

Beyond Neutrality: Identifying Nizārī Ismā‘īlī Footprints in Ṭūsī’s Nasirean Ethics

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ABSTRACT

In the Preamble of *The Nasirean Ethics* (*Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*), Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), the outstanding philosopher and polymath of the time, claims neutrality towards any specific schools of thought, emphasizing that: “What is recorded in this book... is repeated from ancient and modern philosophers; not even a beginning is made to confirm the true or disprove the false, nor – in respect to our own convictions – do we engage to support any opinion or to condemn any particular school of thought.” This assertion of impartiality has significantly shaped modern interpretations of Ṭūsī’s philosophical project, often leading scholars to view *The Nasirean Ethics* as a purely syncretic work devoid of a particular confessional leaning. Drawing upon methodologies from literary analysis, comparative studies, and intellectual history, this paper aims to challenge Ṭūsī’s aforementioned assertion throughout the initial chapter of *The Nasirean Ethics* (‘On Ethics’). By meticulously examining the linguistic choices, thematic developments, and subtle philosophical leanings within this foundational chapter, I will demonstrate how Ṭūsī, despite his stated neutrality, implicitly privileges certain ethical frameworks and philosophical positions. In so doing, I will bring the text into conversation with the author’s Ismā‘īlī-based treatises, specifically *Paradise of Submission* (*Rawḍah-yi taslīm*) and *Contemplation and Action* (*Sayr wa sulūk*). This comparative analysis will highlight the shared intellectual and theological foundations embedded at the core of these seemingly disparate books, revealing a profound and consistent underlying philosophical project that transcends the superficial claim of neutrality in *The Nasirean Ethics*. This paper will thus re-evaluate Ṭūsī’s intellectual trajectory, arguing for a more integrated understanding of his diverse philosophical output.

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Introduction

This paper will examine Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's (d. 672/1274) utilization of sources in the inaugural chapter of his seminal work on ethics, *The Nasirean Ethics* (*Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*). By analyzing Ṭūsī's own Ismā'īlī-based treatises, the paper will challenge his assertion of neutrality vis-à-vis specific schools of thought as articulated in the work's preface. My analysis will contend that a shared foundational framework undergirds both Ṭūsī's Ismā'īlī writings and *The Nasirean Ethics*.

Broadly, the sources utilized by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, a highly preeminent figure within Islamic intellectual history, in the composition of *The Nasirean Ethics* can be analyzed from two vantage points: explicit references within the text, and implicit influences upon its content and philosophy. Regarding the former category, our author himself acknowledges the work of Abū'Alī Miskawaih (d. 421 H/1030 CE), *Refinement of the Ethics* (*Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*), a seminal text on ethics in the Arabic-speaking Muslim world (Ṭūsī, 1964, 26). Moreover, in the work's preface, Ṭūsī acknowledges his adherence to the views of Peripatetic philosophers, particularly Aristotle, as well as his extensive engagement with other Greek philosophical and intellectual schools, notably Platonism and Neo-Platonism (Ṭūsī, 1964, 26).

Wilfred Madelung posits that during the era of Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, the majority of Sunnī and Twelver Shī'a authorities regarded Greek philosophy with skepticism, perceiving it as incompatible with Islamic doctrines. However, the Ismā'īlīs perspective exhibited a marked divergence. As early as the 4th/10th century, Ismā'īlī missionaries (*dā'īs*) had selectively incorporated and adapted Platonic cosmology into their foundational beliefs. Analogously, they adopted elements of al-Fārābī's cosmological concepts a century later. These adaptations of Greek philosophy evolved into central tenets of Ismā'īlī religious thought.¹

In his autobiography, *Contemplation and Action* (*Sayr wa sulūk*), Ṭūsī narrates how this distinctive Ismā'īlī trait resonated with his intellectual inquisitiveness and philosophical aspirations, ultimately culminating in his affiliation with the Ismā'īlī community in Quhistān (Ṭūsī, 1999, 3-7).

Composed circa 633 AH/1235 CE, during his tenure as an intellectual associate and companion of the Ismā'īlī governor of Quhistān, Ṭūsī's *Nasirean Ethics* stands as a **pivotal** treatise on ethics in the Persian language. The work's title honors his learned patron, Nāṣir al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. Abī Maṣṣūr, who commissioned the treatise (Ṭūsī, 1964, 26). Reflecting the literary style of the era, the original dedication expressed gratitude to the contemporary Ismā'īlī Imām, 'Alā al-Dīn Muḥammad.

Following the fall of the Alamūt fortress and the Nizārī Ismā'īlī state of Iran in 654 AH/1256 CE, Ṭūsī entered the service of the Mongol court. Subsequently, he revised the work, removing the laudatory references to the Nizārī Ismā'īlī Imām and the Quhistānī ruler from the

¹ For more information, see: (Madelung, 2011, 3).

introduction. However, he retained not only Ismā‘īlī-specific terminology like “*Nāṭiq*” and “*Asās*,” but also vestiges of Ismā‘īlī thought and philosophy interwoven throughout the text. This suggests a second category of sources utilized by Ṭūsī, exerting a significant but unacknowledged influence upon the composition of *The Nasirean Ethics*.

1. Literature Review

A substantial body of scholarly inquiry investigates the life, writings, and scientific contributions of Nasīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī. While his scientific works, philosophical defenses of Ibn Sīnā, and Twelver Shī‘a theological writings have been extensively examined, research on his Ismā‘īlī-related manuscripts remains relatively unexplored.

The present study centers on *The Nasirean Ethics*, a highly esteemed treatise on ethics in Persian. Existing scholarship on the book can be categorized into two primary areas: content analysis exploring Ṭūsī’s ethical perspectives, and source analysis investigating the intellectual influences on his work. This research falls within the latter category, specifically examining the sources of Ṭūsī’s concept of rationality (‘*aqāl*’) within *The Nasirean Ethics*. Notably, it prioritizes the identification of evidence pertaining to Nizārī Ismā‘īlī intellectual traditions within the book’s inaugural discourse.

