

APPREHENSION AND EXISTENCE, APPEARANCE AND REALITY: THE RECEPTION OF *NAFS AL-AMR* DEBATES AFTER THE 13TH CENTURY

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Abstract

The structure of human cognition and the means of apprehension is suitable only for partly and gradually conceiving reality. This limitation has led to a certain distance between appearance and reality. This means that there will always be a gap between the judgments of the mind about the external world and its contents, which are entities, cases, facts, and states. This partiality and partiteness of human understanding has produced the truth-maker problem with regard to mind judgments. Muslim scholars who admit the correlation between the structure of reality and the categories of the mind but reject the notion of the construction and the determination of reality by the mind refer to the realm that is independent of the mind's personal judgments as *nafs al-amr*. This realm is concerned with the all degrees of reality, namely—from the existent to the non-existent, from the necessity to the contingency and impossibility, from the absolute to the relative, from the material to the non-physical, from the external to the mental, and from the real entities to the abstracted ones—which step into the shot of human cognition or not. Carrying the concept of *nafs al-amr*

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from the logical plane to the metaphysical realm that intersects epistemology and ontology has led to debates that pave the way for various treatments. In particular, Naşir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's (d. 672/1274) *nafs al-amr* epistle that posited it to the cosmic sphere resulted in criticisms of this conception of *nafs al-amr*, and these criticisms are the same ones directed to the Avicennian theory of emanation and its epistemological implications. Scholars who use this concept free from any metaphysical presumption and implication argue against his leap from the logical to the cosmic sphere. During the following period, this tension occasioned debates that led to the approaches that refer to the various degrees of reality, i.e., to the cosmic spheres, the spiritual realms, and the divine realms. This work aims to create a map of treatments, arguments and problems with regard to the concept of *nafs al-amr*.

Key Words: *Nafs al-amr*, truth, apprehension, mind, reality

Introduction

Human understanding of the external world has been subject to various philosophical investigations. These discussions, which may be gathered under the title of *appearance and reality*, focus on the structure and categories of the human mind and on the unfretted structure of the universe. This problem, minimally present even at basic sensible perceptions, grows deeper in regard to philosophical problematics, such as time, space, motion, causality, necessity, contingency, knowledge, and will. Regardless of whether the expansion of human knowledge substantially reduces the distance between appearance and reality, man, who comes to world with a cosmic inquisition as to being and becoming, pursuant to his destiny to go after reality beyond/under the apparent, continues his quest similarly to a person who becomes curious about what is behind the next hill once he surpasses the present.

The traditions of Islamic thought have different approaches to the criteria for true and exact knowledge; nevertheless, there is an agreement that reality outside man is not merely a construction of the human mind. The process of the understanding/apprehension of information, which takes place in the form of the manifestation of things, the particular attributes of which the subject is not aware in the first place, is actually realized within a framework where the objective

is the knowledge as to the situation of the objects and the facts themselves. On the one hand, the distance and distinction between appearance and reality, as well as between construction and truth, provides man with a gradually self-manifesting awareness as to the limits and structure of his own mind; on the other hand, it sets a plane where he can test his knowledge, obtained throughout history, in reference to the plane itself. In Islamic philosophy, the discussions about the quiddity of *nafs al-amr* (fact of matter) can be read as a history of its association with logic, real, cosmic, spiritual and/or divine spheres and has depended on the quest for a *criterion of truth of judgments*. Few studies about the concept of *nafs al-amr*¹ deal with the problem in local terms; therefore, there is a clear need for a study that outlines the map of relevant arguments and sets forth various aspects of the problem.

When *nafs al-amr* refers to something in itself, independent of its external and mental existence, its association with the Avicennian concept of “quiddity in itself” comes to the fore. Indeed, quiddity in itself expresses a level where something is independent of external realization or existence in the intellect through abstraction. According to Ibn Sīnā, quiddity in itself is preserved both in external objects and in the mind; it is only accompanied by accidents arising from existing in these planes. Quiddity in itself exists as a common nature without losing its absoluteness in external particulars; when it is abstracted by mind, it acquires the quality of being predicated of many aspects, that is, the quality of universality. The first aspect corresponds to natural universal, which is commonly present in multiplicity, whereas the second expresses intellectual universal, which is an actual predicate of

¹ A limited number of studies about *nafs al-amr* include the following: Hasan Spiker, *Things as They are: Nafs al-Amr & The Metaphysical Foundations of Objective Truth* (Abu Dhabi: Tabah Research, 2021), 1-248; İhsan Fazlıoğlu, “Seyyid Şerîf’in Nefsü'l-emr Nazariyesi ve Matematik Bilimlere Uygulanması: Şerhu'l-Mevâkıf Örneği,” in *İslam Düşüncesinde Süreklilik ve Değişim: Seyyid Şerîf Cürçânî Örneği*, ed. M. Cüneyt Kaya (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2015), 163-197; id., “Hakikat ve İtibar: Dış-Dünya'nın Bilgisinin Doğası Üzerine –XV. Yüzyıl Doğa Felsefesi ve Matematik Açısından Bir İnceleme,” *Nazariyat: İslam Felsefe ve Bilim Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1/1 (2014), 1-33, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15808/Nazariyat.1.1.M0001>; Hacer Ergin, “Celâleddin Devvânî'nin Nefsülemr Anlayışı,” in *Osmanlı Düşüncesi: Kaynakları ve Tartışma Konuları*, ed. Fuat Aydın, Metin Aydın and Muhammed Yetim (Istanbul: Mahya Yayıncılık, 2019), 87-99.

multiplicity. Intellectual universal is related to nature, which commonly exists in multiplicity. In other words, the ground for the predication of intellectual universal to individuals is the common nature of individuals. In the face of criticisms by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Razī (d. 606/1210) about quiddity in itself, al-Ṭūsī develops a response that turns out to be a rejection of a common nature between external individuals. In such cases, since the ground for the predication of intellectual universal to individuals is removed, the problem of predication has emerged; accordingly, al-Ṭūsī built *naḥs al-amr* as a base for meanings in the mind and identified it with the active intellect.²

The discussions about *naḥs al-amr* reached another stage upon the assessments of claims and expressions in the tracts by al-Ṭūsī regarding the proof of it as a separate substance³ before expanding even further in the course of time. The text is formed, in a sense, by a question posed by Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325) to al-Ṭūsī. In his statements in both *Kashf al-murād* and *Nihāyat al-marām*, al-Ḥillī asks al-Ṭūsī the meaning of the phrase, “the trueness of a judgment is its correspondence with *naḥs al-amr*,” thereupon, in his response, al-Ṭūsī establishes a chain of reasoning in order to prove that *naḥs al-amr* is the active intellect/first intellect.⁴ Thus, the discussions that began

² For an analysis on how al-Ṭūsī interprets Avicennian absolute quiddity, see İbrahim Halil Üçer, “Realism Transformed: The Ontology of Universals in Avicennian Philosophy and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Theory of Mental Exemplars,” *Nazariyat: Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences* 6/2 (2020), 50-52, 43-52, <https://dx.doi.org/10.12658/Nazariyat.6.2.M0116>; For the connection between concept of absolute quiddity and emergence of debates as to *naḥs al-amr*; see Ömer Türker, *İslam Felsefesine Konusal Giriş* (Istanbul: Bilay Yayınları, 2020), 183-185.

³ The tract can be found in records under various titles: *Risālat itbbāt al-jawbar al-mufāriq*, *Risālah fi itbbāt al-‘aql*, *Risālat itbbāt al-‘aql al-kull*, *al-Risālah al-naḥs al-amriyyah*, *al-Risālah al-Naḥsiyyah*, *Risālah fi itbbāt al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*, *Risālat al-burbān ‘alā wujūd al-jawbar al-mufāriq*. See Ṭayyibah ‘Ārifniyā, introduction to *Risālat itbbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad wa-shurūḥ ān*, by Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, ed. Ṭayyibah ‘Ārifniyā (Tehran: Mirāth-i Maktūb, 2014), 52-53.

