

## ON ALI SHARI'ATI: A 'REVOLUTIONARY' SOCIOLOGIST?

Seda ÜNSAR\*

### Abstract

*The essay selectively analyzes the political philosophy of Ali Shari'ati whose ideas have been compared to Catholic Liberation Theology. Shari'ati develops an extensive analysis and critique of Western philosophy as well as Christianity, and proposes –as a 'revolutionary' sociologist (of Islam) - to reconstruct the Islamic polity, ideology and consciousness. Nonetheless, because he develops a non-autonomous sphere of action and thought for religion and philosophy, it is argued here that Shari'ati, despite his radical interpretations, engrossing analyses and even critical stand, still remains within the boundaries of his own civilizational consciousness and fails to bring about an originally revolutionary view to '(wo)man in relation to (her)his polity'. In this context, his worldview ends up with a political proposal –regardless of whatever depth its philosophy attains- not too different from other variants of political Islam.*

**Key words:** Western (political) thought or philosophy, Islamic (political) thought or philosophy, secularism

## ALİ ŞERİATİ: DEVRİMCİ BİR SOSYOLOG MU?

### Özet

*Bu makale, fikirleri Katolik Kurtuluş Teolojisiyle karşılaştırılan Ali Shari'ati'nin siyasi felsefesini bazı yönlerden analiz eder. Shari'ati Hristiyanlık ve Batı felsefesinin derin ve eleştirel bir analizini geliştirmiş ve bir devrimci (İslam) sosyoloğu olarak, İslami kurumsal yapı, ideoloji ve bilinci yeniden inşa etmeyi tasarlamıştır. Bununla beraber, din ve felsefe için otonom olmayan bir düşünce ve eylem alanı öngördüğünden, tüm radikal yorumlarına, sürükleyici analizlerine ve dahi eleştirel bakışına rağmen, içinden çıktığı medeniyetsel bilincin sınırları içinde kalmış ve 'kurumsal yapıyla ilintili olan insana' temelde devrimci bir bakış getirememiştir. Bu bağlamda, Shari'ati'nin fikir dünyası, felsefi açıdan her ne derinlikte olursa olsun, sonuç olarak, siyasal İslam'ın değişik biçimlerinden çok farklı olmayan bir siyasi öneri şeklinde son bulur.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Batı (siyasi) düşüncesi veya felsefesi, İslami (siyasi) düşüncesi veya felsefesi, sekülerizm

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\* Yrd. Doç. Dr., İstanbul Arel Üniversitesi.  
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***Introduction: A new outfit from the same old fabric: A revolutionary?***

As Isaac Newton once declared the reason for his '*seeing farther than others*' to be his '*standing on the shoulders of giants*', the 'giants' on whose shoulders Shari'ati declared himself to be standing were Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh. Still, it is the 'two grave mistakes' he attributed to Afghani and Abduh with which the gist of his ideology can be better captured. Shari'ati believed that Afghani's wrong step was to approach the aristocratic elite to implement his ideas whereas Abduh erroneously endeavored to 'educate' the clergy, which, for Shari'ati, was an *impossible* task.

'The right thing to do', according to Shari'ati, was 'to reach the people' -particularly the youth and the intellectuals- since the political and the clerical elites, because they were part of the ruling stratum, would be too conservative to *reinterpret* and *recomprehend* Islamic history and dogma in a way that could be beneficial to *change* it (revolutionary goals)<sup>1</sup>. Further, the existing elites as the major stakeholders of the system would naturally incline to preserve the status quo which in turn would prevent a critical and systematic *rethinking* on Islam. This central view should lay down the basis of Shari'ati's 'new outfit' as well as to clarify its 'old fabric'. Shari'ati was a revolutionary ideologue who wished to launch an ideology by awakening the masses against the persistent political and clerical elites<sup>2</sup>. Nonetheless, his redefinition of Islam and his reconstruction of Islamic ideology were dependent not on the rationalization of religion in the sense that political, economic and social life could achieve autonomy from religion and those actors, but on the *politicization* of religion so that political, economic and social life could be *restored* -although in a radically different way- *still on religion*. Even if the change sought by Shari'ati was to be achieved; in the end, it would have to come with its own status quo and actors thriving on a new religious dogma. In that sense, he was a pure Islamist theorist and activist.