Several scholars have significantly contributed to the understanding of Islamic ethics and Ṭūsī’s work. Majid Fakhri analyzes ethical approaches in the Islamic world, including *The Nasirean Ethics*, highlighting the influence of Miskawaih’s *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* and Greek philosophy (Fakhri, 1994). Wilferd Madelung acknowledges the impact of Ismā‘īlī thought alongside philosophical and Sufi influences in his work on *The Nasirean Ethics* (Madelung, 2011). Among Persian scholars, Roohollah Karimi emphasizes the relationship between *The Nasirean Ethics*, Miskawaih’s work, and Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* in moral education (Karimi, 2017). Gholamhossein Ebrahimi-Dinani acknowledges Ṭūsī’s Ismā‘īlī leanings in some works, including *The Nasirean Ethics* (Ebrahimi-Dinani, 2007). Other scholars like Henry Corbin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Hanna Al-Fakhoury have examined Ṭūsī’s writings, focusing on philosophical and theological aspects. Sayeh Meisami’s work on Ṭūsī prioritizes conventional interpretations emphasizing Peripatetic and Greek influences (Meisami, 2019).

A critical edition of *The Nasirean Ethics* in Persian was published by Mojtaba Minovi and Alireza Heidari in 1978. Additionally, Mohammad-Taqi Danesh-Pajouh’s critical edition of *Akhlāq-i Muḥtashamī* (1960) offers valuable insights into Ṭūsī’s intellectual sources in the introduction section.

Nevertheless, a critical examination of existing scholarship reveals a prevailing emphasis on Miskawaih’s influence, the Peripatetic school, and Greek and Iranian philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, al-Fārābī, and Ibn Sīnā, as the primary intellectual sources for *The Nasirean Ethics*. While Wilferd Madelung’s work acknowledges the influence of Nizārī Ismā‘īlī doctrines, and scattered discussions exist in certain Persian sources, a dedicated study examining the specific evidence of Nizārī Ismā‘īlī intellectual traditions within *The Nasirean*

Ethics remains absent. This lacuna in scholarship constitutes the primary focus of the present research.

Distinct from prior surveys, this paper employs a rigorous close-textual analysis to move beyond general thematic similarities. By mapping the technical nomenclature and structural taxonomies of *The Nasirean Ethics* directly onto Ṭūsī's contemporaneous Ismā'īlī treatises—specifically *Paradise of Submission* (*Rawḍah-yi taslīm*) and *Contemplation and Action* (*Sayr wa sulūk*)—this study reveals an underlying philosophical unity that transcends the work's stated neutrality. While previous scholars have often treated Ṭūsī's diverse output as compartmentalized phases of his career, this research demonstrates a meaningful, integrated continuity. It argues that the “philosophical” terminology in *The Nasirean Ethics* often serves as a precise esoteric cipher for Nizārī doctrines, thereby providing a more nuanced and accurate understanding of Ṭūsī's intellectual trajectory during the Alamūt period.

2. The Intellectual Sources of Ṭūsī in *The Nasirean Ethics*

2-1 Explicit Influences: Miskawaih and the Peripatetics

In his *Ethical Theories in Islam*, Majid Fakhri divides the ethical writings in the Muslim world, according to their methods and creeds, into four categories or approaches: ethics based on the Quran and Ḥadīth, theological ethics, philosophical ethics and religious ethics (Fakhri, 1994, 23). Ṭūsī's *The Nasirean Ethics* (*Akhlāq-i Nāsirī*) and Abū 'Alī Miskawaih's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* (*Refinement of the Ethics*) have a major role in philosophical ethics of the Islamic civilization.

In the preamble to *The Nasirean Ethics*, Ṭūsī states his direct sources as follows: Abū 'Alī Miskawaih's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* (*Refinement of the Ethics*), which according to Ṭūsī himself “that book contains the sublimest of the topics of Practical Philosophy” (Ṭūsī, 1964, 25), and has very noble and valuable meanings by which the first discourse of *The Nasirean Ethics* (On Ethics) is largely influenced. It should be noted that there are differences of opinion regarding the extent to which *The Nasirean Ethics* are influenced by *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*. In each of the discourses of *The Nasirean Ethics*, Ṭūsī adapts and uses several books; however, in the first discourse (On Ethics), the role of Miskawaih's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* is much more prominent than others. In the second discourse (On Economics), a treatise by Ibn Sīnā identified briefly as *Kitāb al-Sīyāsa*, and in the third discourse (On Politics), al-Fārābī's books of *al-Sīyāsa al-madanīyya*, *Fuṣūl al-madanī*, and his admonitions quoted in Miskawaih's *al-Ḥikma al-khālida* play the same role (Madelung, 1985, 2).

However, in most cases, Ṭūsī has used these sources with considerable freedom, and apparently this freedom in translation has not been incompatible with the scope and format of traditional philosophy. Nonetheless, some scholars believe that the role of the books that form the basis of any discourse of *The Nasirean Ethics* is sometimes so bold that unconsciously implies to the reader the view that Ṭūsī's book is a Persian translation or often a good summary of parts of these works. For example, by comparing the first few pages of the second article of *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, entitled *al-akhlāq wa 'ṭ-ṭabā'i*, with the first and second sections of the

second division of the first discourse of *The Nasirean Ethics*, we see the maximum correspondence so that it can be claimed with more confidence that *The Nasirean Ethics* in its first discourse, is some sort of translation, summary and adaptation-based form of Abū 'Alī Miskawaih's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*. Majid Fakhri, the famous historian of the history of Islamic thought, also, by naming Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī and Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī (d. 908/1502) as two of the most important descendants of Abū 'Alī Miskawaih, emphasizes that neither of these two added much to the essence of al-Miskawaih's ethics (Fakhri, 1994, 7).