⁴ Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf ibn ‘Alī Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, *Kashf al-murād fi sbarḥ Tajrīd al-i‘tiqād*, ed. Ḥasanzādah al-Āmulī (Qom: Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1422), 103-104; id., *Nihāyat al-marām fi ‘ilm al-kalām*, ed. Fāḍil al-‘Irfān (Qom: Mu’assasat al-Imām al-Ṣādiq, 1430), 233-235.

with the dialog between al-Ṭūsī and al-Ḥillī before expanding in such a manner to include separate intellects, Platonic ideas, *‘alam al-amr* and divine knowledge laid the foundation for a significant literature by means of both theological and philosophical works, as well as independent texts. Scholars, such as Shams al-Dīn al-Kīshī (d. 695/1296), al-Dawwānī (d. 908/1502), Mullā Muḥammad Ḥanafī al-Tabrīzī (d. 925/1519), Mullā Ḥusayn al-Ardabīlī (d. 950/1543), Mullā Shams Jīlānī (d. 1098/1687), Mullā Aḥmad al-Jandī (?), and Muḥammad Kashmīrī (d. 1136/1723), have written glosses to this tract by al-Ṭūsī⁵, whereas others, including al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390), al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), Ibn Ṭurkha al-Iṣfahānī (d. 835/1432), Bahā’ al-Dīnzādah (d. 952/1545), Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631), Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1641), ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), and al-Sabzawārī (d. 1289/1872), have touched upon the matter through various comments and expansions. The objective of this study is to map the relevant arguments and approaches and point out the problematic issues to provide a framework for future studies.

I. Course of Discussions, Allegations, and Criticisms: Argument Map

The narrative by al-Ṭūsī in his tract on *nafs al-amr* is highly similar to Ibn Sīnā’s (d. 428/1037) expressions about the proof of the active intellect in the third chapter of *al-Ishārāt*.⁶ Al-Ṭūsī differs only in terms of the connection he establishes between *nafs al-amr* and the active intellect and associates it with the concepts of religious thinking, such as the *preserved tablet* or *clear book*. Such associations by al-Ṭūsī might have been motivated by the following.

- Al-Ṭūsī sought metaphysical-religious grounds in the fear that *nafs al-amr* might be instrumentalized and turned into logical constructions.

- In the face of destructive criticism against procession in general and the active intellect in particular, al-Ṭūsī wanted to preserve it

⁵ For further information about commentators and their respective comments, see ‘Ārifniyā, introduction, 53-79.

⁶ Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alī Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, ed. Mujtabā ez-Zārīfī (Qom: Mu’assasah-‘i Būstān-i Kitāb, 1392 HS), 245-247, 252.

through an association with *nafs al-amr*, which is legitimate in the logical sphere, as well as with the concepts of religious thinking.

- By asserting that the active intellect is actually *nafs al-amr*, al-Ṭūsī wanted to eliminate active intellect in a cosmic sense, design it as a logical plane of reference, and build it as a reflection of divine order in man, expressing it similarly to other various concepts within religious thinking.

- Since he negates natural universal in the sense of it being present commonly in multiplicity, he sought a new justification for correspondence, trueness, and exactitude.⁷

Al-Ṭūsī's narrative and the relevant criticisms against him make it impossible to accept the third explanation. In addition, his effort to find a non-mental ground for mental meanings seems sufficient to refute this option. The first and second comments look meaningful on their own; nevertheless, they are incomplete since none refers to the problem of predication and quiddity in itself. Notwithstanding the issues above, it is possible to claim that all should be evaluated in consideration of the entire philosophy of al-Ṭūsī and that they require further supportive data. The fourth option, which we set forth in the introduction and seems the most plausible, leads to the following questions as to his approach to the nature of knowledge and the problem of predication: al-Ṭūsī often distances himself from concept realism, that is, from the idea of a common nature in multiplicity and a form identical to the quiddity of an object. Rather, he comes closer to the idea of mental images and conceptualist attitude. Therefore, how are we to explain his inclination for the surrealist approach in regard to *nafs al-amr*? Al-Ṭūsī does not consider the common nature within individuals in the external world as a foundation of mental meanings and thus moves away from the realist position. Therefore, how are we to interpret why he carries the ground for predication to active intellect, namely, a source beyond external reality, and why he refuses natural universal and puts forth cosmic form instead? Al-Ṭūsī denies the base of correspondence to external reality to ground it in cosmic reality; then again, doesn't such an attitude denote the substitution surrealism in place of reality and the search for the ground of predication even further away? Given the position to which al-Ṭūsī is

⁷ For an assessment focusing on this possibility, see Üçer, "Gerçekçiliğin Dönüşümü," 50-52, 62-63.

pushed due to criticisms by al-Rāzī, is it possible to claim that the option of solving the problem of predication through forms separated in the active intellect causes fewer problems than efforts to explain the same through the common nature present in multiplicity? The criticisms and comments by commentators and thinkers involved in the debate include some data to determine the beleaguered aspects of this preference by al-Ṭūsī. Once these statements are put forth, we can present his arguments, as well as how they are perceived in the course of history.

The tract by al-Ṭūsī has an argumentative structure, with seven premises and consequential premises. It seems convenient to analyze his chain of reasoning within a structure of five stages, including the comments and assessments by commentators. The most striking qualities of his argumentation are the inclusion of a leap from the logical plane to the cosmic-metaphysical plane and the association of *nafs al-amr* with the concepts of religious thinking.

In the first stage, al-Ṭūsī aims to put forth the existence of a reality independent of the human mind. Accordingly, even though humans have certain contemplations and judgments, some of these are right, while some are wrong. Since the mind is the realm of both right and wrong premises, the righteousness of the right premise requires a reference to a plane (permanence) outside the human mind. For al-Ṭūsī, it will be misleading to restrict this non-mental plane only to an external reality. The non-mental includes all planes, whether it refers to external existence as explained by the statement “fire burns” or to the logical plane as elaborated in the statement “man is universal.” Indeed, universality is imposed on the human mind by a reality outside the human mind (the correspondence of the human concept with numerous individuals). Al-Ṭūsī describes such permanence as “what is in *nafs al-amr*” instead of as *nafs al-amr* itself. Thus, he sends out the first signals of moving away from the approach where *nafs al-amr* is considered as a fact itself, that is, where it is possible to handle it in a plane, such as “the fact that fire burns” and “man is universal.” Al-Ṭūsī tries to ground his assertion that a reality independent of the human mind should be an entity based on the correspondence between what is in the mind and “the exterior.” Accordingly, if a thing corresponds to another, the two should be separated on the true plane. Thus, the judgment of the mind refers to the non-mental form and understanding to which this judgment corresponds; this form and meaning, in turn,

refers to an entity. This entity is *nafs al-amr* itself; what is in it is the form and meaning to which the judgment of the mind corresponds.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify what al-Ṭūsī means with “non-mental permanence.” In grammatical terms, “ثبوت خارج” can be read as a possessive construction or an adjective clause. When it is considered a possessive construction, it means the permanence of an external thing. When it is read as an adjective clause, that is, when “permanence” is mentioned as a verbal noun to signify a derived noun, this also denotes the permanence of an external thing. If it is read as an adjective clause and permanence is used in its true sense, then it signifies not an external object but the external reality itself.⁸ In the first two cases, the idea to see *nafs al-amr* as an entity comes to the fore, whereas the final example refers to the factual reality itself beyond the mental construction and assumption. Al-Ṭūsī proceeds to transition from “permanence” to “permanent” in the following phase of his argumentation; therefore, he represents *nafs al-amr* as an entity. He claims that “non-mental permanence” expresses “what is in *nafs al-amr*.” Al-Jandī, who is one of the commentators of the text, asserts that “non-mental permanence” is indeed expressed as *nafs al-amr* itself in some versions but that this would mean a deviation from the apparent meaning of what al-Ṭūsī says. Therefore, according to al-Ṭūsī, *nafs al-amr* is an entity in itself, and what is in *nafs al-amr* is a form and meaning that subsists with this entity.

