

Authenticity in the Political Thought
of Ali Shariati

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Prepared for presentation at the Middle East Studies Association
Annual Meeting
Research Triangle Park, North Carolina
November 11-14, 1993

Does the pursuit of cultural authenticity conflict with political order? If one begins from a proposition about fundamental human difference, is it possible to reconstruct a common ground for the foundation of political cooperation? Or must the search for authenticity necessarily foment conflict between East and West, Sunni and Shi'i, Serbs and Bosnians, Kurds and Turks? Does the construction of an Islamic Republic necessarily entail a state seeking either to convert its neighbors or conquer them, a state caught between its pursuit of difference and its need to function in a larger world?

The writings and oratory of Ali Shariati helped generate a revolutionary atmosphere in the final decade of the late Shah's reign in Iran. About Shariati's influence there appears to be little dispute. But fifteen years after the revolution, and nearly twenty years after Shariati's death, little else about this man is beyond contention. Critics charge him with inadequate knowledge of Islam and a superficial understanding of the West.¹ Shariati is said by some to have sacrificed logical rigor and a dedication to truth for political influence,² and by others he is said to have been a marginal political force, much more interested in ideas than in action.³ He advocated a return to Islam but in ways that challenged both the religious establishment and the maverick Khomeini's revolutionary ideas, and he both embraced and rejected Western ideas in similar, and seemingly inconsistent, fashion.⁴ He is portrayed as primarily interested in the reform of Islam in the tradition of Muhammad Abduh,⁵ and, quite to the contrary, as prepared to use and abuse Islam for political purposes, in the manner of Jamal al-Din "al-Afghani"--i.e. more a revolutionary than a theologian or a philosopher.⁶ Ajami writes of Shariati as a liberal, despite his apparent preference for equality over liberty and his endorsement of populism.⁷

The problem in assessing Shariati lies in deciding upon standards to apply. Evaluated from the perspective of mainstream Western philosophy from Plato to Kant, Shariati's ideas appear to vacillate between idealism and empiricism without fixing themselves firmly in either camp. Seen instead in the tradition of what Arkoun has called "Islamic Reason,"⁸ itself reinforced by Greek thought, Shariati's arguments look undisciplined, ill supported, and even heretical. He helps himself to those aspects of the Shi'i tradition he finds useful, just as he helps himself to elements of Marxism or liberalism, without committing himself to the principles from which those aspects or elements arise. From either of these perspectives, Shariati has created a hodgepodge of half-baked ideas that need not be taken seriously, however great his pre-revolutionary influence in Iran may have been.⁹

Shariati might better be evaluated for his contributions to a domain of thought occupied by both Westerners and non-Westerners, Muslim and non-Muslim, contemporary and non-contemporary. The problem of authenticity defines this domain, and among the contributors one would have to list Rousseau, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, Gramsci, and Kierkegaard as well as Fanon, Nyerere, Senghor, Césaire, Fanon, Iqbal, Qutb, and many others. In the Arab world, the word "authentic" (*aṣāla*) has been linked to Islamic revival, the effort to rediscover "true," authentic Islam, but this notion of authenticity must be seen one possible answer to a larger question about the nature of the authentic self. What makes a human being himself or herself? How can identity be preserved under the onslaught of modernity? To what extent can the products of universal reason be embraced without compromising what is unique about a person or a culture? To what extent must reason be rejected? These are the questions that define the quest for authenticity. To see Shariati as participating in that quest may be helpful in illuminating his project.

To treat Shariati as an exponent of authenticity permits one to examine his ideas against those of an expanding group of thinkers, all suspect among secularists for their lack of complete

commitment to rationality, and all suspect in the eyes of religious establishments for their lack of faith in a dogmatic tradition. Mysticism permeates the work of many of these writers, empowers them with popular followings, and makes them dubious members of the academic community. In short, Shariati participates in the confusions, ambiguities, and contradictions common to other advocates of authenticity. To assess his enterprise against that backdrop reveals a coherence not otherwise apparent and helps one see that shortcomings reflect not just Shariati's personal weaknesses but the grave difficulty of his enterprise.