From what has been said, one cannot conclude that there is no difference between *The Nasirean Ethics* and *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*; although these differences are not to the extent that a completely distinct and original nature can be considered for *The Nasirean Ethics*. On the contrary, some researchers have tried to show that *The Nasirean Ethics* is authentic and Miskawaih's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* is completely Aristotelian, while Ṭūsī was able to free himself from Aristotelian approach (Karimi, 2017, 69). In general, it should not be forgotten that the way of expressing the content, even if it is not of Ṭūsī himself, is often original and more complete than his sources.

On the other hand, at the end of his preamble, Ṭūsī stresses that:

Let me say that what is recorded in this book, covering all aspects of Practical Philosophy (whether by way of relation or anecdote, or in the form of chronicles or narrative), is repeated from the ancient and modern philosophers; not even a beginning is made to confirm the true or disprove the false, nor – in respect to our own conviction - do we engage to support any opinion or to condemn any particular school of thought. Thus, if the reader encounters an ambiguity on a point, or regards any question as open to objection, he should recognize that the author of this book has no responsibility for rejoinder, and offers no surety for uncovering the face of accuracy. It becomes all to ask for the favor of guidance from the Divine Majesty, who is the spring of mercy's abundance and the source of the light of direction (Ṭūsī, 1964, 31).

From this statement, we can comprehend that by 'ancient philosophers' Ṭūsī means the Greek philosophers; as he mentions some of them as his reference in *The Nasirean Ethics*. Among the Greek philosophers, Ṭūsī gives the most explicit reference to Aristotle. His references to Aristotle are sometimes direct,¹ and sometimes he mentions that Abū 'Alī Miskawaih quotes

¹ For example: "The Philosopher **Aristotle** opened his book on ethics in this way, and truly the right view of the matter was the one taken by him: for the beginning of reflection is the end of action, and the end of reflection is the beginning of action, as is borne out in all crafts..." (Ṭūsī, 1964, 59).

Aristotle as such.¹ Plato, Socrates, Galen, Pythagoras, and the schools such as Stoics and Naturalists are of the important Greek figures who Ṭūsī poses their ideas throughout the book.²

2-2 Implicit Foundations: Challenging the Claim of Neutrality

As observed above, Ṭūsī describes his separation from the views expressed in *The Nasirean Ethics* within its preamble, considering himself merely a narrator of the opinions of the prior wise men. He also mentions earlier in the preamble that the content of his book is about philosophy (*ḥikmat*) and does not agree or disagree with a particular group “Inasmuch as the content of this book comprises one of the branches of Philosophy, and bears no relation to the agreement or disagreement of school or sect or denomination, students of profitable matters, despite differences of belief, were eager to peruse it...” (Ṭūsī, 1964, 24).

To identify the second category of sources employed by Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī in *The Nasirean Ethics* – those he utilizes without explicit attribution of title or methodology – a closer examination of his motivations and pronouncements within the text is necessary. While the preface proclaims the book’s neutrality towards specific schools or sects, advocating instead for a purely philosophical approach, the preceding discussion underscores the pressing need to address ethical concerns within Islamic society during the thirteenth century, a period marked by the devastating Mongol invasions. This raises questions regarding the sincerity of Ṭūsī’s claim to neutrality. Why, then, did he opt for a philosophical framework to guide the populace through this period of moral and ethical crisis? Furthermore, was his assertion regarding philosophy’s detachment from all religious schools and communities truly genuine?

As Wilfred Madelung expresses, during Ṭūsī era, most of the guardians of orthodoxy, Sunnīs and Twelver Shī‘ī communities equally strongly rejected the Greek philosophy believing that it contradicts Islamic doctrines:

There had been and still were, to be sure, Sunnī and Twelver Shī‘ī philosophers who held that Islam was not incompatible with philosophy. They generally did not mix philosophy and religion, however, but viewed philosophy as a truth for the intellectual elite, while the same truth, on an intellectually less demanding level, was reflected in religion and in this form was more suitable for the common people (Madelung, 1985, 3).

In contrast, the Ismā‘īlī approach to Greek philosophy diverged considerably. Early 10th century *dā‘ī* (missionary) Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Nasafī selectively adapted Platonic cosmology, integrating it into the core of Ismā‘īlī religious doctrines and theories. A century later, *dā‘ī* Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī followed a similar approach, adapting al-Fārābī’s

¹ For example: “**Master Abu ‘Ali** (God have mercy on him!) quotes **Aristotle** as saying, in his book of ethics, that young men, or such persons as have the nature of young men, will gain no great benefit from this book...” (Ṭūsī, 1964, 335). (See the list of references to Aristotle in: Ṭūsī, 1964, 335).

² See the list of references to the given figures as follow: Plato: Ṭūsī, 1964, 347 / Socrates: Ṭūsī, 1964, 349 / Galen: Ṭūsī, 1964, 340 / Pythagoras: Ṭūsī, 1964, 348 / Stoics: Ṭūsī, 1964, 350 / Naturalists: Ṭūsī, 1964, 346.

cosmological concepts. These adaptations led Ismāʿīlīs to view philosophy not as incompatible with their religion, nor as a separate truth, but as partially identical. However, complete acceptance of all philosophical ideas was not axiomatic. Prominent Ismāʿīlī missionaries (*duʿāt*) like Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 462/1070) in his *Jāmiʿ al-ḥikmatayn* (*Uniter of the Two Wisdoms*), and al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) in his *Kitāb al-muṣāraʿa* (*Struggling with the Philosopher*), engaged in detailed examinations of compatibility between philosophical and religious viewpoints (Madelung, 1985, 3).