Criticisms about this stage of his reasoning focus on his leap from the logical to the cosmic-metaphysical plane and the weakness of his justifications with regard to the concept of correspondence he employs in order to justify such a leap. According to the relevant response, in regard to the two judgments that are separated with regard to correspondence and non-correspondence, the response related to the corresponding judgment does not need to have permanence outside the mind since correspondence is sufficient. This is proven by the fact that an availability for correspondence is realized merely through being subject to representation. Indeed, this is the case for negative

⁸ Mullā Aḥmad al-Jandī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” in *Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad wa-shurūḥ ān*, ed. Ṭayyibah ‘Ārifniyā (Tehran: Mirāth-i Maktūb, 2014), 130.

premises and judgments about the impossible.⁹ According to al-Jīlanī, this is why unlike false propositions, the assertion, which claims another plane to be owned by true propositions, is controversial. Indeed, in addition to an intellectual space where false propositions and true propositions are common, there is a level of intellectual existence peculiar only to true propositions. This plane is sometimes expressed with the word “exterior.” In such cases, it becomes meaningless to claim a non-mental entity, or more precisely, an eternal intellect, for true propositions.¹⁰ Likewise, according to al-Dawwānī, it is problematic on the side of al-Ṭūsī to put forth individual distinction (*bi-l-shakḥ taghayyur*) as a condition for the realization of correspondence in order to establish *nafs al-amr* as an external entity, since the constructional difference between two corresponding things is sufficient.¹¹ For instance, even though there is no particular distinction between “man” and “the living” or between “individual man” and “man,” there is a correspondence between them. According to al-Ardabīlī, it would be better if al-Ṭūsī contented himself with an “essential distinction” rather than asserting individual distinction in correspondence.¹²

In the second phase of his argumentation, al-Ṭūsī takes the steps that will transform such permanence and reality into a mental entity, namely, the knowledge of a separate intellect. This stage apparently includes a distinct leap from the logical plane to the cosmic-metaphysical plane. The clearest evidence is that “permanence,” which took place at the end of the previous phase, now turns into “permanent.” Thus, *nafs al-amr* becomes the intellect, whereas what is in *nafs al-amr* becomes something that is represented in it. At this

⁹ Shams al-Dīn Kīshī, “Rawḍat al-nāzīr fī sharḥ nafs al-amr,” in *Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad wa-shburūḥ ān*, ed. Ṭayyibah ‘Ārifniyā (Tehran: Mirāth-i Maktūb, 2014), 16-17; Al-Jandī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 131.

¹⁰ Mullā Shamsā (Shams al-Dīn) al-Jīlanī, “Ḥāshiyah ‘alā Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” in *Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad wa-shburūḥ ān*, ed. Ṭayyibah ‘Ārifniyā (Tehran: Mirāth-i Maktūb, 2014), 67.

¹¹ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn As‘ad ibn Muḥammad al-Dawwānī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” in *Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad wa-shburūḥ ān*, ed. Ṭayyibah ‘Ārifniyā (Tehran: Mirāth-i Maktūb, 2014), 49.

¹² Mullā Ḥusayn al-Ardabīlī, “Ḥāshiyah ‘alā Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” in *Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad wa-shburūḥ ān*, ed. Ṭayyibah ‘Ārifniyā (Tehran: Mirāth-i Maktūb, 2014), 78.

point, al-Ṭūsī makes use of the method of investigation and division, indicating that any attempt to associate the represented thing with a certain time, space or position will contradict the situation “being it itself” that defines it. Accordingly, he tries to eliminate the idea of considering external objects and facts or even mental beings which are independent of assumption as *nafs al-amr* itself. However, again, he claims that what is in *nafs al-amr* cannot be a self-subsisting entity because such an approach will lead to the acceptance of Platonic ideas. Thus, he concludes that “*nafs al-amr* is something that exists in an abstract being.”¹³

As al-Ṭūsī eliminates the option of seeing *nafs al-amr* as spatiotemporal beings, incidents and facts themselves, he asserts that things within *nafs al-amr* are free of spatiotemporal reservations.¹⁴ Such an approach will render it impossible to associate objects and situations, which are obliged to constant change, with *nafs al-amr*. Therefore, mathematical propositions, certain logical propositions, such as “something either exists or not,” intellects supposedly immune to change, and anything except God cannot be subject to *nafs al-amr*. Indeed, in *nafs al-amr*, a phrase, such as “it is raining,” that refers to a particular and temporal incident may well be true assuming that it corresponds to a situation in the external world. Al-Ṭūsī is asked, “Cannot the things within coordinates of time and space have an aspect that makes it possible to associate them with *nafs al-amr*?”¹⁵ This question is actually a proposition to solve the abovementioned problem. In this question, the existence of knowledge as a particular form and universal meaning is presented as an example that may lead to such a possibility. More precisely, in our process of knowing, which includes the effort to attain universals through particulars subject to time and space, the universal refers to what is timeless and constant,

¹³ Al-Ṭūsī actually talks about four possible positions of *nafs al-amr* in the text: 1) *Nafs al-amr* is something with a self-subsisting position, 2) *Nafs al-amr* is something without a self-subsisting position, 3) *Nafs al-amr* is extant with something in a position, and 4) *Nafs al-amr* is extant in something that is not in a position. Nevertheless, as the third option can be treated in the same framework as the first, al-Ṭūsī conducts the debate over three alternative options.

¹⁴ Abū Jaʿfar Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, “Risālah fī ithbāt al-ʿaql al-mujarrad,” in *Risālat ithbāt al-ʿaql al-mujarrad wa-shurūḥ ān*, ed. Ṭayyibah ʿĀrifniyā (Tehran: Mirāth-i Maktūb, 2014), 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

and the subjection of particulars to change does not eliminate the unity and timelessness of this meaning; likewise, *nafs al-amr* might be related to them in the context of the nontemporal aspects of spatiotemporal objects, situations, and facts. Thus, beings with a position may be related to *nafs al-amr* in a manner not relevant to their having a position. According to Shams al-Dīn al-Kīshī, it is incorrect to compare the aspects of a mental form as meaning and knowledge and the changing, nontemporal aspects of what is subject to *nafs al-amr*. Indeed, mental form and meaning are not self-subsisting. Al-Ṭūsī, however, tries to eliminate here the option that *nafs al-amr* is something dependent on time and space and self-subsisting. Therefore, the question should be constructed from the point of things that are within the coordinates of time and space and which are self-subsisting. In such cases, the response by al-Ṭūsī to the question will lose its value.¹⁶ Accordingly, al-Dawwānī points out that the mentioned assimilation and comparison between mental forms and *nafs al-amr* is not carried out in every aspect, wherefore the response by al-Ṭūsī is not correct.¹⁷ Mullā Muḥammad Ḥanafī criticizes the justification by al-Ṭūsī, indicating that the judgments that correspond to *nafs al-amr* may well be free of space and time, as this quality is necessary only for things subject to such judgments.¹⁸

Al-Ṭūsī appeals to a second ground where he makes use of the notion of “consciousness/awareness” to eliminate the option of considering *nafs al-amr* as the very self of spatiotemporal beings, incidents and facts. Accordingly, it is impossible to talk about knowledge regarding the existence of correspondence without the consciousness of what is subject to correspondence. Even though there is no consciousness about whether the things to which the true judgments in *nafs al-amr* correspond have a position, we have no doubt about the correspondence of such judgments to *nafs al-amr*. This means that *nafs al-amr* is not a spatiotemporal thing with a position.¹⁹ This weak justification by al-Ṭūsī has been subject to criticism by commentators, such as Shams al-Dīn al-Kīshī, al-Dawwānī,

¹⁶ Al-Kīshī, “Rawḍat al-nāzir,” 24.

¹⁷ Al-Dawwānī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 51.

¹⁸ Mullā Muḥammad Ḥanafī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” in *Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad wa-shurūḥ ān*, ed. Ṭayyibah ‘Ārifniyā (Tehran: Mīrāth-i Maktūb, 2014), 98.

¹⁹ Al-Ṭūsī, “Risālah fī ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 5.

and Mullā Muḥammad Ḥanafī, since it is also employable against the argument that *nafs al-amr* is actually the forms within a separate intellect.²⁰

The third justification by al-Ṭūsī aims at eliminating the option of seeing *nafs al-amr* as the very self of spatiotemporal beings, incidents, and facts; this view is grounded on the idea of a sharp distinction between intellectual and sensible understanding. In this respect, we understand judgments through intellect and understand things with position only through the senses or by means of a similar function. The correspondence between things subject to intellectual understanding and those subject to sensible understanding cannot be realized with regard to their subjection to sensible understanding.²¹ Pursuant to this argument, since judgments are understood through intellect and material beings with a position are not subject to representation with their material forms, their correspondence with *nafs al-amr* makes it impossible for the latter to have a position. According to al-Dawwānī, this argument may face the objection that things, which are within spatiotemporal coordinates and subject to sensible understanding, can be subject to intellectual understanding not through construction of their material aspects but via intelligible forms.²² Al-Ardabilī reminds that the argument that intellect only understands the universal is controversial; for instance, according to verifiers, it is the intellect that makes judgments about things subject to sensible understanding.²³

Al-Ṭūsī insists that what is in *nafs al-amr* cannot be a self-subsisting entity; otherwise, one has to accept Platonic ideas. This evidently is grounded on the well-known interpretation that Platonic ideas are self-subsisting substances.²⁴ In light of this interpretation, al-Ṭūsī leaps from the impossibility of ideas to the impossibility of self-subsistence of

²⁰ Shams al-Dīn al-Kishī, “Rawḍat al-nāzir,” 25; al-Dawwānī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 52. Mullā Muḥammad Ḥanafī says he is surprised to see a verifier and meticulous man such as al-Ṭūsī to use such a justification (“Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 101).