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<sup>1</sup> See for details, Dabashi, Hamid, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, New York University Press, 1993, especially p. 131. The two bases of his revolutionarism were: Shari'ati was definitely against the political and religious authorities, and he sought to raise the consciousness of the masses with his ideological lectures and activities. For further details on Shari'ati, see Gheissari, Ali, *Iranian Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998, and Rahnama, Ali, *An Islamic Utopian. A political biography of Ali Shariati*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Shari'ati said "We must therefore close the era of talking, and everyone must begin acting by reforming his family or his city" in his lecture on *Approaches to the Understanding of Islam*. See further his lectures translated by Algar, Hamid in *On the Sociology of Islam*.

***A discussion on the essential elements of Shari'ati's 'true Islam' and the philosophical boundaries of his 'revolutionary Islam' in connection with Western ideologies***

For Shari'ati, the study of Islam cannot be based on one unique method since Islam is not a one-dimensional religion. Islam, he argues, has two dimensions one of which is the mystic perception of man restricted to his relationship with God while the other dimension involves the question of man's life on this earth, and thus requires the methods of history and sociology, for man has indeed built a society and a civilization<sup>3</sup>. This is the rationale that takes Shari'ati to deliberating on such issues as the rise and fall of civilizations and is justified in comprehending the aesthetic meaning of Quran as a multi-faceted phenomenon of linguistic, literary, philosophical and metaphorical themes. Yet, Shari'ati does combine these dimensions in the worldview of *tawhid*, not merely in the sense of oneness of God (which is the case in all monotheistic religions), but rather in the sense of the 'wholeness and oneness of universe' -including this world and the other, the spirit and the body, the natural and the supernatural, substance and meaning<sup>4</sup>. *Tawhid*, as a worldview, supersedes the oneness of God and rests in the oneness and wholeness of *existence*<sup>5</sup>. Although it treats the being as divided into aspects as the unseen and the manifest, this treatment does not represent a dualism of being but represents the means and limitations of human cognition: thus, this division is not ontological but epistemological; *tawhid* is *monotheism*<sup>6</sup>.

Conversely, Shari'ati likens his explanation of the worldview of *şirk*, which is based on the idea of heterogeneity, disunity and contradiction between this world and the other, the spirit and the body, the natural and the supernatural, substance and meaning, to *dualism*, *trinitarianism* and *polytheism*<sup>7</sup>. Reflecting on duality, he draws attention to an unresolved scientific issue: the materialists believe in the primacy of the matter as the original substance in the physical world and regard energy as the product of matter that has a changing nature while the energists claim that energy is the primary and eternal substance of the physical world and that matter is the changed form of energy. Shariati then quotes Einstein: "An experiment in a darkened room proves that neither matter nor energy is the primary and true source of the world of being", and goes on to state that "the two interchange

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<sup>3</sup> See *ibid* for further.

<sup>4</sup> This worldview reflects itself in the Iranian Revolution in that religion not only represented and took over the whole of the society, politics and economics but also asserted itself as the only answer to any and every question, inserting the clergy's *direct* rule.

<sup>5</sup> Shari'ati occasionally sounds like a Sufi particularly on the principle of *tawhid*, though he claims that religion and mysticism were transformed into a superstitious rationale.

<sup>6</sup> See Dabashi, Hamid, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, New York University Press, 1993 for details.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* for details.

with each other in such a way as to prove that they are the alternating manifestations of an invisible and unknown essence that sometimes shows itself in the form of matter and sometimes in the form of energy”<sup>8</sup>. By referring to science, Shari’ati implies two things: the existence of God and the unity (*tawhid*) of being. For Shari’ati, therefore, *şirk* is the basis of discrimination among classes and races, whereas *tawhid* negates all forms of *şirk*, regarding all phenomena of existence as moving toward a single goal and all not oriented to that goal as *nonexistent*.

Shari’ati’s riveting analysis takes up a comparative turn in that *şirk* sees the world as a feudal system while *tawhid* sees the world as an empire. Yet, as this comparison has a historical dimension, even a cursory examination requires us to note that empires, including the most multi-national ones such as the Ottoman Empire –and precisely because of their multi-nationality- did indeed disintegrate. The multi-national unity was historically only to last until other more homogenous, smaller and conclusive systems of unity in the form of nation-states came into being. Doubtless; although his description of the characteristics of the feudal system as *şirk* is convincingly interesting, one remains skeptical about the correctness of the analogical equation of *tawhid* and empire, simply for the reason that an empire also demonstrates the characteristics of *şirk* elaborated by Shari’ati. Moreover, leaving aside the mystic elements of Sufism, *tawhid* is practically impossible to realize as any person, idea or belief that may wish to deny *tawhid*, is by definition, to be regarded as *nonexistent*.