The difficulty stems from the fundamental impulses of authentic thought: radicalism, voluntarism, particularism, and unitarism. These four impulses shape a theory of authenticity and, at the same time, jeopardize its coherence. The notion of authenticity emerged in Europe among thinkers such as Rousseau who found themselves distressed by the portents of modernity and unwilling to turn back toward tradition. Authentic thought seeks radical escape from the alienation produced by both modernity and tradition. The solution is thought to lie deep within the self, distinguished from all other selves by its own particular social and historical circumstances and by its creativity. Aware of their distinctiveness, human beings fashion their world by their own efforts. With "be thyself" as the motto, there is a presumption of choice about what one can "be." Without the ability to reshape their world, human beings could not escape the passivity of tradition or the determinism of modernity. But if human beings responded only as individuals, utterly isolated from one another in their particularism, their efforts could scarcely produce a meaningful outcome. Authenticity would turn out to be anarchy or nihilism. Thus, the search for what it means to be authentically human necessarily turns back to a belief in some measure of unity in the human experience, even in its particularism and diversity. It embraces a fundamental unitarism but at a level below, prior to, or beyond reason. Arguments for authenticity reject the universality of reason but not the oneness of being.¹⁰

The term "authenticity" used in this way reaches far beyond but does not exclude the notion of *aşala* as applied to militant Islamist movements in the contemporary Middle East, which call for a return to "authentic" Islamic society and government. Some such groups proclaim literal interpretation of the Qur'an and the hadith as the ultimate sources of such authenticity; for this they have frequently been dubbed "fundamentalist," although this word developed in the Protestant tradition may be more misleading than helpful when applied to an Islamic context. For some, the word "authentic" must be eschewed for its association with "fundamentalism" and reactionary use of Islam for political purposes. Mohammed Arkoun, for example, dissociates himself thoroughly from contemporary, militant Islam, and hence from the word "*aşala*," yet his work bears strong resemblance to that of Iqbal, Shariati, and even Sayyid Qutb in its efforts to establish a ground for personal authenticity in the modern world.¹¹

Within the universe of authenticities, Shariati should be regarded as an internationalist, one whose work can be read as a plea for rediscovering common human bonds through the exploration of distinctive cultural roots. While he exhorts intellectuals to explore their cultural roots, and especially their Islamic, Shi'i heritage, as a basis for understanding themselves and the foundations of mass action, his aim and objective remains the liberation not of the Shi'a or Muslims in general but of human beings of all sorts, cultures, and faiths.¹² However imperfectly and inadequately, he sketches a U-shaped path from an externally imposed universality, associated with the West, through cultural rediscovery, and back towards a common human bond based not in reason but "authenticity." In doing that he lays a possible ground for escape from the ravages of self-determination.

The argument of this paper thus falls in two parts: 1) that Shariati deserves to be considered among the exponents of authenticity, not simply because he uses the word but because the radicalism, particularism, voluntarism, and unitarism characteristic of most

arguments for authenticity are to be found in Shariati's thought; and 2) that the political significance of Shariati's brand of authenticity lies in its effort to create a ground not for narrow, nationalistic organization but for a process of bringing larger numbers of people together through the rediscovery of their diverse, authentic cultures.

I. A Theory of Authenticity

Shariati's called for revolt against both modernity and tradition in the name of authenticity. Colonialism had sought to propagate a single, foreign, universal culture in order to generate a single, uniform set of consumers. Traditionalism had deteriorated into a routinized, ritualized "fossilized" means of insulating Iran from the forces of history. But Islam and modernity also represented the cure, for in his view Islam in general and Shi'ism in particular, incite revolt and enable Iran to save itself from modernity through modern revolution. Modernity and tradition constitute the essence of the problem and contain the solution.

Shariati grew up on the margin of East and West. Born in a village near Mashad in the northeastern province of Iran, he grew up at a distance from the secularizing, modernizing force of Reza Shah and from the cosmopolitanism of Tehran. His father had founded a "Center for the Propagation of Islamic Truths" in Mashad. Yet Shariati began his own career by teaching in a secular public school, and even later, when his criticism of the religious establishment struck raw nerves, he resisted formal religious training at the hands of the ulema. He studied Western sociological and political philosophy as well as Islam in Paris, but he returned to Iran in the late 1960s as an established opponent of the Westernizing, modernizing, authoritarian rule of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. His Western education drew him toward opponents of colonialism, such as Jacques Berque and Frantz Fanon. His study of Islam pulled him into conflict with the religious hierarchy in Iran.