However, in Ṭūsī's era, the Ismāʿīlīs were more interested in philosophy and philosophical ideas than other Islamic groups. As Ṭūsī writes in detail in his autobiography *Sayr wa sulūk* (*Contemplation and Action*), apparently it was his philosophical curiosities and intellectual quests that ultimately led him towards the Ismāʿīlīs and made him one of their great scientific and philosophical figures (Ṭūsī, 1999, 26-32). *The Nasirean Ethics* is one of Ṭūsī's first books which was written during his residence among the Ismāʿīlī community at the request and in dedication to their Ismāʿīlī ruler in Quhistān, Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥtasham (d. 655/1257). Due to Ṭūsī's own claim in his autobiography describing how he joined the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī community (Daftari, 2000, 147) (although he entered the Mongol Court after the fall of the Iranian Nizārī Ismāʿīlī state in Alamūt in 654/1256), an Ismāʿīlī perception of *The Nasirean Ethics* does not seem that farfetched.

The Nasirean Ethics, the most highly esteemed book on ethics in Persian, was completed by Ṭūsī around the year 633 H / 1235 CE, while he was in the service of the Ismāʿīlī governor of Quhistān, the *muhtasham* or chief Nāṣir al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. Abī Manṣūr. Ṭūsī named the work after his learned patron, who had commissioned him to write it, and opened it with a dedication to him in the flowery style of the time in which he also invoked the blessings of the contemporary Ismāʿīlī Imām, ʿAlā al-Dīn Muḥammad. Upon joining the Mongol Court after fall of the Alamūt fortress and the Nizārī state of Iran in 654 H/1256 CE, Khwājah revised the book and removed the praises he had given in the preamble to the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Imām of the Time and his appointed ruler in Quhistān. Nonetheless, he preserved the terms and expressions specific to Ismāʿīlī literature, such as *Nāṭiq* and *Asās* (Dinani, 2007, 219).¹

2-3 Comparative Analysis: *The Nasirean Ethics* and Ismāʿīlī Treatises

The traces of Ismāʿīlī thought in *The Nasirean Ethics* are not limited to these obvious words and expressions; rather, there are more influences in the content of the book. The second category of sources utilized by Ṭūsī are those which, while not explicitly referenced, exerted significant influence in the composition of *The Nasirean Ethics*. Here, we are discussing only three of these examples.

2-3.1 Hierarchies of Existence and the State of Unity

In *The Nasirean Ethics*, Ṭūsī delves into the hierarchical progression of human faculties towards achieving greater virtue and nobility. He outlines three ascending levels: 1.

¹ See the list of references to the given terms as follow: *Nāṭiq*: Ṭūsī, 1964, 346 / *Asās*: Ṭūsī, 1964, 335.

Development of arts and skills, 2. Engagement with sciences and virtues, and 3. Direct revelation and inspiration. This final stage, accessible to a select few, grants access to knowledge of divine truths. Ṭūsī portrays this progression as surpassing the discrepancies between species and culminating in unity with the divine.

All men in whom these faculties (conformities with nature) are complete, and who are able (by use of organs and deduction of premises) to advance themselves from deficiency to a higher perfection, enjoy a greater virtue and nobility than those in whom such notions are less developed. The first of such degrees is occupied by those persons who, by means of intelligence and the intuitive faculty, bring forth noble arts and organize delicate skills and subtle instruments. Next comes a class who, by much utterance, reflection and meditation, engage with the sciences and the branches of knowledge and the acquisition of virtues. Beyond these, there are persons who, without the intermediacy of bodies, by revelation and inspiration, receive knowledge of truths and laws from those brought close to Divine Majesty. These are a comfort and an infallible cause of felicity to men of (all) climes and ages, in regard to perfection of disposition and the ordering of the affairs of this world and the next. This is the highest of the ascending degrees of the human species, the discrepancy in which is greater than in the species of animals in the same proportion as has been stated to hold between animals and plants. When this stage is reached, there is an inception of contiguity with the nobler world and of junction with the ranks of the sanctified angels and the abstract intelligences and souls. And so to the limit, where is the abode of Unity, and there the circle of existence meets, like a curved line beginning from a point and returning to the same point. Then intermediaries are set aside, gradation and opposition cease, *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* become one, and nothing remains but the Reality of Realities, the Ultimate of Quests, which is the Absolute Truth: ‘And thy Lord’s face abides, splendid and revered’ (Ṭūsī, 1964, 46).

In his *Paradise of Submission*, the preeminent treatise of Ṭūsī concerning the teachings and doctrines of the Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs in the Alamūt period, authored during his residency at the Alamūt fortress, on the other hand, he speaks about these levels using another terminology: the intelligence of worldly life (*‘aql-i ma‘īshatī-yi dunyā’ī*), the prophetic law-giving intelligence (*‘aql-i shar‘ī-yi nabawī*), and resurrectional intelligence of the Hereafter (*‘aql-i qiyāmatī-yi ākhiratī*).

In the course of his quest for physical and spiritual perfection (*kamāl-i khalqī wa amrī*), man at the initial stage, when he is not independent of his bodily

organs, is obliged to make use of forces pertaining to his animal faculties (*quwā-yi ḥayawānī*) upon which sense perception and movement depend. Thereafter, [he makes use of] the particular soul (*nufūs-i juzwī*), through which the perfection of the human body is achieved; [followed by] the intelligence of worldly life (*ʿaql-i ma ʿīshatī-yi dunyāʾī*) which, in one way or another, is possessed by everyone; [followed by] the use of the prophetic law-giving intelligence (*ʿaql-i sharʿī-yi nabawī*), through which the general well-being of creatures can be maintained in the world; and lastly [by using the] resurrectional intelligence of the Hereafter (*ʿaql-i qiyāmatī-yi ākhiratī*), which is the terminus of all goals and the supreme end (Ṭūsī, 2005, 81-82).

