



COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY V. IN TWELVER SHI'ISM

COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY

v. In Twelver Shi'ism

Imami traditions contain a chaotic abundance of material portraying the origin and structure of the universe. Book XIV, "On the heavens and the earth," of Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesī's *Behār al-anwār*, fills ten volumes (LVII-LXVI) in the most recent edition and contains several thousand traditions; to this abundance must be added related material from elsewhere in Majlesī's vast compilation and in other Imami collections of Hadiths. Further information is to be found in Imami polemics, apocalyptic, and even narratives of the ascension (*me'rāj*) of the Prophet Moḥammad. Of most interest is the older corpus of traditions, in which mythical elements had not yet given way to the rationalist discourse of later theological and juridical tradition (Amīr-Mo'ezzī, 1992b, I/2). In view of the abundance of material and frequent inconsistencies, it is possible to discuss here only the most common themes. Cosmological traditions fall into two groups, the first differing only in detail from the Sunni cosmological traditions attested from the same period; the second contains material peculiar to Shi'ism, dealing mainly with the cosmological role of the imams.



Elements shared with Sunni Islam. According to early Imami sources, God created the universe “from nothing” (*lā men šayʿ*; Kolaynī, n.d., I, p. 183; idem, 1389/1969, I, p. 135). The essence of the Creator is separated from the creation by veils (*hejāb*), curtains (*setr*), and pavilions (*sorādeq*) impregnated with the divine attributes (Majlesī, LVIII, chaps. 2ff., with frequent references to Ebn Bābūya). Two parallel series of “first created things” are described. On one hand, there are creations that can be considered archetypes, like the pen (*al-qalam*), the well-guarded tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*), the throne (*al-ʿarš*), and the seat (*al-korsī*); it is said, for example, that at the divine command the pen of light was dipped into the *nūn* (cf. Qurʾān 68:1) and wrote with ink of light on the tablet of light all that was destined to happen until the resurrection (Qomī, sub 68:1; Ebn Bābūya, 1379/1959, p. 23). The seat seems to encompass the entire universe in its exoteric aspects (*zāher*), while the throne incorporates the esoteric aspects (*bāṭen*; Kolaynī, n.d., I, pp. 175ff.; Ebn Bābūya, 1398/1978, pp. 321ff.). On the other hand, creation is also said to have begun with the elements: First was the water on which the divine throne rests (cf. Qurʾān 11:7). According to some traditions, this water itself rested on air (ʿAyyāšī, sub 11:7; *Nahj al-balāḡa*, p. 26). When God wished to “unleash” creation, he drew the wind from the water and ordered it to whip up the latter. The lashing of the waves gave birth to a vapor, which formed the heavens, and a foam, which dried and formed the earth (Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, sub 11:7; Kolaynī, 1389/1969, I, p. 135). In another version the water transformed itself into fire; the heavens originated in its smoke, the earth in its ashes (Kolaynī, 1389/1969, I, p. 223; *Nahj al-balāḡa*, pp. 26, 241ff.). Sometimes the two series of protocreations are combined, for example, when the throne is said to have been created after air, the pen, and light (Ebn Bābūya, 1398/1978, pp. 325-26).

Creation took place in six days (cf. Qurʾān 32:4). The Islamic cosmogonic tradition draws abundantly on biblical and midrashic literature (Eisenberg, pp. 13-28), which is why in Imami narratives creation is often said to have taken place between Sunday and Friday, with Saturday apparently reserved as the Creator’s day of rest. On the first day (Sunday) good was created, on the two first days the earth, on the third day nourishment for the earth, on the fourth and fifth days the heavens, and on Friday the nourishment for the heavens (Kolaynī, 1389/1969, I, 213; Majlesī, LVII, pp. 53ff.). In other narratives the creation of the heavens is placed before that of the earth (e.g., *Nahj al-balāḡa*, p. 26), both hypotheses being compatible with the concise language of the Qurʾān (cf. 2:29, 41:9-12, 9:7, 32:4, 25:9, etc.). There are seven heavens, the proportion of each to that above it being that of a small ring to an immense



desert (Kolaynī, 1389/1969, I, pp. 224-25). The imams have provided their names and described their colors, constituent elements, and inhabitants (Ebn Bābūya, 1385/1986, II, p. 280; idem, 1329 Š./1950, II, p. 74; idem, 1377/1958, I, p. 241; Majlesī, LVIII, pp. 88ff.). Among the elements of this celestial topography are paradise, sometimes placed below and sometimes within the seventh heaven; hell, located either in the first heaven or below the seventh earth (see below); the “lotus tree of the boundary” (*sedrat al-montahā*; cf. Qur’ān 53:14, 53:16), the blessed tree of the highest heaven (cf. Wensinck, 1921); and the “house frequented” (*al-bayt al-ma’mūr*; Qur’ān 52:4), a temple located at the center of the same heaven (Majlesī, XVIII, pp. 319ff., on the *me’rāj*; LVIII, chaps. 3ff.).