While Shari’ati creates this monotheistic foundation as the basis for a single sociology, philosophy of history and anthropology of Islam that functions as an internally coherent ideological argument for revolutionary change, Dabashi argues that *tawhid* serves to quell the traditionalist opposition directed against him by underscoring his quintessentially Islamic lexicon as well as to convince the young Muslim audience that the ideology promulgated is truly an Islamic one<sup>9</sup>. Dabashi states that although this emerging Islamic worldview is predicated on absolute monotheism, Shari’ati’s sociology hinges on the dialectic of class struggle as expressed in the hostility between Cain and Abel; his philosophy of history presumes valid a linear progression from the period of prophethood to that of the Imam, then to the occultation of the last Shi’i Imam which Shari’ati calls the scientific and responsible democracy leading to universal revolution; his anthropology postulates the validity of an innate dialectic operative between the forces of good and evil in man<sup>10</sup>. Yet, the interpretation here is that all of this is still consistent with Shari’ati’s absolute

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid pp. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Dabashi, Hamid, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, New York University Press, 1993, p.129.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 128.

monotheism because *tawhid* exactly refers to the unity of the ‘way’, the ‘existence’ (God, nature and man) in the sense that the origin of all is the same with the same direction, the same will, the same spirit, the same motion, and the same life. A significant point is that although the concept of *tawhid*, in this context, appears to be the Islamic basis for democratic and progressive thought that excludes racist and fascist inclinations; in the hands of religious ideologues, it remains vulnerable to reverse its meaning of existence, and be used to exclude thoughts deemed to be irreligious or un-Islamic.

Shari’ati appears convinced that “no revolutionary ideology can mobilize the necessary force of politicized masses without a firm ground in common and enduring religious symbols”<sup>11</sup>. As indeed for the East, -because of the ill-defined late integration of her markets into the world-economy of the industrializing West- the diverse political ideologies of the post-industrial revolution society remained, by and large, as the imported intellectual products of the West; the breadth and depth of the Eastern worldview have been heavily influenced by the inability of a radically deconstructive from within socio-political transformation. This is not to say that the Eastern societies have not gone through a serious economic, political and social transformation with indigenous cadres and intelligentsia as well as various ideologies. While the Western impact is evident on this path of change, it is also historically verified that the factors of change were in the making prior to the impact of the West. As Karpat argues, it is essentially significant to recognize the impact of internal forces that historically initiated social and political transformations long before the massive European influence which rather served to accelerate the processes of change<sup>12</sup>. Further yet, the social and political forces of progressive change, in the Cold War Era, have met various obstinate forces of resistance that were also supported by politics of Western hegemony for which the well-known 1953 coup d’etat in Iran is a most dramatic example<sup>13</sup>. This had to leave Shari’ati with religion as the only tool for truly revolutionary change (which he correctly asserts should come from the masses). Yet, because the proposed ‘worldview’ for the society does not, in its fundamentals, go through change; what Shari’ati calls a ‘revolutionary’ change and what Dabashi interprets as ‘progressive’ elements in fact are neither revolutionary nor progressive. Truly, Shari’ati’s vision of Islam has distinctive constructs that come as a mixed bag

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp. 130.

<sup>12</sup> See for further, Karpat, Kemal, The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1972, p. 243-281.

<sup>13</sup> Gasiorowski, Mark J., The 1953 Coup D’etat in Iran, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19(3), 1987, p.261-286. For further on Iran, see Halliday, Fred; (2000), *Iran: Dictatorship and Development*, Penguin 1978, *Nation and Religion in the Middle East*, London: Saqi Books; and Keddie, Nikki, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*, Yale University Press, 1981.

of Western and Eastern ideologies embodying the best of the two worlds: the East and the West; socialism and capitalism; materialism and idealism. Nevertheless, despite the theoretical grounds of ‘unity’ idealistically emerging from the idea of *tawhid*, it does fail to provide a clear and firm unity in practice.

Shari’ati claims that Marx, having insisted on the primacy of the infrastructure of the society, and Weber, having emphasized the causal significance of the superstructure, each have seen half of the social reality, and when two halves are put together, one sees the whole of the reality. His objective is to demonstrate that a classless society could be engineered based on a monotheistic theology as its ideological infrastructure (this is where Weber comes into play) and that class-based Marxism is a societal expression of a polytheistic theology. Hence, Shari’ati argues that contrary to the Marxist conception of all religions as the opium of the masses, Islam was ontologically beneficial to the formation of a classless society<sup>14</sup>. Although he analyzes, at length and in depth, how Marxism and Islam have common points and are also different in some aspects, what he does is clearly *Islamization of Marxism*. Marxism holds that the rules of the society and history are certain and known to its exponents (arguably correct or incorrect), and as an ideology, it may turn ‘dogmatic’ in thought or practice; nevertheless, it does not have a *dogma as its basis* in the same sense and context that any religion, by definition, has.