Radicalism

Shariati was never systematically anti Western. In fact, he wrote in an essay on art that Iranians erred not in imitating the West but in failing to do so. We are neither Eastern nor Western, he said in effect.¹³ He meant, I think, that Iranian intellectuals had failed to imitate the West in creating from its own resources, in criticizing the eighteenth century dogmas of universal truth upon which colonialism had been constructed, and in rejecting positivistic attitudes toward religion. "...There is no universal prototype of being 'enlightened'," he wrote.¹⁴ What he rejected was not Western thought as a whole but what he termed the central impulse of modernity: "All human beings must become 'consumer animals' and all nations must be stripped of their authenticity."¹⁵ More precisely, he reproached Iranians for not understanding, as many Europeans had come to argue, that this absolutist definition of modernity lacked any but relative authority.

Shariati treats Marxist thought as another effort, not unlike what he refers to as biologism, sociology, naturalism, and liberalism, to portray limited truth as universal. Several aspects of Marxism appealed to Shariati: its emphasis on social reality, its attention to history as a source of truth, its analysis of capitalism and imperialism, its call for revolution. But far from liberating man, he argued, Marxism presupposed a humankind subject to a history it could not control. "In short, humanity turns out to be the product of the mode of material production."¹⁶ Shariati revolts against such materialist assertions as well as against the liberal prescriptions for humankind.

An authentic response to these alienating forces, hence any genuine revolt, could only come from the inside, from the spirit, according to Shariati. "Spiritual knowledge alone can raise

the existential value of man to a degree that protects him against any feeling of inferiority toward Occidental greatness."¹⁷ Since religion tends the spirit, and religion in Iran means Islam, the burden of revolution lies with Islam. But Islam in Iran, far from positioning itself at the cutting edge, had been subverted into a force for conservation. "It is common knowledge that the true Islam was turned into the mockery we have today, not by the philosophical or military opponents of Islam, but by its supports, the traditionalists..., judges..., Muslim jurisconsults, speculative theologians, interpreters of the Qur'an, religious judges, rulers, preachers, theosophists and the caliphs."¹⁸ While the thrust of modernity comes from the outside, the strength of tradition lies within. Perhaps that explains the edge of bitterness found in Shariati's assault on tradition that is missing from his analysis of modernity.

Shariati sounds much like Iqbal and Qutb, but also like Rousseau, Montesquieu and Kierkegaard, when he describes the alienating impact of tradition:

History is a long cemetery, silent and sad, empty and cold, black and deathly, generation after generation. Everything is repetition, imitation. Lives, thoughts, hopes are only tradition and inheritance. Culture, civilization, art and faith are only so many dead stones.¹⁹

The past, then, does not necessarily liberate but rather immobilizes human beings by subordinating individuality and spirit to an overriding pattern of legitimate action. On the other hand, human beings would be utterly incapacitated without a past from which to draw a sense of self. "It is absolutely impossible for an individual who has no past to have a future," wrote Shariati.²⁰ How does one imagine, create, project, and expect without reference to the past? The welfare of the spirit depends upon one's understanding of the past.

Shariati sees regime and clergy, perhaps moved on occasion by outsiders, as the manipulators of the Iranian past and the architects of tradition as a prison. The late Shah evoked not religion but the unchanging place of monarchy in Iran, while the men of the cloth emphasized the unchanging role of Islam.

The tragedy [in Iran] is that, on the one hand, those who have controlled our religion over the past two centuries have transformed it into its present static form and, on the other hand, our enlightened people who understand the present age and the needs of our generation and time, do not understand religion. ...Meanwhile, true Islam remains unknown and incarcerated in the depths of history....²¹

For Shariati, "true" Islam is revolutionary, and "true" Shi'ism is a particularly revolutionary brand of Islam.²² In Iran, the "red Shi'ism" of Ali had become the "black Shi'ism" of the Safavis, and the spiritual and temporal revolution begun by Muhammad and turned into a defense of ceremony, sayings, and rituals.²³

The battle shapes up as Islam versus "true Islam," "narcotic" religion versus "true" religion, religion against religion, Islam versus Islam. Shariati calls upon Islamologists to lead an intellectual revolution in the discovery of that distinction. It takes people who know both Islam and the contemporary world, he says, to see that "true Islam" is revolutionary. "It is a question of an Islam that comes forward as a revolutionary ideology, generating an ideal capable of transforming the system, the environment and social relations."²⁴

