his temporal right. Without such renunciations, there would not have been any history at all, but an immediate realisation of God’s decisions. In this sense,

¹³² Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, al-maqālah al-ulā, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Dībājī and Ḥāmid Šidqī, Tehran, 1378 SH/1999, I, pp. 149 and 234–235, with a quotation of the *Jazavāt* (Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse*, pp. 265–266, 404–405); in the third part, see ms, pp. 896–901, commingled with quotations of the *Qabasāt* with reference to the concept of “meta-temporal newness” (*ḥudūth dahrī*).

¹³³ Quṭb al-Dīn Lāhijī (Ashkivarī), *Laṭāyif al-ḥisāb* (*the Subtleties of Calculation*), ed. Muḥammad Bāqirī, Tehran, 1389 SH/2010, pp. 67–70.

¹³⁴ ‘Alawī, *Sharḥ kitāb al-Qabasāt*, pp. 318–20.

¹³⁵ Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, IV, pp. 126–128.

¹³⁶ The idea that this event is the first act of *badā’* of history is assumed by Mullā Šadrā in his commentary of Kulaynī’s chapter on the issue of *badā’*: see *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, IV, pp. 195–96.

the concept of *badā'* allows us to consider at the same time the contingency of history and the absolute Wisdom of God, to understand how the latter realises itself through the former. Furthermore, by indicating the "occult" principles of the deciphering of *badā'*, or even of its causation, Mīr Dāmād may have tried to make this Shī'ī philosophy of history both in *theōria* and in *praxis*.