Twelver angelology is highly developed, and the heavens are thus described as densely populated. In the angelic hierarchy, below the four principal archangels (Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel, and Azrael), who rule the seven heavens and attend the divine throne, are the angels in charge of each heaven, presiding over armies of angels millions strong, each category with its own task (Majlesī, LIX, pp. 144-256). The natural order, including even meteorological events, is also conceptualized in terms of angels: Eclipses, winds, the courses of the stars, and the like are considered the work of angels specifically assigned to these tasks (Kolaynī, 1389/1969, I, pp. 119, 130, II, p. 91). In some traditions even the “archetypal creatures” like the pen and the well-guarded tablet are associated with angels (Ebn Bābūya, 1379/1959, pp. 23, 30). There are also other celestial beings, distinct from the angels: the spirit (*al-rūh*), which is superior to them, inspiring and sustaining the imams (Şaffār Qomī, IX, pp. 16-19; Kolaynī, n.d., II, pp. 17ff.); the terror (*al-ro’b*), a celestial being who is to “march” with the Mahdī and assist him in his eschatological mission (No‘mānī, p. 337; Ebn Bābūya, 1405/1985, I, p. 331; see below); and even the cosmic **cock**, its claws resting on the seventh earth and the throne sprouting from its head, which announces the Day of Judgment in its prayers, thus arousing the cocks of the terrestrial earth (Kolaynī, 1389/1969, II, pp. 91-92). Finally, the stars, which were created after the heavens and are considered living beings that pray to God, are almost as important in the universal harmony as are the angels (Kolaynī, 1389/1969, I, p. 230, II, p. 125; Majlesī, LVIII, chaps 5ff., LIX, pp. 327-98).

There is also a topography that lies between heaven and earth and encompasses such elements as the region of darkness (*zōlomāt*), with the fountain of life (*‘ayn al-ḥayāt*) in the center; the silver tents (*kīām men fezza*),



where the spirits of past imams dwell; and even the “kingdom of the earth” (*malakūt al-arḏ*) and the cities Jābolqā and Jābolsā, which, though described as located at the hidden center, the extreme east, and the extreme west of the earth respectively, seem nevertheless to be located outside its physical boundaries (Şaffār Qomī, VIII, pp. 12-14, X, p. 14). These topoi play an important role in Twelver initiation rites, when the imams “dispatch” their disciples to visit these places; the terms in which they are described are simultaneously spiritual and corporeal, suggesting an ontological reality beyond the senses.

Parallel to the heavens there are also seven earths, each like a ring in a desert in comparison to the one above it (Kolaynī, 1389/1969, I, pp. 224ff.). Their names, inhabitants, and events are known to the imams (Majlesī, LIX, pp. 343-98). The terrestrial earth, the equilibrium of which is ensured by the weight of the mountains (cf. Qur’ān 13:3, 21:31), especially Qāf, the largest of them, consists of seven climes (Ebn Bābūya, 1329 Š./1950, II, pp. 97ff.), with the Ka’ba at the center. The Ka’ba is also the middle member in a tower of fifteen sanctuaries located in the centers of the superimposed seven heavens and seven earths; apparently all are cubical, the highest being the “house frequented” (see above), which stands just below the throne and was constructed in its image (Ebn Bābūya, 1404/1984, p. 196; idem, 1376/1957, II, p. 201; idem, 1385/1966, II, pp. 396-98; cf. Wensinck, 1916).