The debate turns on methodology. For Shariati, knowledge of the "true Islam" would appear to depend upon at least four methods: the history of Islam, and especially the early days

of Islam; study of the contemporary world and its needs; familiarity with Islamic scripture, and receptivity to the most mystical elements of religion. Traditional scholarship emphasized scripture with grudging, unofficial room for the mystical. In the madrasa, students worked through rhetoric, logic, the Arabic language, the Qur'an, compilations of hadith and the law as compiled and interpreted by learned men over the centuries. Islamic history meant history as seen through scripture, not the history of scripture itself in its spatial and temporal context. For Shariati, Islamology required an examination of the situation in which Islam had emerged and the impact of Islam on that situation. It meant seeing, for example, that the Prophet retained the form, or container, of many a custom of pre-Islamic Arabia, but he "changes the contained, the contents, spirit, direction, and practical application of this custom in a revolutionary, decisive and immediate manner."²⁵ For example, Islam adopted the traditional point of religious pilgrimage in Mecca, the Kaaba, but imparted to it a new significance. The advent of Islam brought a moderate change in customs but a radical, revolutionary change in the meaning of those customs.

Shariati speaks of this as the "method" of Muhammad, not the method of God, and he speaks of prophets as those who combine mysticism and intellectual acuity with a sharp sense of what the masses of people need and want. The "true Islam" must be discovered not in scripture but in the activity of exemplary Muslims, Muhammad foremost among them. As a Shi'i Muslim, Shariati puts Ali and Fatima close behind Muhammad in importance. Knowledge of "true Islam" suffers for the lack of sufficient historical knowledge of Ali and Fatima. What passes for such knowledge is a formalized, abstract, wart-free portrait derived from scripture. Knowledge of scripture preempts the understanding of Islamic practice.

Islam is revolutionary because the prophet Muhammad acted in a revolutionary manner to transform life first in Medina, then in Mecca and finally in Arabia as a whole. When Shariati calls for a revolution that would start from "*table rase* and rebuild everything,"²⁶ he does so out of conviction that this was the essence of Muhammad's activity. When he says that the Shi'a "do not accept the path chosen by history," he means that the early followers of Ali, the most illustrious proponents of the Shi'i school of thought, revolted against their destiny as had Muhammad before them.²⁷ Of Shi'ism he wrote:

The awakened call and the possibilities of learning of this school are based upon the twin principles of imamate and justice. It produces revolutionary cries of Ashura and the aggressive mobilization of the masses against the existing conditions. It invites people to await the hidden Imam who is in occultation....It keeps alive the hope of 'redemption after martyrdom.' It promotes the idea of revenge and revolt, faith in the ultimate downfall of tyrants and the decrees of destiny against the ruling powers who spread justice by the sword."²⁸

The legitimacy of Shi'ism flows from its continuation of the revolutionary tradition begun by Muhammad but nipped in the bud by the Umayyads if not the caliphs who were, in Sunni eyes, "rightly guided." The partisans of Ali resisted the drift toward standardization, bureaucratization, codification, authoritarianism, and inauthenticity, in Shariati's view, by continuing to espouse a personalistic vision of Islamic leadership. In Iran, they succumbed to the transformation of "red Shi'ism" into "black Shi'ism" only after 1500 and under Safavi rule.

Such analysis of Shariati's position suggests why he resisted the rather insistent proposal of some ulema that he withhold his critique and spend a few years in the study of Islam. That would have meant study of the scriptural tradition, which he regarded as a cause of Islamic distress rather than a cure for its emphasis on continuity. Such study was unlikely to improve his knowledge of actual Islamic history, of contemporary needs, or of the mysticism necessary to

sustain a sense of authentic identity. His rejection of such study makes it difficult to call Shariati a "reformer" in the sense that Muhammad Abduh sought reform of the traditional Islamic understanding of scripture. Shariati rejected the idea of reform; rather than reform of doctrine, he sought to undermine dogma and doctrine as the basis of the religion. And in this regard he resembles Iqbal, Qutb, and Arkoun more than he does Abduh.