Shari’ati asserts that the calamity and essential fallacy of all Western developments (including humanism, liberalism, capitalism, existentialism and Marxism) derive from a fundamental difference between Christianity (that in turn relates to antique Greek mythological religion) and Islam. Christianity of the middle ages was at odds with humanity, with its representation of man as “helplessly condemned because of divine displeasure to an inferior world [and its declaration of man] to be an abject, reprehensible, and weak sinner”<sup>15</sup>. All of the artistic and aesthetic manifestations of the era were illustrations of the supernatural and superhuman. For Shariati, this is precisely why Enlightenment, as the key, so to speak, to the lock behind which humanity had been kept, revealed itself in bourgeois liberalism, materialism, existentialism and Marxism that were all directed against religion. Similarly, Catholicism as the negation of human traits to reach God and the pursuing opposition between humanism (man) and theism (God) emerged due to the conception of medieval Christianity as a continuation of Greek myths (polytheism) that rested firmly on the competitiveness, opposition, and jealousy between humans and the anti-human gods. Alternatively, the evolution of Islam is based on a totally opposite source: Contrary to Zeus or medieval Catholicism, Islam’s God is in no

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<sup>14</sup> We will come back to this point when discussing man’s relationship (and covenant) with God.

<sup>15</sup> Shari’ati, Ali, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, Mizan Press, Berkeley, 1980, p. 19-20.

opposition to humans, and, wishing to free humanity from slavery to nature, achieves the deed by way of entrusting his prophets with the ‘divine light of Prometheus’ so that Adam can reach out to light from darkness. In other words, Shariati claims that the aim of all Western movements since the Renaissance has been to restore nobility (and freedom) to man whereas Islam already provides nobility (and freedom) due to the fact that God did not restrain or challenge human nobility (and freedom) from the beginning<sup>16</sup>. While this is a profound philosophical treatise on the different origins of two conceptions of God in two religions, it obscures the fact that historically man’s neither nobility nor freedom has been spared of domination and repression by self-appointed representatives of Islam simply because of the idea of a ‘non-hostile’ God.

Granting for such reasons, there is no ground for duality in the evolution of Islam and humanism; there exists another form of duality within man deriving from the given belief that he is created half from mud (the lowliest being) and half from the spirit of God (the highest being). This is how the Satan may be perceived as not a rival of God but as an inner part of man which man has the nobility and freedom to not obey. Likewise, man is God’s representative on Earth and for Shari’ati, this is a sanctity that the West could never even conceive of. Although the spiritual and philosophical depth of this statement is captivating, it is also reflective of the philosophical boundary of any Islamic worldview, new or old, since any interpretation of Islam is bound to perceive man as a ‘part of God’ and thus fails to conceive man as ‘man’, and attach nobility and freedom to his being man per se, as opposed to existentialism for instance, which in this sense has a more free nobility and a more noble freedom<sup>17</sup>.

Nevertheless, the freedom of man thus analyzed does not capture the whole picture without incorporating the (political) obligation of man in Islam that derives from a philosophical rather than a theological theory. On one hand, since in Islam, it is the essence that precedes existence, man’s freedom is an obligation to God before it is to himself. On the other hand, man’s freedom is already within the limits of the nature of God’s covenant with man which is not one of ‘among equals’ but one in the form of man’s submission to God<sup>18</sup>. Thus

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<sup>16</sup> Shari’ati draws attention to the submission of all angels before man although man was created out of mud but because he accepted God’s offer that is life on Earth and God ordered so. This could be taken as one of the pillars of the inherent nobility and freedom man is bestowed with in Islam. For further, see Shari’ati, Ali, *Man and Islam*, University of Mashhad Press, Mashad, Jahad Publications, 1982.

<sup>17</sup> In existentialism, as Existence precedes Essence, freedom is *absolute* in that humans do not have any predetermined nature or essence, and can act independently of any outside determination. For further philosophical discussions, reference should be made to Dostoyevski, Pascal, Kierkegard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre, Rilke, Kafka and Camus.