The positions of some elements in the hierarchy of the “physical” universe fluctuate considerably. In the most frequently mentioned sequence the seventh earth rests on the cock, which stands on a rock poised on the back of a whale that swims in the ocean of darkness; the ocean is borne by the air, which is in turn sustained by the moist earth (*bard*; Kolaynī, 1389/1969, I, pp. 224, 127; Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, sub Qur’ān 11:7). All the lists end with *tarā*, which is said to constitute the farthest limit of human knowledge. In the hierarchy of the celestial universe the seventh heaven is surrounded by the hidden ocean contained in the mountains of cold (*bard*; or of hail if the word is read *barad*), which in their turn are contained within the air; the latter is supported by the veils of light encased in the divine *korsī* (Kolaynī, 1389/1969, I, p. 225).

As for the inhabitants of the earth, information is even more confused, for the relevant traditions also incorporate several other notions, including the cycles, age, and number of the worlds. Aside from such confusion, it is also impossible to know whether the term “world” (*‘ālam*) as used by the imams refers to the entire universe or only to the sublunary earth. The “worlds” are numbered



seven, twelve, twelve thousand, or even a million, and all the inhabitants, excepting naturally the “enemies” of the imams and their partisans on earth, recognize the *walāya* (spiritual guidance) of the “immaculate ones” (*ma’šūmīn*). The age of the world is often said to be 50,000 years, divided into five periods of 10,000 years each. During the first the world was empty, arid, and uninhabited; during the second it was populated with beings who were neither jinn nor angels nor human beings. In the third period the world was again empty and uninhabited. The fourth was that of the creation of the jinn and the monstrous *nasānes* (sg. *nasnās*). In the fifth period, of which the major part has already elapsed, humanity, the descendants of Adam, was born. But Twelver Shi‘ism also incorporates cycles of humanity, the individual duration of which is unknown; only after the disappearance of the last generation of human beings will the world be entirely renewed, with a population not divided between male and female and totally dedicated to the worship of God (Mas‘ūdī, p. 3; ‘Ayyāšī, s.v. Qur’ān 2:30, 50:15; Ebn Bābūya, 1329 Š./1950, II, pp. 107ff., 322ff., III, pp. 321ff.; idem, 1398/1978, p. 277). The accounts of the creation of Adam, the events of his life, and the personages that surrounded him (Eve, Eblīs, Cain, Abel, etc.) do not offer cosmological features properly so-called and in fact belong to the chapter on theology; here it is possible only to cite the koranic passages, enriched with information drawn from the written and oral *esrā’īlīyāt* literature. The subhuman categories of the jinn, created from fire, and the *nasānes*, monsters of evil, have been invisible to ordinary human beings since the inception of the fifth era, that in which the “world” was created; in addition, there are the “monstrosities” (*mosūk*), human beings reincarnated in the bodies of unclean animals. These categories seem to correspond to a doctrinal need: Some of the jinn who are believers and initiates into Islam correspond on the subhuman plane to the Imami faithful, just as the *nasānes* correspond to the partisans of the imams’ enemies. The *mosūk* are almost always reincarnations of adversaries of the Imami cause (on the jinn and the *nasānes*, see Şaffār Qomī, II, p. 18; Kolaynī, n.d., II, pp. 242ff.; idem, 1389/1969, II, p. 54; Mas‘ūdī, p. 3; on the *mosūk*, see Şaffār Qomī, VII, p. 16; Kolaynī, 1389/1969, I, p. 285, II, p. 37; Ebn Bābūya, 1329 Š./1950, II, pp. 329ff.; idem, 1377/1958-59, I, p. 271; No‘mānī, p. 387).

Aside from several features with esoteric and initiatory connotations (the cycles of the world and of humanity, treatment of the terrestrial and celestial topoi, certain aspects of angelology) and several doctrinal characteristics (treatment of the subhuman), this “first level” of Twelver cosmogony is not fundamentally different from Muslim cosmogony in general, as it has been set



forth by such authors as Azraqī (d. after 244/858), Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Moṭahhar Maqdesī (Pseudo Balkī; d. after 355/966), Kesā'ī (d. beginning of the 11th century), or even Ṭa'labī (d. 427/1035), all approximately contemporary with the first Imami compilers (cf. Fahd). The details of this level are derived from an ancient Semitic background, with traces of Judaism and mediated through it very ancient Near and Middle Eastern traditions, especially those of Mesopotamia.

Elements peculiar to Shi'ism. The teachings of the imams, as they appear in the nonrational esoteric tradition, constitute a second cosmogonic and anthropogonic “level,” differing from the contemporary Sunni tradition and exhibiting some similarities with Iranian cosmogonies. These teachings, fundamentally Imami, can be characterized as “primordial,” for the events described preceded the creation of the universe. Twelver primordial cosmogony is explained in two groups of apparently unrelated but actually interdependent and complementary traditions.