²¹ Al-Ṭūsī, “Risālah fī ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 5.

²² Al-Dawwānī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 52.

²³ Al-Ardabilī, “Iḥāshiyah ‘alā Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 81.

²⁴ For various comments and assessments on Platonic ideas, see Mullā Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Yaḥyā al-Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā), *al-Ḥikmah al-muta‘āliyah fī l-asfār al-‘aqliyyah al-arba‘ah* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1990), II, 46-81. Hereafter referred as *al-Asfār*.

what is in *nafs al-amr*; given other comments on Platonic ideas and the lack of exactitude of the arguments about the impossibility of ideas, his approach has been questioned by commentators.²⁵

Al-Ṭūsī uses the term “the intelligible (*ma‘qūlāt*)” to express what is in *nafs al-amr* within the abstract being. This situation opens up the mode of the existence of intelligible forms in the abstract for discussions, as well as relevant issues. Are the intelligible within the abstract being actually forms that are distinguished in such a manner to require seeing separate intellect as a store of forms, or even, as Ibn Sīnā puts it, are they the simple meaning of being without any separation? The relevant criticisms against al-Ṭūsī, as we will see below, are based on the acceptance that what is meant here is separated forms. Indeed, according to al-Jandī, it is clear for philosophers that the knowledge of God does not occur with form; in addition, there is no textual ground by which they characterize the knowledge of separate intellects through inscription (*irtisām*). Nonetheless, the argument that what is in *nafs al-amr* is exactly what is in the active intellect refers to this.²⁶ As the fourth phase of argumentation shows, al-Ṭūsī grounds his argument on the impossibility that God can actually include infinite multiplicity, while he eliminates the probability of *nafs al-amr* being divine knowledge; therefore, he presumably means separated forms within a separate intellect.²⁷ The abovementioned criticisms can be invalidated by asserting that the knowledge of separate intellects is neither acquired nor based on impression;²⁸ however, al-Ṭūsī is still subject to severe

²⁵ Al-Kīshī, “Rawḍat al-nāzīr,” 25-26; al-Dawwānī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 52-53; al-Ardabilī, “Ḥāshiyah ‘alā Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 81; Mullā Muḥammad Ḥanaḥī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 102-103; al-Jandī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 134-136; Mullā Muḥammad al-Kashmīrī, “al-Lawḥ al-maḥfūz ‘an al-hazl al-manbūdh fī sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” in *Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad wa-shurūḥ ān*, ed. Ṭayyibah ‘Ārifniyā (Tehran: Mirāth-i Maktūb, 2014), 175-177.

²⁶ Al-Jandī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 149.

²⁷ For more information on the debate about the position of al-Ṭūsī in the context of natural universals, see Üçer, “Gerçekçiliğin Dönüşümü,” 43-52.

²⁸ As a matter of fact, Mullā Şadrā points out the same emphasis, as he comments on the relevant explanations and the evaluations of al-Ṭūsī, al-Ḥillī, and al-Dawwānī. See *al-Asfār*, VII, 276-277; id., *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-karīm*, ed. Muḥammad Khwājawī (Qom: Intishārāt-i Bidār, 1988), II, 143-146.

criticism because he underlines the distinction between separate intellects and the forms therein.

One of the criticisms against this second stage of argumentation is constructed on the assertion that “*nafs al-amr* is the form in separate intellect” and the acceptance that “intellect only apprehends the universal.” Pursuant to this criticism quoted by al-Kīshī, in such cases, both universal and particular judgments of mind will correspond with *nafs al-amr*. For instance, the judgment that the “diagonal of a square does not equal its side” corresponds with *nafs al-amr*; likewise, the statement that “Zayd is wise” also corresponds with *nafs al-amr*. Regarding *nafs al-amr* as the form within separate intellect, since this form is universal, we will either be unable to talk about the correspondence between particular judgments and *nafs al-amr* or even to talk about a different meaning for the correspondence with *nafs al-amr* depending on the universal or particular judgments. Since both options are wrong, *nafs al-amr* cannot be the form in a separate intellect.²⁹

Another criticism against the second stage is articulated by certain thinkers, especially al-Jurjānī and al-Kīshī. In this respect, the criterion for the trueness of forms in separate intellects is problematized. Accordingly, the trueness of a judgment is its correspondence with *nafs al-amr*. Since forms within separate intellects are true, they should also correspond with *nafs al-amr*. If these forms are *nafs al-amr* itself, their trueness means their correspondence with *nafs al-amr* and thus with themselves. However, nothing can be in correspondence with itself. Therefore, *nafs al-amr* cannot be formed in separate intellects.³⁰

In this context, al-Kīshī points out another criticism that refers to the problem of priority-posteriority between the self of the separate intellect and the form therein. The separate intellect itself should be prior to everything called *nafs al-amr*; if *nafs al-amr* is in the form of the separate intellect, since the separate intellect precedes form, it will precede *nafs al-amr* as well. If the knowledge of the separate intellect

²⁹ Al-Kīshī, “Rawḍat al-nāẓir,” 35; al-Jandī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 150.

³⁰ Al-Kīshī, “Rawḍat al-nāẓir,” 35-36; al-Sayyid al-Sharīf Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Jurjānī, *Ḥāshiyat al-Tajrīd*, along with Maḥmūd ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī’s *Tasdīd al-qawā‘id fī sharḥ Tajrīd al-‘aqā‘id*, ed. Eşref Altaş et al. (Istanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2020), 202.

in itself is identical to its self and this knowledge should correspond with what is in *nafs al-amr*, then what is in *nafs al-amr* should precede the separate intellect. Thus, what is in *nafs al-amr* will precede the separate intellect. Then, again, if what is in *nafs al-amr* precedes the separate intellect, that corresponding with the self of the separate intellect, namely, *nafs al-amr*, will have preceded the separate intellect itself.³¹ This problem of priority-posteriority is also applicable to the knowledge of God. Indeed, the knowledge of God corresponds with *nafs al-amr*. Since the knowledge of God precedes the self of the separate intellect, which, in turn, precedes *nafs al-amr*, that is, the form in it, *nafs al-amr* will have twice preceded itself. Then, again, if *nafs al-amr* is a separate intellect, the knowledge of God that precedes creation will become controversial.³²

At the third stage of argumentation, al-Ṭūsī puts forth the quality of what is in *nafs al-amr*. Accordingly, this thing in *nafs al-amr* is definitely far from the qualities of potentiality, possibility, change, and cessation; instead, it has the qualities of actuality, necessity, constancy, and eternity. If what is in *nafs al-amr* has such qualities, then *nafs al-amr* itself should be the same.³³ Thus, the reasoning process is constructed in such a manner that *nafs al-amr* is a separate intellect and what is in *nafs al-amr* comprises intelligible forms. Since the separate intellect is a self-subsisting, non-positioned being in the external word and actually includes all the intelligible and since it cannot come from potentiality to actuality, change, renew, or cease, any intelligible forms therein will have the same qualities. Importantly, this conclusion makes it possible to define *nafs al-amr* as the self of God and to define what is in *nafs al-amr* as the knowledge of God. Indeed, God is also self-subsisting; it never comes from potentiality to actuality and does not change; in addition, in the context of such a quality, the knowledge of God encircles everything. Therefore, if the mentioned qualities are applicable for both the separate intellect and its knowledge as well as God and His knowledge, there is no obstacle against the association of what is in *nafs al-amr* with divine knowledge. Well-aware of this fact, al-Ṭūsī eliminates the abovementioned option in the fourth phase of his argumentation. For

³¹ Al-Kīshī, “Rawḍat al-nāẓir,” 36.