Nonetheless, Shariati's proclamation of revolutionary Islam and revolutionary Shi'ism seems no more secure than the nature of the times in which it was proclaimed. By insisting that an interpreter of Islam must know contemporary social conditions as well as Islamic history, he would seem to imply that social conditions might sometimes dictate a conservative Islam, not revolution. Might not Muhammad then be properly understood as a builder of stable institutions and an enduring system of justice? Shariati's definition of the "true Islam" ultimately lies in the present; logical consistency requires that he locate his own thinking and actions as squarely within history as he puts those of Muhammad, Ali, and Fatima. While Shariati also speaks of Islam as "enduring ideals," it is difficult to imagine he would put revolution among them, for he explains Islamic revolution not as an ideal but as a necessity of circumstance. Does this approach liberate human beings from their history or enslave them?

Voluntarism

Shariati meant to liberate human beings from history and from God by making them conscious of their capacities. Family, social circumstances, customs, historical context, economic and physical needs--all these factors shape human beings but do not determine their responses. Rather, by virtue of their humanity, by virtue of God's gift of volition, human beings can say "yes" or "no" at every juncture. Will emerges in Shariati's thought, as it does for other authenticists, as the defining characteristic of what it means to be human, and the search for the source of will leads deep into the mystical recesses of the human spirit. To realize their authentic personalities, human beings must respond not merely to external cues but to the mystical, spiritual qualities within, which liberate them from a domineering God acting in history by putting them closer to a remote, unknowable God who remains the unifying force of the universe.

Akhavi sees a pair of related contradictions in Shariati's position. First, he wonders how Shariati can insist both upon an autonomous human being, apparently free to choose conduct of which God would not approve, as the prime generator of human history and upon God as an "absolute hidden being," ultimate guardian of the universe²⁹ Second, he observes that Shariati, apparently a phenomenologist, believes that human beings cannot themselves penetrate to the truth of things; they must look at both material objects and ideas as signs or indications of truth but must not confuse these signs (readings of the Qur'an, for example) with truth itself. Can one regard human beings as fully autonomous if in fact their so-called "autonomous" choices reflect only the "appearances of reality?"³⁰ Might not their ability to choose be mere illusion, itself fostered by manipulative forces they do not understand?

Both objections carry weight but would apply to much authentic thought, surely to the work of Iqbal and Qutb as well as that of a European Christian existentialist such as Kierkegaard. Shariati seems to have opted for the Iqbalian solution, with all its defects. The common starting point, which simultaneously opens the way to criticism and resolves the problem, is that logic and rationality are neither necessary nor sufficient avenues to truth. Human beings may come closest to truth and God through inward reflection and the creativity that springs from it. Poetry for Iqbal and art in general for Shariati express those inner strivings for truth. The existence of God and the oneness of the universe are intuitive rather than demonstrated, but no less certainly "true" forasmuch. What can be demonstrated by modern methods is the impact of human action. The prophets, and especially Muhammad, reshaped the world by force of will. Western

technology and imperialism have altered the basis of choice in the Third World. But it cannot be demonstrated, even by the standards of logic, that this success represents Truth in some larger sense.

For Shariati, then, authentic human behavior depends upon both the rational and the irrational and hence upon worldly and other worldly orientations. Human autonomy depends upon submission to one's innermost being, one's spiritual being, which leads toward God. If there is some hidden manipulation of the universe via this spiritual communication, it would be by definition unknowable by logic and rationality. What Shariati argues with conviction and persuasiveness is the lack of proof for verifiable determinism of any sort, material or ideal. Similarly, the insufficiency of human reason does not, even by logical standards, preclude the possibility of human access to spiritual truth and, as a result, to genuine autonomy.

Such considerations do not negate the logic of Akhavi's objections. They merely underscore two somewhat contradictory assertions of authentic thought: that human beings make their own world, but a part of what makes a human beings unique and authentic is a mystical, other-worldly quality. Without that mystical quality human beings lack the will to affect their world in a positive, purposeful, fully human way. To be human is to have a solid footing in two worlds, one historical and amenable to reason, the other beyond the confines of Western logic. Such thought will always come up short by the standards of reason alone.