<sup>18</sup> For further philosophical discussion and its political reflections on the Islamic society, see Mardin, Serif, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton,

man's freedom in Islam is never as absolute as it is under existentialism. What seems as a fallacy from an Islamic perspective is in this sense related to the limitations set by the very perspective.

Shari'ati brilliantly examines economism, state capitalism in the name of socialism, historicism, biologism, sociologism, democracy and Western liberalism, Marxism and Islam<sup>19</sup>. He then analyzes Marx as a materialist, a partisan of sociologism, and an utensilist; and declares that Marx, by combining dialectical to materialism, "sets up a materialistic determinism over and above the force of historical determinism in man, which, at the level of practical application, amounts to another chain"<sup>20</sup>. It is from this point on that he takes up the argument that the calamity faced by humanity today is a human calamity, and briefly examines Lao Tzu, Confucius, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam to finalize his claim as it is: *Humanity is in decline*. In the case of Islam, Shari'ati argues that "the road to salvation was no longer mapped out through *tawhid*, pious acts, and knowledge [but] instead it lay either through an inherited tradition of blind conformity, entreaties, vows, and supplications or else in flight from reality, society, and life into astral worlds, a way characterized by pessimism concerning human history, progress, and the salvation of man in this world, and the repression of all natural human wants and proclivities"<sup>21</sup>. Having deducted from the development of humanity in the East and the West that the meaning of existence is lost and that "Adam rebelled, even in this paradise on Earth", Shari'ati then involves in a deep philosophical argument with a more pessimistic echo<sup>22</sup>. He profoundly asserts that the basics of Marxism show us that this time it has become the 'scientific philosophy' that asks the questions that would normally interest religion, philosophy, idealists, and ethical socialist utopians: "Marxism: the repudiation of capitalism; the repudiation of classes; the repudiation of exploitation; the state; specialization, accumulation of wealth, the ethics of self-seeking-above all the repudiation of human captivity, that deformation of man's essential

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1962.

<sup>19</sup> He defines economism as the fundamental principle of Western industrial capitalist society relying on Bacon's words: Science abandons its search for truth and turns to the search of power; historicism as the presentation of history as a single determinative material current; biologism as the ideology that assigns precedence to the laws of nature; sociologism as one that views man as a vegetable growing in the garden of his social environment. See for further details Shari'ati, Ali, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, Mizan Press, Berkeley, 1980, p. 32-38.

<sup>20</sup> Shari'ati, Ali, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, Mizan Press, Berkeley, 1980, p. 35. Since Marx specifies the mode of production as consisting of tools of production and allocates man his primacy derived from the primacy of tools, Shari'ati argues that Marx considers man a progeny of tools and names him an 'utensilist'.

<sup>21</sup> Shari'ati, Ali, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, Mizan Press, Berkeley, 1980, p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> See for details particularly *ibid*, pp. 40.



nature in the system of production and social order”<sup>23</sup>. As a denial of earlier roads for ‘salvation’, at this point, one would think that Shari’ati has become an anarchist and a de-constructivist. Surprisingly, what happens is that Shari’ati proposes yet another version of ‘return to self’ (*bazgasht*) in his gradually developed ideology “that he liked to call ‘Alid Shi’ism’, a Shi’ism identified with the authoritative figure of the first Shi’i Imam”<sup>24</sup> (*‘red Shi’ism’*), which is (yet another proposal of an) ‘original Islam’, and for which he develops ‘the conservative Safavid Islam’ in his political vocabulary as a counterbalancing measure. Shari’ati, having criticized Toynbee at one point, proves him right by creating ‘the Other’ for the identification of his own ideology. One reason one cannot help but consider is the possibility of his doing so out of explicitly revolutionary motives the consequences of which he could not see<sup>25</sup>.

### ***Conclusion: Shari’ati as a theorist and an activist***

Ali Shari’ati was an activist but his activism did not convey a meaning other than learning for the sake of changing; creating a ‘new kind of vision’ with which ‘glory from God’s to the People’s’ could be realized<sup>26</sup>. This ‘self-made illusion’ was his de facto legacy for the generations of revolutionaries<sup>27</sup>. More than that, Shari’ati was by all means a theorist in that he sought to *politicize* religion (politicize Islam to be precise) and *religionize* ideology (Islamize Marxism) as well as to refuse existentialism. Although the range of his philosophical assessments covers a vast area of subject matter and knowledge, these three tasks of his, in my opinion, surmount others.