In the first it is reported that thousands of years before the creation of all things, in the immaterial “place” of the Mother Book (*omm al-keṭāb*), God sent forth from His own light the shaft of light identified with Moḥammad—that of exoteric prophecy—and from that shaft a second, that of 'Alī, typifying the imamate, or esoteric *walāya* (No'mānī, p. 131; Ebn Bābūya, 1404/1984, pp. 75, 236, 347-48; idem, 1385/1966, pp. 134, 174, 208; idem, 1379/1959, pp. 306ff.; Ebn Šahrašūb, I, p. 183). This primordial light, single and dual, is the sacred pleroma of the fourteen immaculate ones (Ebn Bābūya, 1385/1966, I, pp. 135ff.; 1405/1985, p. 319; 1329 Š./1950, II, pp. 307ff.; Ḳazzāz, pp. 110-11, 169-70). The lights of the immaculate ones are described in numerous traditions as “shades,” “spirits,” or “shadows” of the light (*ašbāḥ*, *arwāḥ*, *aẓella nūr* or *men nūr*; Ebn Bābūya, 1385/1966, I, pp. 23, 162, 208; idem, 1405/1985, pp. 335-36; Ebn 'Ayyāš, p. 95; Majlesī, XI, pp. 150ff., 192ff., XXV, pp. 23ff.). According to some imprecise and allusive reports, the stage of the “shadows of light” is supposed to have occurred not in the primordial world of the Mother Book but in the “second world,” called in the texts “the first world of shadows” (*ālam al-aẓella al-awwal*) or “the first world of particles” (*ālam al-ḍarr al-awwal*; No'mānī, pp. 274, 309; Ebn Bābūya, 1404/1984, p. 612; Ḳazzāz, pp. 169-70). The transition from the world of the Mother Book to the first world of shadows would thus mark the passage from the amorphous light of the immaculate ones to light in human form, of an extremely “subtle” substance (No'mānī, p. 328; Ebn Bābūya, 1329 Š./1950, I, p. 156; Ḳazzāz, p. 112). It must have been at



that stage that the divine throne was created, for it was around the throne that the primordial luminous entities, the immaculate ones, performed an archetypal circumambulation, testifying to the Oneness of God (*tahlīl*, *tawhīd*) and praising His glory (*taḥmīd*, *tamjīd*, *tasbīḥ*, etc.; Ebn Bābūya, 1405/1985, pp. 318-19; idem, 1377/1958, I, pp. 262ff.; Ḳazzāz, p. 170; Ebn ‘Ayyāš, p. 123). In a subsequent stage the “shadows” or “particles” of those who can be called “pure beings” were created. Despite the disorder and lack of clarity in the traditions, it is nevertheless possible to class the “pure beings” in three broad categories: shadows of future spiritual and nonhuman inhabitants of the heavens and the earth; shadows of the prophets, with particular emphasis on the *ūlo’l-‘azm* (lit. “prophets endowed with firm resolution”), and finally shadows of the initiates (*mo’menūn*, a technical term designating initiates into the esoteric religion, in contrast to the *moslemīn*, adherents of the one true exoteric religion; for the opposition *mo’men/moslem*, or *īmān/eslām*, see Amīr-Mo‘ezzī, 1992b, s.vv.) among the descendants of Adam, that is, the followers of the imams in all periods (Ṣaffār Qomī, II, pp. 6, 8, 11; Ebn Bābūya, 1342 Š./1963, pp. 11-12; idem, 1385/1966, p. 122; Ebn ‘Ayyāš, pp. 41, 58).