³² *Ibid.*; al-Ardabīlī, “Ḥāshiyah ‘alā Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 84.

³³ Al-Ṭūsī, “Risālah fī ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 7.

this purpose, he indicates that a separate intellect actually includes an infinite multiplicity but that it is impossible to say the same for God.³⁴

The third stage, where attributes of *nafs al-amr* are determined, takes us to the point that there is a being that exists in the external world but has no position and that it is self-subsisting and incorporeal (*mujarrad*). This being actually includes all the intelligible that are either actual or that have the capacity of coming from potentiality to actuality. This being or the intelligible therein cannot change, transform, renew, or cease to be. The separate substance itself and the intelligible in it eternally have these qualities.

If the intelligible in a separate intellect are to have the abovementioned qualities, then the separate intellect itself should be of the same quality. Otherwise, if we assume that the self is a potential, the actual existing intelligible should exist independent of any receptacle/substrate. al-Ṭūsī, however, had already eliminated this alternative. The actual inclusion of the intelligible by separate intellection means the latter cannot mature with them. Talking about intelligible forms in *nafs al-amr*, he refers to permanence and necessity. Accordingly, things in *nafs al-amr* are not related to space and time, and their permanence is necessary. For al-Ṭūsī, since the correspondence between what is or can actually be present in the human mind in any given time and what is potential is impossible, then the intelligibles in separate intellects should be actual. Again, since the trueness of judgments by mind in line with *nafs al-amr* are constant and independent of space and time, the intelligibles in separate intellects should be the same.³⁵ Nevertheless, al-Ṭūsī has been subject to severe criticism for his effort to justify actuality and permanence on the basis of correspondence. In the eyes of al-Ardabili, the main reason behind such criticism is that the mentioned reasoning includes a leap. More precisely, the permanence of something that corresponds with *nafs al-amr* signifies either the permanence of relevant understanding or the permanence of its occurrence. In the first case, the trueness of the proposition does not require continuous understanding of the unity between the subject and predicate. Indeed, its trueness is indifferent to the understanding of the unity between its subject and predicate. Therefore, the permanence of trueness does not require the permanence of relevant understanding. In the second case,

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

notwithstanding my understanding, the permanence of the mentioned unity between the subject and predicate does not require the existence of a substrate that will carry this permanence outside the subject-predicate and the unity between them.³⁶

The attributes of actuality, constancy, and eternity also apply for God and His knowledge. In the fourth phase of his reasoning chain, al-Ṭūsī grounds his argument on the impossibility of associating God with multiplicity to eliminate the option of considering *nafs al-amr* as divine knowledge itself. He negates all three likely manners of association.

- i. No multiplicity can be present in God.
- ii. God cannot be the first principle of multiplicity.
- iii. God cannot be the receptacle/substrate for multiplicity.

Well then, while al-Ṭūsī asserts that a separate substance includes infinite multiplicity, which forms the existence of multiplicity, which he negates for God, does he appeal to a separate substance? In consideration of the first alternative, saying a separate substance includes multiplicity, he means that just as an object consists of atoms or matter-form, the multiplicity is a part of it in mereological terms or that the separate substance is a substrate for multiplicity. The first is unacceptable, while the second is already expressed in the third option. The same applies for the fact that separate substances are principles of multiplicity. Indeed, if this means that it is the first efficient cause, then in this sense, God is clearly the principle. Therefore, such a quality cannot be negated for God. If this, however, means that a separate substance is receptive for multiplicity, it would be synonymous with the third option; that is, it would “be a receptacle/substrate for multiplicity.”³⁷

If the first option denotes consisting of several parts, this cannot be negated only for God. Indeed, even if we say that intelligible forms distinctively exist in separate intellects, this will still not signify such a meronymy. In the second option, the statement that God cannot be the first principle of multiplicity reflects a conscious preference. Indeed, this implies that God cannot be the first principle of multiplicity but that God can be the indirect principle of it. In such cases, the separate

³⁶ Al-Ardabilī, “Ḥāshiyah ‘alā Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 81-82.

³⁷ Al-Kīshī, “Rawḍat al-nāzīr,” 30-31.

intellect will be the first principle of multiplicity. Then, again, what is the origin of this multiplicity in a separate intellect? According to al-Dawwānī, if multiplicity comes to it from God, this would contradict the argument that multiplicity cannot be present in God. If multiplicity originates from a separate intellect itself, then it would be both the subject and the recipient of such multiplicity.³⁸ In the eyes of Mullā Muḥammad Ḥanafī, even if a separate intellect acknowledges multiplicity and the realization of multiplicity in a separate intellect originates from God, this does not mean God is a receptacle for multiplicity.³⁹ In other words, when we say separate intellect is principle of multiplicity, we mean the existential meaning, which will enable separate intellect to be receptacle of multiplicity, comes to it from God. The third option, namely, that God is not the receptacle of multiplicity, means that no separated form can be present in God. The narrative by al-Ṭūsī seems to denote the inclusion of infinite multiplicity by a separate substance in such a manner that it does not impede the existence of the intelligible forms in it. According to thinkers, such as al-Ardabilī, al-Jandī, and Mullā Muḥammad Ḥanafī, if the option of considering *nafs al-amr* as the knowledge of God is eliminated and it is identified with the intelligible in a separate intellect, this approach will entail problems in terms of both the knowledge of God and the predications about God. For them, grounding the knowledge of God on intelligible forms in a separate intellect would mean that the reference and argument for phrases about God is a separate intellect that represents *nafs al-amr*.⁴⁰

At the end of his chain of reasoning, al-Ṭūsī points out a non-mental plane for *nafs al-amr*; with regard to actual reality, he refers to an

³⁸ Al-Dawwānī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 57.

³⁹ Mullā Muḥammad Ḥanafī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 109.

⁴⁰ Al-Ardabilī, “Hāshiyah ‘alā Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 86; Mullā Muḥammad Ḥanafī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 113; al-Jandī, “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-‘aql al-mujarrad,” 134. Al-Kashmīrī backs al-Ṭūsī and opposes the mentioned comment as follows: Knowledge of God cannot ground on it in the sense that the receptacle of multiplicity (=separate intellect) is the receptacle of the forms of things. Knowledge of God does not require acquisition of the mentioned forms in another receptacle. Instead, it (=separate intellect) is something that God creates first and whose form He projects in the later creations. God made it the example for forms of all creatures in order to spread His competent potency (“al-Lawḥ al-mahfūz,” 183).

abstract being other than God, as he eliminates both the latter and God's knowledge in this respect. Qualities, such as the lack of coming from potentiality to actuality and constancy, denote that a celestial soul cannot be a candidate for *nafs al-amr*. Indeed, the soul has perfections that are yet to be present in it and realized.⁴¹ Thus, all premises are constructed in such a manner to lead to a separate intellect. Thus far, we have deliberately used the term "separate intellect" in the presentation of argumentation. This is because al-Ṭūsī employs *universal intellect* for *nafs al-amr* in the fifth phase. He prefers the *universal intellect* over the *active intellect* to signify *nafs al-amr*. For al-Hillī, *nafs al-amr* of al-Ṭūsī is the active intellect or the first intellect. There is no apparent problem with this point, since the term active intellect can be used for any intellect, including the first and the universal intellect. Nevertheless, *nafs al-amr* may vary in scope depending on whether it is the first or tenth intellect. On the other hand, according to al-Ṭūsī, the separate intellect that represents *nafs al-amr* includes infinite multiplicity, and his narrative does not allow for the qualification of actuality on all aspects. As a result, Shams al-Dīn al-Kīshī, al-Dawwānī, and other thinkers argue that this approach makes it more difficult to suggest that he means the universal intellect/first intellect with *nafs al-amr*. In fact, the intelligible of the first intellect which is a kind of intellect of both the universal intellect and the entire universe are necessary in them and are not forms that are distinguished therein.⁴²

Positioning *nafs al-amr* with regard to a cosmic-metaphysical plane, al-Ṭūsī takes the problem to the realm of religious thinking; as a result, he associates *nafs al-amr*, which he expresses as the universal intellect, with a preserved tablet and the clear book. According to Shams al-Dīn al-Kīshī, preserved tablet includes all particulars and universals, whereas universal intellect includes only universals; therefore, it seems unlikely to correspond to preserved tablet.⁴³ In this

⁴¹ Al-Dawwānī, "Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-ʿaql al-mujarrad," 59; al-Jandī, "Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-ʿaql al-mujarrad," 144.