In another part of the book, Ṭūsī speaks of three realms of existence and their residents:

Three distinct realms can be said to exist: the intellectual realm (*ʿālam-i ʿaqlānī*), which is absolute goodness; the realm of soul (*ʿālam-i nafsānī*), in which good and evil are mixed; and the physical realm (*ʿālam-i jismānī*), which is pure evil. Each of these realms has its own denizens. The denizens of the intellectual realm are the people of unity (*ahl-i waḥdat*); the denizens of the realm of soul are the people of gradation (*ahl-i tarattub*); and the denizens of the physical realm are the people of opposition (*ahl-i taḍādd*) (Ṭūsī, 2005, 81-82).

In his *Contemplation and Action*, Ṭūsī provides more details regarding the qualities of these three categories of people. He expounds that in the perspective of the people of opposition and contradiction (*taqābul wa taḍādd*), the world is perpetually characterized by plurality and contradiction (*munāqaḍāt*), constant change, and transformation. Consequently, the light of certainty can never illuminate anyone who enters this realm of confusion and bewilderment, preventing them from attaining salvation. Instead, such individuals encounter endless disputes, debates, and tribulations.

Conversely, from the viewpoint of the people of gradation (*tarattub*), everything that has been, that will be, and that currently exists is in its appropriate time and place, embodying truth and being aligned with reality. Anything that does not fit this temporal and spatial context is considered illusory and detached from truth. Perceived imperfections stem from flaws in one's vision; otherwise, all elements of existence, from the least to the most noble, serve as signs and clear testimonies supporting one another and pointing to one fundamental truth: "We shall show them our signs in the horizons and in themselves, until it is clear to them that it is the truth" (Quran 41:53). "In everything, there is a sign of Him, proving that He is one."

Lastly, from the perspective of the people of unity (*waḥdat*), there are no distinctions such as truth or falsehood, multiplicity or oneness, resurrection or religious law, outward or inward,

origin or return; everything is He, and nothing exists apart from Him – nothing whatsoever. “Suffice it not that thy Lord is witness over all things?” (Quran 41:53).

For the first group, truth does not exist, and falsehood does; for the second group, truth exists, and falsehood does not; but for the third group, only the truth exists, encompassing all. The knowledge of the first group is derived from inference from effect to cause, and their adherence is to religious law and tradition (*sunnat*). The second group’s knowledge is based on deduction from cause to effect, and their adherence is to the resurrection. The third group’s knowledge is derived from the one who is knowing (‘*ārif*), and their adherence is to knowing God through God.

In the revelation (*tanzīl*), these three groups are referred to as the ‘people of the left’, the ‘people of the right’, and the ‘foremost’ (*sābiqān*). Common parlance labels them as the ‘people of this world’, the ‘people of the hereafter’, and the ‘people of God’. However, the elite recognize them as the ‘people of religious law’, the ‘people of resurrection’, and the ‘people of unity’. “Perfect is the word of thy Lord in truthfulness and justice; no one can change His words; He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing” (Quran 6:115)” (Ṭūsī, 1999, 51-52).

The state of “unity” (*waḥdat*) as the pinnacle of human existence, is a theme resonant across Ṭūsī’s Ismā‘īlī writings. Throughout his treatises, our author consistently delineates the characteristics of this elevated state in a uniform manner. While the ascent of the soul and unity (*waḥdat*) are perennial themes in Peripatetic (Ibn Sīnā), Illuminationist (Suhrawardī), and Sufi traditions, the evidence for Ismā‘īlī influence in *The Nasirean Ethics* does not rely on these concepts in isolation. Rather, it rests upon Ṭūsī’s utilization of a highly specific taxonomy of existence that is uniquely characteristic of Nizārī Ismā‘īlī cosmology during the Alamūt era.

Here, we shall have the triad of Opposition, Gradation, and Unity in mind. In other words, Ṭūsī’s delineation of the realms of existence—Opposition (*taḍādd*), Gradation (*tarattub*), and Unity (*waḥdat*)—serves as a technical hallmark that distinguishes his argument from standard Peripatetic or Sufi models. While various schools of Islamic philosophy discuss the hierarchy of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), they do not typically categorize the physical world through the specific lens of “the people of opposition” (*ahl-i taḍādd*) as a prerequisite stage for the “people of gradation”. Furthermore, although Sufism seeks “Unity,” Ṭūsī’s presentation in *The Nasirean Ethics* mirrors the exact structural development found in his *Paradise of Submission* (*Rawḍah-yi taslīm*) and *Contemplation and Action* (*Sayr wa sulūk*). In these works, this triad is not merely mystical imagery but a foundational philosophical construct used to explain the movement from the physical world to the “resurrectional intelligence” (‘*aql-i qiyāmatī*).

Notably, Ṭūsī posits the compatibility of the state of Unity with the resurrectional intelligence of the Hereafter, an Ismā‘īlī philosophical construct unique to the Alamūt era, rooted in the concept of resurrection and the esoteric interpretations thereof, deeming it as “the terminus of all goals and the supreme end” for humanity.