Like Qutb, Shariati speaks of an awakening for human beings who otherwise slumber through history. Gabriel descended to rescue the Prophet from passivity, isolation, and individualism by giving him a mission, pushing him into battle. While Muhammad was the final prophet, every person is "heir of the prophets."³¹ Man is "always moving, searching, struggling, working and wanting. He will not be satisfied."³² "True" Islam, unlike the "narcotic religion" propagated to render human beings submissive to the authority of past and present, provides an example and a doctrine for the exercise of such initiative and energy. According to Shariati, the principal lesson brought by Muhammad is that human beings as individuals inspired by God can wrest their fate from the grip of "nature, history, society and the self,"³³ which can be but the involuntary product of external forces. The mystical awakening opens the way for the voluntary reconstruction (Iqbal's term) of self and society. And, as Qutb observes, Islam entreats believers to undertake jihad--effort, striving, struggle--toward these ends, which are human ends. Muslims undertake jihad in the name of God to fashion their own personalities and make their own history, escaping the determinant conceptions of religion, history, and self that have imprisoned them.

Particularism

Shariati's radicalism leads him to reject tradition and modernity, hostile to the authentic understanding of self. Human beings must choose their personalities and shape their own lives, but on what basis must they choose? What is the link between their choices and something Shariati calls their "primordial being?" Why would one suppose that Iranians, faced with choices stemming from the clash of tradition and modernity, would proceed any differently than Europeans? What is the foundation for authentic revolt and choice? For Shariati, that foundation is culture.

Culture he defines as the "totality of material and spiritual savings of a particular race and society," as opposed to what he calls "civilization," which is the "totality of material and spiritual accumulations of humanity."³⁴ Technology constitutes an aspect of civilization, because it is universal, he says, but culture distinguishes one ethnic group, race, or nation from another. He calls culture the "inherent attribute of a society," and the "spiritual essence of a race or a

nation."³⁵ Culture divides while civilization unites, and while it lies within the power of human beings to modify the culture they have produced, Shariati is not clear on whether one could ever imagine cultures dissolving themselves into an undifferentiated world civilization. At times he speaks of "human nature" as if it floated above culture, as when he speaks of "human values" as "sacred ideals, which, although their applicability may vary, are eternal and absolute and may change only as the human species changes or disappears,"³⁶ or when he speaks of mysticism "as a manifestation of the primordial nature of man."³⁷ But even then he argues that values will be applied differently in each culture, and the mystical instinct may merely help explain the drive for religion, generator of a variety of cultures rather than a single civilization. For Shariati, the particular preempts and conditions the universal.

Shariati's essay on Fatima, daughter of the Prophet and wife of Ali, turns on this point. He seeks to portray her not as a model of female liberation, leadership, subordination, activity, or passivity. Rather, he argues that Fatima's greatness stemmed from her ability to play a whole series of roles dictated by her particular circumstances. The title of the essay, and the final line, is "Fatima is Fatima." She asserted her influence on Islamic history not by following a script or imitating a model but by being herself. By virtue of her success, she has become a part of Shi'ite myth and legend, serving with Ali as an example for the present. But the problem, says Shariati, is the paucity of what is known and written about them as concrete historical personalities. Instead they are portrayed as reflecting universal Islamic values, unchanging models, a static culture. The details of reality and history have become obscured by retrospective idealism.

Ideologies reshape cultures and civilization. They arise as from "particular human self-consciousness" generated in concrete social circumstances. They are effective if they express the needs and aspirations of a given society. "Any school [of thought] which is not based upon the cultural foundations of a society looks like a good book in a library which is used only by a small group of students and professors...If a free-thinker separates himself from his society, no matter where he goes or what he does, his society will remain in everlasting corruption."³⁸ Prophets succeed precisely because they emerge from the masses and speak a language that is generally accessible. They make universal claims but their success in remaking culture stems from their understanding of the circumstances in which they lived and worked. Whatever the truth of their claims, "A valid and true statement expressed at an improper time and place will be futile."³⁹

Shariati proposes a universal definition of "enlightenment" and argues that there is no universal prototype for being "enlightened." Francis Bacon was enlightened for his time and place, Sartre for his. "...The enlightened soul is a person who is self-conscious of his 'human condition' in his time and historical and social setting, and whose awareness inevitably and necessarily gives him a sense of social responsibility."⁴⁰ The form of enlightenment seems to be unchanging but its content must vary, as must the educational system designed to produce enlightenment. To be sure, science is universal, and a scientist may learn the same things the world over. But scientific learning, the quintessence of enlightenment in one set of circumstances, might not be apt in another. Enlightenment must begin with knowledge of context.