Shari’ati’s main attack on Marxism and existentialism was basically that they all reduced man to a ‘material being’ and deprived him of his

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<sup>23</sup> Shari’ati, Ali, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, Mizan Press, Berkeley, 1980, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> Dabashi, Hamid, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, New York University Press, 1993, p. 111.

<sup>25</sup> Shari’ati died before the Iranian Revolution took place in 1979. A note of caution: The Iranian Revolution hardly represents Shari’ati’s version of ‘original Islam’ although for many, he was the intellectual figure of the revolution. Yet, Shari’ati repeatedly condemned clerical despotism as the ‘worst kind of tyranny in human history’ (Shariati, quoted in Dorraj, Manochehr, *From Zarathustra to Khomeini: Populism and Dissent in Iran*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990, p. 148).

<sup>26</sup> Dabashi, Hamid, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, New York University Press, 1993, p. 145.

<sup>27</sup> See *ibid*, Chapter 2, especially the part: “A New Kind of Vision”. See pp. 105 for instance, where Dabashi cites Shari’ati: “...Suddenly I felt a cool and delicate caressing between the fingers of my bare feet. Gradually the murmurs, intensifying and expanding every moment, came from everywhere, joining together, becoming one cry, and the cries were raised from all over, joining together, and now turning angry, rebellious, aggressive: Water”. See for further, Shari’ati, Ali, *What Is To Be Done: The Enlightened Thinkers and an Islamic Renaissance*, edited and annotated by Farhang Rajaei, foreword by Esposito, John L. Houston: Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986.

‘spiritual being’ which resulted in the loss of the ‘meaning of existence’. Though, one could argue that the spiritual part of being is not indeed torn off the man; rather his *existence* is placed on a *non-religious* stratum. This was to mean that the morals of man no longer needed an ‘outside force’ -that is God-, but could come into being on its own, and only because man is a cause himself independent of the outside force<sup>28</sup>. Yet, this would still be a simplistic interpretation if it failed to incorporate Shari’ati’s assertion that God in Islam does not appear as a foe for man (as was the case with the polytheism of Ancient Greece, and later with the monotheism of Catholicism) and that through unity (*tawhid*), man is nothing less or more than God’s reflection on Earth. The critical aspect to be emphasized here is that although for Shari’ati, this appears as the highest form of sanctity and freedom for man (which it is from a mystical point of view), it not only fails to break the vicious cycle man has found himself in since the time of his existence but also places another burden -now of *divine* responsibility- upon his shoulders. Although Shari’ati, along with “the traditionalist, stagnant and past-worshiping Iranian customs”, derides Ancient Greek philosophy -as he considers to be an unhealthy part of Shi’ism-, the revolution of consciousness that he presumes for the ideal Muslim -as in the words of Iqbal, ‘heart like Jesus, thought like Socrates, and a hand like the hand of a Caesar, but all in one human being, in one creature of humanity, based upon one spirit in order to attain one goal’- reminds one of Plato’s ‘philosopher-kings’, ‘the world of the ideas and the world of the reality’, and the indispensable conditions for the Republic<sup>29</sup>. More alarmingly, the principle of *tawhid*, for all good purposes and intentions, resolves, by definition, into *conformity* in practice. Shar’ati, equally, becomes not a progressive *but* a regressive revolutionary who looks back at the time of Ali; redefines ideology accordingly (just as his prior ‘heroes’ have done), and hence bounces back from the borders of (de-constructivist) anarchy to essentially an Islamized political polity.

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<sup>28</sup> Incidentally, in Western thought, the origins of the emergence of a God as an ‘outside force’ can be traced to Galileo who likened life to a ‘clock’ set up by God but working on its own. In Islam, such rationalist ideas go back to at least Mu’tazilites of Baghdad and Basra between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Yet, with the consistency of the strike of the orthodoxy, the rationalist trend was prevented from becoming the mainstream, and thus furthering secular trends of philosophy which in turn impacted the general patterns of thought. See Hoodbhoy (1991) for a brilliant account of the battle for rationality in Islam. The two points here: rational-secular thought was not alien to Islam; and yet, it was not possible to institutionalize such thought in a historical process common to all Muslim societies, as it most often remained crushed by the orthodoxy. Although the Turkish experiment was emulated, for reasons out of scope in this essay, it was not wholly successful.

<sup>29</sup> See Shari’ati, Ali, *What Is To Be Done: The Enlightened Thinkers and an Islamic Renaissance*, edited and annotated by Farhang Rajaee, foreword by Esposito, John L. Houston: Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986, p. 106.

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