⁴² Al-Kīshī, "Rawḍat al-nāzir," 31; al-Dawwānī, "Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-ʿaql al-mujarrad," 58.

⁴³ Al-Jandī believes this justification may face objections. Indeed, all universal and particular things exist in intellect; nevertheless, the existence of particulars in the intellect is not in the form of a change or a transformation in the temporal

case, it would be more accurate for a person who wants to reconcile philosophical concepts with the *sharḥī* terms to say that the preserved tablet corresponds to the universal soul. Indeed, similar to preserved tablet, the universal soul also incorporates infinite forms that are separated in a universal and particular manner. The first intellect is named “pen” (*qalam*) because it is a means for reflecting knowledge to the universal soul. In this case, it would be more appropriate to name the universal soul a “tablet” (*lawḥ*). Indeed, the soul is like a tablet for this pen. On the other hand, the attempt to associate the universal intellect with the clear book is also controversial in the eyes of al-Kīshī. In fact, commentators refer to three things for the clear book: the Qurʾān, the knowledge of God, and the preserved tablet. Al-Kīshī finds the second more appropriate. According to him, the reference to the verse, “With Him are the keys of the unseen,” reinforces the idea that the term “clear book/record” at the end of the verse signifies divine knowledge.⁴⁴ For al-Kashmīrī, the assumption that the universal intellect is a preserved tablet contradicts general acceptance.⁴⁵ Al-Taftāzānī criticizes al-Ṭūsī, saying “if only he did not associate *nafs al-amr* with these” and indicating that words of al-Ṭūsī are clearly against the abovementioned Qurʾānic verse.⁴⁶

II. Meaning of *Nafs al-amr*: Map of Approaches

Evidently, approaches about understanding *nafs al-amr* cannot be reduced to meanings ascribed to wordings that constitute phrases or that are revealed only through reference to them. A question put by al-Ḥillī to al-Ṭūsī shows that the problem is based on a debate about the criterion for the trueness of judgments of the mind. The relevant literature provides a significant number of correspondences for *nafs al-amr*: self of thing, domain of the real world, universal intellect, universal soul, active intellect, material world, world of images, world of incorporeal, divine knowledge, immutable entities, divine names, divine entity, preserved tablet, the clear book, and Platonic ideas. It is

dimension. Instead, it is in a single mode; “Sharḥ Risālat ithbāt al-ʿaql al-mujarrad,” 145.

⁴⁴ Al-Kīshī, “Rawḍat al-nāzir,” 32-33.

⁴⁵ Al-Kashmīrī, “al-Lawḥ al-maḥfūz,” 185.

⁴⁶ Saʿd al-Dīn Masʿūd ibn Fakhr al-Dīn ʿUmar ibn Burhān al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh al-Harawī al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* (Istanbul: Dār al-Ṭibāʿah al-ʿĀmirah, 1277 AH), I, 71.

necessary to determine the pivotal meaning around which all these terms are located; in addition, it is possible to categorize them in various aspects. In terms of categorization, they can be classified through their relation with the logical, real, cosmic, spiritual, and divine spheres. A more compact categorization might include mentalist, realist, and surrealist categories. We may also attain a well-defined categorization if we say that they are entities and planes that substantially have the same content, even though some of them are expressed through different concepts in respective terminologies of various traditions of philosophical, scientific, or religious thinking.

In his dialog with al-Ḥillī, al-Ṭūsī takes *nafs al-amr* to the cosmic plane and associates it with the separate intellect. This approach of al-Ṭūsī transformed it into a philosophical problem that thanks to the contributions of numerous thinkers, would be expanded throughout the following centuries, laid the foundation for various approaches, and put forth various other subject matters in relation to different problematics of logic and metaphysics. Shams al-Dīn al-Kishī, who was one of the first thinkers to join the debate and to write a gloss for a tract of al-Ṭūsī, refuses the assertion that *nafs al-amr* is the first intellect, and he thus does not adopt the approach that appoints a high rank to *nafs al-amr* in the hierarchy of cosmic intellects. Seeing *nafs al-amr* as an instrument of the human mind to comprehend reality, he refers to the fact that an object has a real existence independent of the human mind.⁴⁷ In the chapter about predicting the quality of existence and nonexistence in *Sharḥ al-Maqāsid*, in response to the conclusion that correspondence occurs in *nafs al-amr*, al-Taftāzānī analyzes and criticizes the approach of al-Ṭūsī. Accordingly, al-Taftāzānī, who is frequently referred to in this matter, thinks it is incorrect to interpret *nafs al-amr* as the active intellect. In linguistic terms, *nafs* means essence, whereas *amr* signifies thing and matter; therefore, *nafs al-amr* refers to something *per se*. The existence of something *per se*, namely, in itself, means to exist independently of understanding, construction, and assumption.⁴⁸ In this regard, in the distinction between the real and the constructional, *nafs al-amr* is on the side of the former; nonetheless, there is no object to place it against constructionally. Nevertheless, since constructional quality includes what is assumptional (*faraḍī*) and extractional (*intizāʿī*), it requires a

⁴⁷ Al-Kishī, “Rawḍat al-nāzīr,” 38.

⁴⁸ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāsid*, I, 70-71.

reflection on the content of what is true and what corresponds with *nafs al-amr*.⁴⁹ Indeed, just as mental or external entities are described through nonexistent things, there are examples where the thing that is included in the subject or predicate of a proposition does not externally exist or even where the mental or external existence is not a part of the predicate. Propositions, such as “Phoenix (‘Anqā’) is nonexistent,” “Partner of God is impossible,” “possibility is constructional,” “quiddity exists,” “genus is the constituent of species,” “nonexistence of cause is the cause for nonexistence of effect,” and “Zayd is blind,” are in this category; nonetheless, their subjects are qualified by their respective predicates in *nafs al-amr*. Al-Jurjānī joins the debate and in a similar manner to al-Taftāzānī, before adding that it is highly improbable to claim *nafs al-amr* is the active intellect, he indicates *nafs al-amr* means a thing in itself. According to al-Jurjānī, this may be only if *amr* in this phrase is used in the sense that it corresponds to creation (*kbalq*) and is employed for the realm of abstract beings. This, however, leads to certain problems caused by the presence of intelligible forms in the active intellect, as we also touched upon in Chapter one.⁵⁰ In consideration of all these assessments, *nafs al-amr* is essentially used in a framework that includes the permanence of existence, quiddity, and constructional notions.

To crystallize the relevant approaches, it seems important to further clarify the definition of *nafs al-amr* as a “thing in itself.” The picture of the content of *nafs al-amr* shows that in peripatetic essentialism, it is impossible to identify a “thing in itself” with “quiddity in itself.” The problem about the status of quiddity in itself evidently has an influence in expanding relevant debates; nonetheless, it will not be accurate to claim that *nafs al-amr* is available for use only in Avicennian metaphysics. Indeed, talking about the existence of something in *nafs*

⁴⁹ Al-Tahānawī uses the term “inventive” for what we mean by “assumptive.” For him, the attribution of external and mental entities in *nafs al-amr* through things acquired from them via extraction falls under the general sense of *nafs al-amr*. In addition, he associates attribution with real things, which excludes the extractational, with the narrower sense of *nafs al-amr*; Muḥammad A‘lā ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Tahānawī, *Mawsū‘at Kaşshāf iştihāḥāt al-funūn wa-l-‘ulūm*, ed. ‘Alī Daḥrūj (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān Nāshirūn, 1996), II, 1720.