For an Iranian that context is the "totality of things which have been accumulated as the Iranian culture; Islamic principles, story, myth, art, philosophy, oration, and theosophy comprise our culture."⁴¹ It is not the truth of Islamic principles from which an intellectual must begin but rather their facticity as a part of Iranian culture. Better understanding of context would require not a more thorough training in exegesis but rather an understanding of how principles, stories, and myths emerged from historical circumstance and what they have come to mean. Hence Shariati's insistence, given the predominance of Shi'ism in Iran, on the vital necessity of research on the historical figures of Ali and Fatima, whose lives have generated a plethora of stories and

myths taken to be fundamental to Shi'ism. Shariati would not challenge the "sacred truth" of Islamic principles, but, as he put it with regard to a somewhat different issue, "The questions I am raising here are ... by whom, for what purpose, and at what time this sacred truth is being utilized."⁴² Enlightenment thus begins with knowledge of the concrete interaction of ideas and consciousness with physical surroundings and historical developments. Abstract, ideological understandings can only be useful and meaningful if they emerge from such familiarity.

Mysticism is the other pillar of particularity. "Mysticism follows love," writes Shariati. Love is the extra-material energy that is the source and active cause of human behavior."⁴³ Mysticism saves one's thoughts and actions from the erosion of history, either by authorizing indifference and passivity toward ongoing historical developments, an attitude Shariati and other authenticists deplore, or by becoming the basis for individual will and action. By reaching beyond the rational, one may believe in the efficaciousness of human activity while nonetheless engaging in the sort of cold-blooded, myth-destroying analysis that undermines the absoluteness of all principles, even one's own. Through mysticism one feels at "home" in the world, spiritually comfortable, thoroughly oneself, despite physical separation and alienation from physical objects and historical process. Strangely, and this is perhaps the essence of mysticism, this particularistic, personalistic spiritual endeavor both solidifies individuality and relinks the individual, otherwise alienated, to a larger world.

Shariati's treatment of the pilgrimage to Mecca, in an essay called *The Hajj*, illustrates the links between particularism, mysticism, and universalism.⁴⁴ First, by writing about pilgrimage, Shariati distances himself from those who see Islam as a set of abstract principles.⁴⁵ By going on pilgrimage, a Muslim seeks to experience faith as the early Muslims did, to walk where they walked and pray where they prayed. It is a return to origins⁴⁶ for human beings who divest themselves of their daily routine, the clothes that symbolize culture and materialism, the petty purposes for which one lives, all those things that come to overlay the self and alienate human beings from their spiritual, inner selves. Pilgrims must be prepared to die before they leave; debts must be paid, a will drawn, anger and hostilities dropped.⁴⁷

He witnesses his own dead body and visits his own grave. Man is reminded of the final goal of his life. He experiences death at Miqat and resurrection after which he must continue his mission in the desert between Miqat and Miad."⁴⁸

The theme echoes one frequently expressed in authentic thought, whether in Rousseau or Heidegger, Iqbal or Qutb: only at death does one experience one's authentic being. Only death is utterly personal. Only at death does one see the full scope of one's life in all its particularity.

From that initial preparation for death, the pilgrim then moves toward God. Shariati writes not so much of the ritual or the rules but of what the pilgrims feel. The surroundings, the masses of similarly clad pilgrims, the Kaaba, the heat and dryness all produce sensation, helping the pilgrim to recreate the feelings and faith of Abraham, Hajjar, and Muhammad. One feels drawn away from the self into a mass of human beings being swept along. One feels the excitement as one approaches the Kaaba. The sense of self dissolves only to return again as one steps out of the Tawaf circle at the point of entering. "After denying and killing all of the previous and false egos, you will discover your 'authentic ego.'"⁴⁹ Later, in Mashar, the pilgrim feels utterly alone despite the presence of a mass of people spending the night there. As one moves on to Mina, one feels the power of love behind individual and collective action.