2-3.2 Spiritual vs. Literal Interpretations of the Afterlife

In the *Nasirean Ethics*, Ṭūsī criticizes a group who prioritize earthly pleasures in the afterlife, despite acknowledging a higher spiritual reality:

The view of a group who conceive the world-to-come as offering the same sort of pleasures and appetites as this world. From Eden's Paradise and proximity to the Divine Presence, they (only) ask excessive capacity to acquire pleasurable foods, or to have power over voluptuous women, or to get hold of much-coveted drinks. In their devotions and their prayers, they beg such things of their Master. They forsake the world and abstain from its delights on a business-like principle of driving a better bargain, giving up a little of the present for much to come, and expending the contemptible and the transitory in quest of the imposing which endures. In truth, these people are most avid of mankind for pleasures and appetites, not the most abstemious or the most moderate. Yet, in spite of all this, if mention is made in their presence of the World of Dominion or the Sublime Company, or if they hear that the Angels, those brought close to the Presence of Sanctity, are sanctified and absolved from such impurities and from basenesses of the appetites, they still assert the eminence in rank of these beings; indeed, they recognize that the Maker (glorified and exalted be He!), who is the Creator of creatures and the Author of all, is aloof and elevated above this degree, and that pleasure and enjoyment in such things is not proper to Him (Ṭūsī, 1964, 53).

Khwājah's *Paradise of Submission*, however, offers another perspective on the subject:

If the real Paradise and Hell, as is the belief of the majority of Muslims, were made of physical matter (*mawādd-i jismānī*) and composed of material things - for example, if Paradise were a garden of immense extent adorned with streams, trees, beautiful maidens, palaces, water, milk, honey, wine and other various delicacies of eating and drinking as they count them; and if Hell were, for example, a pit of awesome length, width and depth, eternally and endlessly filled with fire, snakes and countless terrifying scorpions which sting and bite, and, as they have said, [enormous chains] set on fire and red hot with knots in them like mountains, by which the inmates of hell are thrown into the fire and tortured – there would have been no difference at all between this world and the Hereafter. On the contrary, Paradise is situated at the 'uppermost height' (*a 'lā 'illīyin*) and Hell at the 'lowermost depths' (*asfal-i sāfilīn*), the magnitude of both realms being of such an extent that no one's estimation (*wahm*) and reflection can possibly comprehend them. The information given by the Prophets in such physical descriptions of Paradise

and Hell are all descriptions presented in accordance with the intellectual capacity of ordinary people and expressed in order to either encourage or frighten them, so that they might incline to obedience and abstain from disobedience (Ṭūsī, 2005, 57).

According to the preceding paragraphs, Ṭūsī refutes interpretations of the Quranic descriptions of resurrection and the rewards of the Hereafter as entirely literal. He asserts that the true nature of these concepts transcends human comprehension. This perspective is a defining feature of the doctrine of *qiyāmat* in Ismā'īlī thought, which interprets resurrection and the Hereafter's rewards spiritually, emphasizing one's existential proximity to the Imām. The notion of "return" (*'awdat*), inherent in the term "resurrection" (*ma'ād*), signifies a return to the principle and origin of creation, understood as the sublime Word (*kalima-yi a'lā*) or the Divine Command (*Amr*), which in the resurrectional (*qiyāmatī*) approach of Ismā'īlī philosophy represents the status of the Imām (Ṭūsī, 2005, 57).

In *The Nasirean Ethics*, Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn addresses the issue from an ethical standpoint, aligning with the text's focus on ethics. He considers those who forgo their carnal desires in this ephemeral world in hopes of fulfilling them eternally in the Hereafter as the epitome of greed.

Following this, *The Nasirean Ethics* explores the concept of felicity and the highest level of virtue. Ṭūsī describes this pinnacle as a state characterized by absence of worldly attachments and having pure and divine motivation. At this stage, individuals are driven solely by an aspiration towards divine essence and reality, performing actions for their intrinsic worth without expectation of reward or external motive. Praising this level as the purpose of wisdom and the culmination of felicity, Ṭūsī acknowledges the immense challenge of attaining this state, emphasizing the need to shed self-love and worldly desires:

This is the purpose of wisdom and the culmination of felicity. However, man does not arrive at this degree until he entirely sets at naught his own will (dependent as it is on external things) and all psychical accidentals; nor until the random thoughts arising from those accidentals become totally obliterated and lost within him; nor until his inner self becomes charged with the divine character and with infinite wisdom. But such a charge can come about (only) after it be purified of natural things, becoming utterly cleansed therefrom: then it is charged with divine knowledge and infinite yearning, and becomes assured in divine things. (Ṭūsī, 1964, 68).

Ṭūsī also considers felicitous person to be the one who "his felicity knows no decline or removal, is safe from upset or fall, and when the revolution of circumstances and the vicissitudes of time no longer have any considerable effect thereon" (Ṭūsī, 1964, 69)

On the other hand, Ṭūsī's discussions in the domain of ethics, especially regarding the perfection of human felicity and how to achieve it, have been presented, concisely and precisely, in the twenty second *taṣawwur* (chapter) of *Paradise of Submission*. It should be borne in mind that Ṭūsī's *Paradise of Submission* is in accordance with the doctrine of *qiyāmat* in Ismāʿīlī philosophy and therefore, is based on the theological view of such approach. In the twenty second *taṣawwur* of *Paradise of Submission*, similar to *The Nasirean Ethics*, our author, while dividing the faculties or forces of human soul into three categories of reason, anger and sexual desires, explains that the faculties of anger and sexual desires should be defeated, but by neither ignoring nor disrupting; in turn, "overcoming both of these forces should be accomplished by bringing them to perfection - namely, by bringing both of them under the rule of reason (*ḥukm-i 'aql*), so that, where they were despotic (*ammārah*) and obstructive, they will now become obedient (*ma'mūr*) and co-operative; where they governed the affairs of reason, now reason should govern their affairs" (Ṭūsī, 2005, 100).

Ṭūsī writes about the highest rank of virtue in *Paradise of Submission*, as well:

The basis and substance of all good character is love for the Imām of the Time (*dūsti-yi imām-i waqt*). The sign of this is to love him and not oneself, because if one manifests an atom's worth of self-love, he does not love [the Imām] - may salutations ensue upon mention of him. Whoever mixes his love of the Imām with self-love, makes his love impure and adulterated, and being impure, such love will not be accepted. Thus, the most solid foundation that may be laid down for the refinement of character is not to love oneself, and [to consider it] necessary [to obey] the commands and orders of the true Imāms – may salutations accompany mention of them (Ṭūsī, 2005, 94).