⁵⁰ Al-Jurjānī, *Hāshiyat al-Tajrid*, 201-202. Strikingly enough, in *al-Ta‘rīfāt*, al-Jurjānī allows for the description where *nafs al-amr* is defined as divine knowledge. See *al-Ta‘rīfāt*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ṣāliḥ Ḥamdān (Cairo: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1990), 315.

al-amr or its correspondence with *nafs al-amr* is not dependent on whether it is handled in metaphysical theories on the basis of its essence-attribute or existence-essence or handled even in physical theories through a substance-accident or matter-form. On the other hand, if we construe that the existence of something in itself means it exists independently of understanding, construction, or assumption, we will face the question of whether *nafs al-amr* refers to an ontological plane or whether it is mere construction. In this respect, if *nafs al-amr* is not a category outside the mind and an externality, isn't it fair to say that the 'independence of understanding, construction or assumption' will transform it into a construction? The consideration of something independently of understanding, construction, or assumption evidently requires its existence independently of understanding, construction, or assumption. This does not mean that the thing does not exist in dependence on another. For instance, even though an accident exists only in dependence on a substance, namely, a bearer, it is also existent in *nafs al-amr*, and the substance is qualified in *nafs al-amr*, or more precisely, independently of one's understanding, through such accident. Then, again, even though universal concepts are present only in the mind, they are qualified in *nafs al-amr* through their universality. Indeed, the universality of a concept does not depend on whether one takes it into account or even on one's assumption. As a result, even if we acknowledge a plane where *nafs al-amr* is seen as construction, it has to have an ontological ground. The term *wāqi'* used by philosophers to explain *nafs al-amr*, can be read as a sign that it is not considered merely as a construction. On the other hand, when this concept is used on its own, it has a quiddity that is available for identification with the self of the object, occurrence, or fact. Given that *amr* is used in the sense of "thing" and *nafs* is employed as the "essence (*dhāt*)," *nafs al-amr* may signify the self of a thing. In such cases, *nafs al-amr* will be the very self of a realized thing, whereas the exterior and the mind will be the casing for such a realization. This explanation faces the criticism that the correspondence of something with *nafs al-amr* entails the correspondence of such a thing with itself. All these acceptances take us outside the mind to a real plane of discussion. Mīr Dāmād is among the thinkers who focus on the quiddity of such an ontological ground and who deal with it in relation to other problematic areas.

Mīr Dāmād refers to the realization of something in itself by confirming the pivotal meaning of *nafs al-amr*; consequently, he

frequently uses the concepts of *nafs al-amr* and *matn al-wāqiʿ/ḥaqq al-wāqiʿ* (inner dimension of the real world) together.⁵¹ Mīr Dāmād employs these concepts as a casing for the absolute permanence/existence or reality of something and incorporates them in the theory of perpetual creation.⁵² Going beyond the approach that sees *nafs al-amr* merely as a construction, Mīr Dāmād refers to an ontological plane including it. Thus, he expands the abovementioned absolute permanence to contain all other planes proposed for *nafs al-amr*. In this regard, according to the approach of Mīr Dāmād, al-Ṭūsī's identification of *nafs al-amr* with the active intellect is wrong because it restricts the realm of *nafs al-amr*, but it is right because it is one of the ranks of *nafs al-amr*.⁵³ This approach associates *nafs al-amr* with the presence plane of every single thing, including being and quiddity, the existential and the nonexistential, the true and the extractional, the external and the mental, the material and the noncorporeal, and the cosmic and the metaphysical/divine. Nevertheless, we need responses to certain questions to understand this approach: Is *nafs al-amr* constructed as a metaphysical container that includes all these things? If we identify *nafs al-amr*, which is taken beyond a construction and is not identified with any cosmic, spiritual or divine sphere, with the permanence of an occurrence or fact in its respective stage, doesn't such an attitude bear the risk of considering each thing subject to change and transformation as if it consists of its very own essence? If this, despite all its differences, is identical with being and becoming at any stage and is another thing that provides it with the quality of association with *nafs al-amr*, then what is this thing?

⁵¹ For example, for information on how these concepts are used by Mīr Dāmād, see Dāmād Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ḥusaynī al-Astarābādī, *Kitāb al-Qabasāt*, ed. Mahdī Muḥaqqiq, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tahrān, 1988), 4, 16, 62, 224, 365, 410.

⁵² For a few examples of this association by him, see his "al-Īmāzāt," in *Muṣannafāt-i Mīr Dāmād: musbtamil bar dab ʿunwān az kitābbā wa-risālahā wa-ijāzahā wa-nāmabā*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Nūrānī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Anjuman-i Āthār wa-Mafākhir-i Farhangī, 2003), 18; id., "al-Taqdīsāt," in *Muṣannafāt-i Mīr Dāmād: musbtamil bar dab ʿunwān az kitābbā wa-risālahā wa-ijāzahā wa-nāmabā*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Nūrānī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Anjuman-i Āthār wa-Mafākhir-i Farhangī, 2003), 196.

⁵³ For an evaluation by Mīr Dāmād of the approach of al-Ṭūsī, see *Kitāb al-Qabasāt*, 385-387.

Those who reject *nafs al-amr* as a merely logical construction and oppose its consideration as immanent to the structure of the mind or reality identify it with certain metaphysical entities or planes that include the knowledge of everything *per se* and that are free of change or transformation. In this context, given their relation with the cosmic/spiritual and divine spheres in essence, the relevant approaches can be evaluated in two groups.

For the word *amr* (command), which is used as equivalent to *khalq* (creation), some philosophers identify *nafs al-amr* with *‘alam al-amr*, which they consider to be the realm of noncorporeal beings. According to al-Sabzawāri, separate intellects are occasionally associated with *amr* by certain philosophers because their creation is realized merely through divine command, without the need for any further matter, form, aptitude, motion, and time. According to another comment, this is because they in fact have no quiddity and are identical to divine commands, which is synonymous with the command *kun* (be), representing mere existence.⁵⁴ Pursuant to this approach, if something is in *nafs al-amr*, it corresponds with what is in a separate intellect. Indeed, the separate intellect includes the knowledge of all that is existent. Here, the separate intellect signifies the active intellect, first intellect, or universal intellect, but this does not make any difference as to the ontic status of intelligible forms. The identification of intelligible forms in a separate intellect with *nafs al-amr* requires a confrontation with three major problems analyzed in Chapter one.

i. The first problem is the mode of existence of intelligible forms in a separate intellect. Various situations arise depending on whether they are separated forms. If we accept a single, unseparated meaning, then there is the problem of how we will establish the relation between it and the judgments that correspond with *nafs al-amr*. If it is separated, then we have to answer how the ensuing multiplicity occurs in a separate intellect.

ii. The second relevant problem is that for intelligible forms that are also subject to *nafs al-amr*, their correspondence with the latter will be synonymous with themselves.

⁵⁴ Mullā Hādī Sabzawāri, *Sbarḥ al-Manzūmah*, scr. Ḥasanzādah al-Āmulī, ed. Mas‘ūd Ṭālibī (Tehran: Nashr-i Nāb, 1371 HS), II, 216-217; id., *Sbarḥ al-asmā’*, ed. Najafqulī Ḥabībī (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Balāgh, 2006), 607-608.

iii. The third problem is the status of entities or planes or even related judgments that exceed intelligible forms in separate intellects with regard to *nafs al-amr*. Indeed, the intellects themselves, God, His knowledge, names and attributes, and all relevant judgments correspond with *nafs al-amr*.⁵⁵

Given the identification of *nafs al-amr* with intelligible forms in a separate intellect, the permanence of mentioned things and the criterion for the trueness of the relevant judgments, this approach leads to several consequences that trouble both the correspondence and the hierarchy with regard to existence. Particularly, the questions about the mode of existence of intelligible forms in a separate intellect reminds another possible meaning, namely, the universal soul.⁵⁶ Indeed, contrary to a separate intellect, forms and intelligible forms can exist in it in a separate manner. However, even if we think that it brings a solution to the first problem, then the second and third problems remain unsolved because of the association between *nafs al-amr* and the universal soul. Similar consequences arise when the world of images or the interpretation of Platonic ideas other than divine knowledge are identified with *nafs al-amr*.

Complications in the association of *nafs al-amr* with the cosmic plane pave the way for another interpretation, or more precisely, its association with the divine sphere. According to Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, *nafs al-amr* is the essential knowledge that includes forms of all beings, whether they are universal or particular, small or large, external or mental.⁵⁷ Pursuant to the principle of absolution (*tanzīb*), no multiplicity can be present in God. This principle stopped al-Ṭūsī from considering *nafs al-amr* as the knowledge of God. Nevertheless, such absolution clearly is grounded on the supposition that intelligible forms, which he says are in the separate intellect, are present in it in a separated manner. However, whoever claims *nafs al-amr* is divine knowledge and includes the knowledge of all beings does not mean the form subject to acquired knowledge. Pursuant to this approach, allegations that *nafs al-amr* is the first intellect, universal intellect,

⁵⁵ Ṣāʿin al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Turkah, *Tambīd al-qāwāʿid: Kitāb al-Tambīd fī sharḥ qawāʿid al-tawḥīd*, ed. Ḥasanẓādah al-Āmulī (Qom: Alif Lām Mīm, 1381 HS), 34.