The next stage was the one in which God concluded the primordial covenant (*mīṭāq*) with the “pure beings.” This covenant encompassed four solemn oaths, though it is rare that all four are mentioned in a single tradition: the promise to adore God and the promises of love for and fidelity (*walāya*) to Moḥammad and his prophetic mission, to the imams and their sacred cause, and to the Maḥdī, the universal savior at the end of time (Ṣaffār Qomī, II, pp. 7, 12; Kolaynī, n.d., III, pp. 12ff.; No‘mānī, p. 274; Ebn Bābūya, 1385/1966, pp. 117, 124, 312ff.). It is for this reason that the first world of shadows is also known in the texts as the “world of the covenant.” Despite the lack of precision in the traditions, it seems logical to place the “primordial initiation” after this covenant, in accordance with a universal rule of esoteric and initiatory doctrines. In fact, the shadows of the “pure beings” are said to have been initiated by the luminous entities of the immaculate ones into the secrets of the two sacred sciences of unification and glorification, well before the creation of the other shadows (see above); these secrets were the four sacred formulas *lā elāha ellāh*, *sobḥāna’llāh*, *al-ḥamdo le’llāh*, and *Allāho akbar* (Ebn Bābūya, 1385/1966, pp. 5ff.; idem, 1405/1985, pp. 254-55; 1377/1958, pp. 262ff.; Ebn ‘Ayyāš, p. 63). Even the number of these formulas, which contain the most sublime mysteries, has a cosmic value, for it is because of these four that the throne and all the sanctuaries occupying the superimposed centers of the seven heavens and the seven earths are cubical (Ebn Bābūya, 1376/1957, II,



p. 201; idem, 1385/1966, pp. 396-98; Majlesī, LVIII, pp. 5ff.). Another event is said to have taken place in the world of shadows: the creation of the descendants of Adam, in the form of particles, from earth and water. They were divided into “people of the right” (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*), characterized by their obedience to God, and “people of the left” (*aṣḥāb al-šemāl*), who refused to obey the divine order (Ṣaffār Qomī, II, p. 7; Kolaynī, n.d., III, pp. 10ff.; Ebn ‘Ayyāš, pp. 9-10; see below).

The division between people of the right and of the left serves as a transition to the second group of traditions mentioned above. There is, in fact, a large body of traditions about the division of creation into two opposing groups: on one hand, beings of light and knowledge, on the other, beings of darkness and ignorance. The most important tradition in this corpus is without doubt the account of the cosmic creation of supreme intelligence (*‘aql*) and of ignorance (*jahl*) and their respective armies (*jonūd*). The supreme intelligence was the first of the spiritual creations (*rūḥānīyūn*); drawn from the right side of the throne and formed from sweet water, it is characterized by obedience and yearning for proximity to God. It is endowed with seventy-five armies, which are actually moral qualities elevated to the rank of cosmic powers. Next ignorance, proud and disobedient before God, was created from cloudy, brackish water. When it protested because of the strength of its adversary, God endowed it also with seventy-five armies, vices as cosmic powers. The battle of the forces of good and evil thus began before the inception of the physical world. The identification in early Imami tradition of *‘aql* with the imam (Amīr-Mo‘ezzī, 1992b, index, s.v. *‘aql*; cf. 1992a) helps to explain the interrelation of the two groups of cosmogonic traditions. Both refer to a perpetual struggle in which the initiated oppose the “counterinitiates,” the army of the imams of light (*a‘emmat al-nūr*) opposes the imams of darkness (*a‘emmat al-ḡalām*), the people of the right oppose those of the left, and the creatures of the highest heaven (*‘ellīyūn*) oppose the creatures of the lowest hell (*sejjīn*; on these pairings, see Ṣaffār Qomī, I, pp. 15-16; Kolaynī, 1389/1969, II, pp. 52ff.; Ebn Bābūya, 1404/1984, pp. 345, 412). In fact, this level of Imami cosmogony comprises a genuine anthropogony, containing the two constants of Imami doctrine, the notions of initiation and of struggle. In this anthropogony it is said that the spirits and hearts (the heart being the seat of the spirit) of the imams were created from a clay found above the divine “place,” the *‘ellīyūn*, and their bodies from that of the *‘ellīyūn* itself. The spirits and hearts of the imam’s initiates and of the prophets are created from the clay of the imam’s body, and their bodies from a clay found below the *‘ellīyūn*.



In rigorous parallelism, on the other side the spirits, hearts, and bodies of the enemies of the imam are created from the clay of the infernal “place,” the *sejjīn*, the intellects and hearts of their partisans from the same clay, and finally the bodies of the latter from a clay below the *sejjīn* (Şaffār Qomī, I, p. 9; Kolaynī, n.d., II, pp. 232-34, III, pp. 2-16; Ebn Bābūya, 1385/1986, p. 117; on *‘ellīyūn* and *sejjīn*, see Qur’ān 83:18-21, 7-9; cf. Ja’far al-Şādeq, sub 82:12-13; Qomī, sub 83:7-19, 18-21).