According to the passages quoted from *The Nasirean Ethics*, Ṭūsī considers the highest rank of virtue to be belonged to someone whose acts are purely divine acts, meaning the acts whose "agent does not perform it for any other purpose than the act itself; for Pure Good is an end sought for itself and intended for its own sake" (Ṭūsī, 1964, 67). And this goal is achieved when "the other promptings of the bodily nature, the accidentals of both the Bestial and the Savage Soul, and the imaginative accidentals arising from both souls and from the promptings of the sensory soul, all these are exorcized within him. At this point, there remains to him no will or aspiration external to the act sought by him; indeed, his control of actions is without will or intention to any other thing, i.e. his purpose in any act is nothing but the essence of that act" (Ṭūsī, 1964, 67).

In *Paradise of Submission*, however, Ṭūsī clarifies the way with which one could reach to such stage, writing explicitly that this is achievable once one knows his Imām of the Time and loves him only, insofar as love for the Imām and focusing on obeying his commands, prevent him from anything else, including thinking of his own personal desires. The sentence of

“Whoever mixes his love of the Imām with self-love makes his love impure and adulterated, and being impure, such love will not be accepted” (Ṭūsī, 2005, 94), illustrates the depth of the importance of love and submission to the commands of the Imām of the Time, according to the Nizārī Ismā‘īlī views.

In this manner, Ṭūsī establishes a correlation between genuine and ultimate happiness and the love towards the Imām of Time. In the Nizārī Ismā‘īlī perspective, to which Ṭūsī himself is an outstanding thinker, the Imām represents the embodiment of divine Command, and the cultivation of love and unity with him is posited as a pathway to attaining perpetual felicity.

Such views, which are actually very close to Islamic – Iranian mystical traditions, have been formed on the basis of the doctrines of *ta’līm* and *qiyāmat* in the Alamūt period of the Nizārī Ismā‘īlī history. In fact, it is such kind of interpretations during the Alamūt period as well as the post-Alamūt era, which presents the Nizārī Ismā‘īlī principles very close to those of Ṣūfism. Hence, some scholars consider Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī a great Ṣūfī, as well (Pahlevan, 2001, 252), as the doctrine of *qiyāmat* in the Nizārī Ismā‘īlī philosophy represents a totally esoteric (*ta’wīlī*) perspective.

2-3.3 Felicity, Self-Annihilation, and the Authority of the Imām

Ṭūsī, in *The Nasirean Ethics*, discusses the concept of worship and the three categories of duties towards God: 1. Bodily actions, 2. Spiritual aspects, And 3. Socio-political responsibilities. In discussing the philosophers’ opinions on man’s duties towards God, Miskawaih mentions three categories from the Muslim philosophers on the duties comprised in worship. The first category expresses duties mainly derived from *Sharī‘at* and Ḥadīth sources, in the form of three types.¹ The second and third views are to do with the spiritual and socio-political duties, respectively.²

Once adapting from Miskawaih’s *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, however, Ṭūsī explains the types of prayers or service of God, as well as the stages to the presence of the Divine, as follows:

A later group of philosophers take the view that the service of Almighty God may be comprehended under three heads. First comes that pertaining to bodies, such as formal prayer and fasting, and standing in noble stations with regard to invocation and silent prayer. Second is that which pertains to souls, such as sound convictions, e.g. the affirmation of unity, magnification of the Almighty Truth, and reflection on the manner in which His liberality and wisdom is diffused upon the world, and matters of like purport. The third category is that which is obligatory in the associations of men, such as fair-dealing in transactions, cropsharing agreements and marriages; the discharge

¹ 'فَيَمُ (الفلاسفة) قالوا إن عبادة الله عز وجل ثلاثة أنواع أحدها فيما يجب له على الأبناء كإحصاء الصلوات والصيام والسجود إلى الموفقة الشريعة لمناجاة الله عز وجل" (Ṭūsī, 1964, 102).

² "والثاني فيما يجب له على النفس كالاعتقالات الصحيحة وكالعلم وحده الله عز وجل وما يستحقه من الثناء والتعجب وكالفكر فيما أفاضه على العالم من وجوه وحكمة ثم الاتساع في هذا المعطى. والثالث فيما يجب له عند مشاركا الدنيا في العين وفي المعاملات والمزارعة والمنافع وفي تأديب الأمتلاك مع نصيحة طبعه بضرير المعايير وعند جها الأعطى وللبن من الحرم وحامى الحوزة قالوا فهذه هي العبدان وفي الطق المؤدية إلى الله عز وجل" (Ṭūsī, 1964, 102).

of trusts, the counselling of one's fellow-men, striving against the enemies of the faith, and the defence of womenfolk. Of these (philosophers), a group more akin to the men of discernment, have said that service of Almighty God consists in three things: true belief, correct utterance, and upright action. The detailed implementation of each item, at any moment of time and on any occasion, and in any connection or regard, will vary as the prophets or the jurisconsults (who are the heirs of the prophets) may expound; and the mass of mankind, to keep the Commandment of the Truth (glorified be His glory!), is under the obligation to submit to them and to conform to their course.

It should be known that the human species, in proximity to the presence of divine things, has stages and stations to the number of four. First comes the station of the people of certainty, called the Assured Ones, and this is the rank of the great philosophers and the outstanding scholars; second is the station of the people of well-doing, called the Well-doers, and this is the rank of those who, besides perfect knowledge, are adorned with the ornament of action and characterized by the virtues we have enumerated; the third station is that of the Dutiful Ones, a group engaged in the reform of land and people, whose endeavour is confined to perfecting created beings; the fourth station is that of the people of attainment, called the Attainers and also the Sincere Ones. The culmination of this rank is the stage of Union, beyond which there is no conceivable station or stage for the human species (Ṭūsī, 1964, 103).