⁵⁶ Al-Kīshī, *Rawḍat al-nāẓir*, 32-33.

⁵⁷ Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Ḥasanẓādah al-Āmulī (Qom: Bustān-i Kitāb, 1382 HS), 78; Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Asfār*, 261-262.

active intellect, or the preserved tablet do not pose any problem because these forms are manifestations of divine knowledge.⁵⁸ In this case, all ranks that are hierarchically under divine knowledge transform into manifestations of *nafs al-amr*. This comment identifies *nafs al-amr* with divine knowledge and is grounded on the idea that divine knowledge is not identical to essence but is an addition to the latter. Then, again, if *nafs al-amr* is divine knowledge and divine knowledge is subject to *nafs al-amr*, given the correspondence of divine knowledge with *nafs al-amr*, doesn't this also denote its correspondence with itself? In addition, if divine knowledge is the criterion of correctness for the judgment that God exists in *nafs al-amr* or is qualified therein with any faculty, then wouldn't this mean grounding the correctness of something that precedes divine knowledge on divine knowledge? Thinkers such as Bahā' al-Dīnzādah and 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulūsī agree on the core meaning of *nafs al-amr* as *something in itself*; in the face of the abovementioned problems, these philosophers refer to a plane (*ḥaḍrat al-nafs al-amr*) that constitutes the foundation for all levels of existence.⁵⁹ In this context, *nafs al-amr* is expanded in such a manner to besiege divine knowledge and to become identical to divine essence; therefore, it is referred to as divine existence. Pursuant to this comment, since all beings, whether they are natural, exemplar or intellectual, exist with this divine existence, the latter deserves to be named *nafs al-amr* more than anything.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 79.

⁵⁹ Bahā' al-Dīnzādah puts forth several arguments in order to oppose the alternatives to see *nafs al-amr* as a space of mind or a construction; he refers to a permanence and a realization that is the basis for all stages. See Mullā Muḥyi al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Bahā' al-Dīn ibn Luṭf Allāh (Bahā' al-Dīnzādah), *Risālah muta'alliqah bi-ḥaqā'iq al-asbyā'* (Istanbul: Süleymaniye Library, Ragıp Paşa, 1460), 237v. Al-Nābulūsī, in turn, refers to *nafs al-amr* as a plane that is the origin of all effects, divine attributes, and name stages. See 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulūsī, *İtlāq al-quyūd fī sharḥ Mir'āt al-wujūd* (Istanbul: Süleymaniye Library, Yazma Bağışlar, 2961), 16r.

⁶⁰ Mullā Şadrā, *al-Asfār*, VI, 261-262; Bahā' al-Dīnzādah, *Risālah muta'alliqah bi-ḥaqā'iq al-asbyā'*, 238r.

Conclusion

The debates on *nafs al-amr* arise from the problem of the external correspondences of predications and mental propositions; these debates lead to a sphere of problems where numerous approaches are put forth and for which there is an agreement on the judgment that trueness “corresponds with reality.” *Nafs al-amr* is embodied in the deepening debates about the status of quiddity in itself; accordingly, the identification by al-Ṭūsī of *nafs al-amr* with the active intellect led to a broader discussion about the problem. This move by al-Ṭūsī seems a step back from the Avicennian attitude in favor of the second option. In fact, the Avicennian approach rejected both solely extant ideas and the forms immanent to divine intellect and grounded predicational unity on universal nature. The effort to identify *nafs al-amr* with elements of peripatetic metaphysics/cosmology has caused a reaction among philosophers who use the term for referring to each stage of reality in the sense that “something exists independently of understanding, construction, or assumption.” If we don’t say *nafs al-amr* is a construction, that is, if we are not talking about considering something independently of understanding, construction or assumption, then the assertion that reality itself is *nafs al-amr* includes an ambiguity that requires clarification. Indeed, the proposition subject to judgment that “the trueness of a proposition is its correspondence with reality” mentions a part of reality; therefore, such a judgment gives the impression of bearing a controversy expressed as the “trueness of the proposition about reality is its correspondence with reality.” Apparently, these commentators, most of whom are philosophers from the tradition of religious thinking, were convinced that the comprehension of structure and the functioning principle of factual reality, which is shaped in line with divine knowledge and does not include determinism, allows explaining each particular situation with reference to the mentioned structure and principles. In their eyes, since this order is determined by divine knowledge, it becomes possible to justify trueness and correspondence based on an intellectually monitorable process, even though it comprises unlimited possibilities in proportion to divine power.

Mir Dāmād constructs *nafs al-amr* as a dimension immanent to the structure of reality; evidently, his approach requires a more detailed analysis and clarification. On the other hand, there is another argument that asserts that beings in spatiotemporal coordinates also exist with dimensional existence. Apparently, such an argument enables us to

position him against supra-realist approaches. In addition, note the close connection between the view that associates *nafs al-amr* with divine existence and the Avicennian approach that calls universal nature “divine existence.” Moreover, if we can put forth concrete evidence in the sense that these two, namely, divine existence and universal nature, correspond to the same thing similarly to the dimensional existence to the existent, it would become possible to claim all three views are in the same pot, despite slight differences in details. All the foregoing shows that various approaches that agree on the pivotal meaning of *nafs al-amr* interpret the term in line with their respective metaphysical framework. In principle, however, these approaches can be evaluated under two categories: those that assert *nafs al-amr* is immanent to the structure of external reality and those that explain it with reference to various planes.

We think that a general outlining of a problem map about *nafs al-amr* debates would set the guidance for future studies.

Al-Ṭūsī constructs his reasoning on the basis of judgments that correspond with *nafs al-amr*; his approach reveals the relation between the debates on the problem of *predication*. While they discuss the problem of predication, the various philosophers’ emphasis on this issue actually shows this connection.

Another issue that should be addressed as an extension of the predication problem is the status of *nafs al-amr* within the context of the *distinction of truth construction*. Certain existential and even nonexistential qualities, which are not a part of external beings in a mereological sense but are derived of them and are their predicates, are also present in *nafs al-amr*. Consequently, not only entities with physical/real existence but also some constructional/extractional concepts, such as possibility, nonexistence, unity, and multiplicity, are evaluated within the scope of *nafs al-amr*. We also observe that mathematical objects and models in various scientific disciplines are handled in this regard.⁶¹

Since *nafs al-amr* is treated in the same pattern with the concepts of exactitude, constancy, primordially, and continuity, it should also be analyzed in connection with the theory of demonstration. Apparently, the mentioned debates have overlooked this aspect of the problem. The analysis of epistemological exactitude and continuity is

⁶¹ For a relevant analysis, see Fazlıođlu, “Hakikat ve İtibar,” 1-33.

important to determine how the correspondence with *nafs al-amr* is related to which types of propositions.

The argument that *nafs al-amr* is related to a realm of being that is becoming independent of understanding and is on a plane accompanied by constancy and continuity paves the way for its association with a kind of creation, namely, perpetual creation, which is used in the sense of *prioritization with pure nonexistence beyond temporal and essential nonexistence*.

The attribution of constancy, primordality, and continuity to what is in *nafs al-amr* brings *Platonic ideas* into the debate. Evidently, in the consideration of each comment about Platonic ideas, it is necessary to answer how they represent the things in *nafs al-amr*. Nevertheless, the effort to identify the essence of something with ideas should engage an explanation of issues, such as correspondence and predication, understanding and knowledge, and continuity and change, within the context of their relation between *nafs al-amr* and the ideas for any approach.

Within the context of *nafs al-amr*, another controversial issue is the essence of the *knowledge of God about the existents*. An effort to position *nafs al-amr* as the active intellect, universal intellect, universal soul, or the world of images brings forward the question of how we will explain the predications as to essence, attributes and the knowledge of God. In addition, its interpretation as divine knowledge attracts arguments that God cannot be the principle or receptacle of multiplicity.

Therefore, *nafs al-amr* incorporates a network of problems that should be analyzed through independent studies in relation to all the foregoing issues and their respective subsets.

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