Eschatology. Like all mythical constructions of an initiatory character, Imami doctrine has a tripartite structure concerned respectively with origins, the present, and ultimate events—that is, a cosmogony (based essentially on a theosophical anthropogony), a cosmology (in which the “real” is based on the irruptions of the first sacred fact), and an eschatology (essentially soteriological because founded on a return to the sacred origin). Each of the three can be fully understood only in relation to the other two. For example, Imami [eschatology](#) begins with the creation of Adam. The light of Moḥammad and ‘Alī is said to have been deposited in Adam and to have begun its “journey” through the sacred history of humanity, in order to return to its original possessors, the historical Moḥammad and ‘Alī and the eleven other imams. This light is transmitted through a dual genealogy including several prophets and their imams. The content of this legacy (*waşīya*) of light, essentially the initiatory science (*‘elm*) and supernatural power (*qodra*; for these translations of *‘elm* and *qodra*, see Amīr-Mo‘ezzī, 1992b, svv.), is transmitted on the visible plane (*zāher*) through the natural genealogy of the Prophet and the imams in the medium of the seminal substance, whereas on the hidden plane (*bāṭen*) it is transmitted through the spiritual genealogy, by means of the initiation that each prophet reserves for his imam or imams (Amīr-Mo‘ezzī, 1992b, II/2; idem, 1991; Rubin, 1975; idem, 1979; Pellat; on the dual genealogy, see Mas‘ūdī, p. 8-74; Ebn Bābūya, 1376/1957, IV, pp. 129-30; idem, 1405/1985, I, pp. 211-13; Ebn ‘Ayyāš, pp. 51-52). It can be inferred that in the same way the darkness of original ignorance has been transmitted throughout history to the enemies of the different prophets and their imams.

If cosmology in general is defined as the explanation of the laws of the universe, Twelver cosmology can be articulated along two axes. The first, vertical axis belongs to the spiritual world; it extends between two complementary poles, defined by such pairs as *zāher* and *bāṭen* (visible and hidden, exoteric and esoteric), *nabī* and *walī* (prophet and imam), *tanzīl* and *ta’wīl* (literal revelation and spiritual hermeneutics), and *eslām* and *īmān*



(submission to the revealed religion and initiation into its esoteric aspects). It is vertical because passage from the exoteric to the esoteric is defined as a progressive approach to the divine and ever greater knowledge of the secrets of the universe. The second axis is horizontal and belongs to the world of the senses and history. It is characterized by two opposing poles, defined by such pairs as *emām* and *ʿadūw* (imam and enemy), *ʿaql* and *jahl* (intelligence and ignorance), *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* and *aṣḥāb al-šemāl* (people of the right and people of the left), *aʿemmat al-ʿadl* and *aʿemmat al-jawr* (imams of justice and imams of violence), and *walāya* and *barāʿa* (sacred love of the imams and sacred hatred of their enemies). The vertical axis is that of progressive initiation; it traverses all the phases of creation from initiation of the shadows of the “pure beings” in the world of the covenant by the luminous entities of the imams to the universal initiation by the Mahdī at the end of time, including the initiations of the faithful by the imam or the imams of each religion. It thus begins with the first creation in order to arrive at the end of time, where, through the universal unveiling of the secret, the visible will become hidden and the hidden visible and the world will thenceforth be inhabited only by initiates, as it was in the time of the covenant of the four oaths. The horizontal axis is that of perpetual struggle, also traversing all the phases of creation, from the primordial cosmic conflict between the armies of *ʿaql* and those of *jahl*, repeated in every period as the imams and their faithful are pitted against the enemies and their partisans, until the definitive destruction of the forces of evil by the Mahdī at the end of time. The dominating and persecuting enemy throughout history will be conquered once and for all, annihilated, and the world will become again as it was in the time when only the *ʿaql*, the imam of the good creation and the divine armies existed, close to God. The fundamental role of the imam in this specifically Twelver cosmogony/anthropogony is to be understood as the perfect manifestation of those aspects of God that can be made manifest; he is the agent of initiation, the perfect guide, the leader of the forces of good. It is owing to him that the spiritual world exists and that the world of the senses is not plunged into chaos and ignorance, the darkness. That is why it is said that God “unleashed” creation in order that the created might know Him, and this knowledge is possible only thanks to that of the imam (Ebn Bābūya, 1385/1966, p. 9). The imam is thus the ultimate reason for the creation.



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