Significantly, Ṭūsī mentions of the “jurisconsults” (*ulamā-ye mujtahid*) as the heirs of the prophets, not in its technical meaning. This reflects the Ismāʿīlī concept of the Imām who, in succession to the prophets, have full authority over the divine law to expound it in accordance with the change of time and circumstances. His explanation in *Paradise of Submission* clarifies the point more precisely:

Since in every epoch, all the [sciences of] ethics (*kull-i akhlāq*) and social conduct (*muʿamalāt*) have been kept in order by the grace of their harmony with the command of the truthful master of that epoch (*amr-i muḥiqq-i waqt*) - may salutations ensue upon mention of him - and have suffered ill by relinquishing his command, thus the basis of the refinement of character lies in obedience and utter submission to the command of the truthful master. For one cannot know, in effect, what type of morality every truthful master in each particular epoch prescribes, ordains and considers as appropriate for the people [of his time]. For this reason, if one persists in observing ethical codes and manners permitted and sanctioned by a truthful master, but when another truthful master [of a later epoch] perceives that moral prosperity lies in following a different course which he indicates to be licit, and if one hesitates

to follow that [second] command and is troubled with confusion, thus generating objections and scruples within one, such objections will result in the impossibility [of all faith] (Ṭūsī, 2005, 93).

As pointed out earlier, the term *mujtahid* typically refers to a legal scholar in Twelver Shī'ī or Sunnī jurisprudence; however, within the specific context of Ṭūsī's intellectual output during the Alamūt period, these terms function as technical placeholders for the Ismā'īlī Imām. This is evidenced by a comparative analysis of Ṭūsī's definitions of authoritative guidance, as the above texts could read.

In *The Nasirean Ethics*, Ṭūsī identifies "jurisconsults" (*ulamā-yi mujtahid*) as the "heirs of the prophets" responsible for expounding divine law according to the exigencies of the time. While this phrasing mimics standard Islamic discourse, its functional application in the text—granting the scholar the power to alter the "detailed implementation" of the law—aligns precisely with the Ismā'īlī doctrine of the *Imām* as the "Truthful Master" (*muḥiqq-i waqt*). Expounded in our author's *Paradise of Submission*.

The speculative nature of this link is dismissed when examining Ṭūsī's autobiography, *Sayr wa sulūk*, and his *Paradise of Submission*, both written during his tenure at Alamūt. In *The Nasirean Ethics*, Ṭūsī states that the mass of mankind must conform to the course set by the "heirs of the prophets. In *Paradise of Submission*, he uses nearly identical language to describe the Imām, stating that moral prosperity lies solely in following the course which the "truthful master" indicates to be licit for that specific epoch.

In fact, Ṭūsī frequently uses the term *muḥaqqiq* (the verifier/realizer) or *muḥiqq* in his Ismā'īlī treatises to denote the Imām's unique role. By substituting this with *mujtahid* in *The Nasirean Ethics*, Ṭūsī employs a form of "philosophical *taqiyya*" (pious circumspection). He retains the *functional* authority of the Ismā'īlī Imām—specifically the power to abrogate or refine the *Sharī'at* through *ta'wīl*—while using a term acceptable to the broader Muslim intellectual community.

In addition to that, the definitive evidence lies in Ṭūsī's initial definition of "Practical Philosophy." He explicitly groups the "prophet" and the "Imām" together as the primary imposers of divine law. By the time the reader reaches the discussion of worship, the "jurisconsult" (*ulamā-ye mujtahid*) has inherited the exact administrative and spiritual sovereignty previously attributed to the Imām in the book's preamble. This linguistic substitution was a common necessity in 13th-century Persian philosophical and theological texts to ensure a work's survival across sectarian boundaries, especially following the Mongol conquest.

Conclusion

Although Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's states, at the beginning of *The Nasirean Ethics*, that his book follows a purely philosophical approach which abstains from reflecting the views of any

particular sect or school, this paper has intended to explore the link between the views of Ṭūsī in the given book with his other Ismāʿīlī writings. The reason for this possibility and theory is simply that *The Nasirean Ethics* is one of the first works of Ṭūsī which was written during his residence among the Ismāʿīlīs and at the suggestion of the Ismāʿīlī ruler of Quhistān as Ṭūsī's great patron. His glorious praises of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Imām of the Time as well as the Nizārī ruler of Quhistān in the first preamble of *The Nasirean Ethics* can illustrate their mutual attention to each other. Also, although Ṭūsī removed those praises from the preamble after entering the Mongols Court, he still left the terms specific to the Ismāʿīlīs throughout the text of the book.

The study draws parallels between concepts in *The Nasirean Ethics* and Ismāʿīlī doctrines, particularly regarding the authority of the Ismāʿīlī Imām in interpreting religion and the pinnacle of ethical development, termed the 'resurrectional intelligence of the Hereafter'. This state implies a unity with the Creator and aligns with Ṣūfī notions of 'unity of existence' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and 'annihilation into the Divine' (*fanā' fī'l-lāh*).

The comparison between Ṭūsī's philosophical ideas and Ismāʿīlī doctrines suggests a potential fusion of these concepts in *The Nasirean Ethics*. It highlights how elements such as obedience to a truthful master and the ultimate ethical state parallel Ismāʿīlī beliefs in the Imām's absolute authority and the aspirational goal of achieving unity with the Creator. This intertwining of philosophical themes with Ismāʿīlī doctrines sheds light on the potential influence of these doctrines on Ṭūsī's *The Nasirean Ethics*, precisely authored during his close association with the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī community.

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