For Shariati, what matters about the *hajj* are the intent with which a pilgrim performs the ritual and the feelings derived from the observance. Like Kierkegaard, he focuses upon Abraham's decision to sacrifice Isaac (Ismail) as something a pilgrim must confront: what is his

or her Ismail? Is one free to make the proper choice? Can one act from faith even without explanation, as did Abraham? Scripture entreats faith and even pilgrimage, but Shariati, like Kierkegaard, asks that the pilgrim be prepared to make Abraham's "leap of faith," not because it is required, for then there is no genuine choice, but because it can and must be freely chosen. Rather than returning home content with having fulfilled one of the duties of a Muslim and confident of a good life beyond death, the pilgrims must assume responsibility as did Abraham for the state of the faith and the state of their people. Ibrahim and Ismail built the Kaaba together, and the pilgrim must return to build a "house for the people."⁵⁰

By undertaking the *hajj*, a pilgrim moves closer to God, but this means the fulfillment of the authentic self, liberated from the ordinary routines, obligations, and duties of life, and freed to think about the past and one's responsibilities for the future. By confronting the historicity of Islam, one must come to grips with the needs of the present. By reflecting upon the exemplary actions of early believers, one moves toward an understanding of what must be done in the present. By sensing the unchanging and eternal, one sees that genuine faith, such as that of Abraham, calls for responsibility on earth. Islam is not a religion of pious forms leading toward eternal life but an invitation to individuals to take stock of themselves and the world in which they live in order to follow the lead of their ancestors in making that world a better place. For Shariati, authentic faith requires appropriate action from responsible individuals fully conscious of their particular backgrounds in concrete circumstances.

Another, somewhat contradictory message also runs through Shariati's discussion of the pilgrimage. The pilgrim grasps individuality and at the same time melts into the masses of pilgrims who circumambulate the Kaaba and follow the rest of the timeworn route. Although Shariati regards faith as a personal matter, and the *hajj* as important for the consciousness it instills, he also argues that the faith leads toward a realization of the oneness of humanity and, even beyond that, of the universe. From an understanding of particularity and historicity emerges a sense of unity and oneness (*tawhīd*) which is critical to Shariati's general argument, as it is to those of other authenticists. Uniformity produced by routine, ritual, and tradition stand in the way of an authentic, choice-driven life, but a world of individual choice promises chaos, unless there is some fundamental unity beneath or beyond choice. Shariati's vision of a better world, and certainly his hopes for getting there, presuppose that such unity exists despite the particularistic nature of the phenomenal world he entreats us to confront.

Unitarism

No theme runs more insistently through Shariati's work than *tawhīd*, a Qur'anic idea rescued, rejuvenated, and reinvigorated to mean much more than the oneness of God. As Shariati uses it, however, this highly traditional term begins to sound radical in Jacobin, socialist, idealist, transhistoric ways. He brandishes *tawhīd* as a sword to combat religious division, the partition of knowledge, the separation of God and man, and the meaninglessness of discrete historical events. If he does not brandish it energetically and successfully, he risks a world caught in cultural particularisms, speaking different languages, worshipping different gods; but if he wields it too viciously he threatens the particularity that distinguishes human beings from other creatures and anchors the concept of individual authenticity. He also fuels the arguments of the traditionalists about a single, unchanging Islam and of the idealists about a single concept of modernity. The line he attempts to walk is thin and perhaps nonexistent.

For Shariati, the unicity of the universe is a matter of instinct and faith. It cannot be a product of empirical proof, for inspection of the phenomenal world leads him to conclusions about particularity and multiplicity. The world abounds with contradictions and distinctions, which empiricism can seek to contain but not overcome. Logic may be helpful but cannot

suffice, for logic cannot demonstrate the sufficiency of logic. Moreover, a part of what Shariati means by unity is the unity of feeling and knowledge, of love and truth, which cannot, of course, be demonstrated definitively in the realm of knowledge alone.⁵¹

Shariati invokes logic but then acknowledges its inadequacy as a proof. Reflecting and modifying existentialist refrains, he says there can be no meaning in human beings, who are a part of the universe, unless there is meaning in the universe. It is not possible for human beings to have choice and responsibility in a world without there existing conscience, will, direction and intelligence. Human beings participate in Being; if Being is absurd, all is absurd.⁵² But human reason, as only one element in Being, cannot examine itself from the outside and verify this proposition. In fact, all efforts to do so lead to breakdowns of moral and social consensus, division rather than unity. Hence, like Iqbal, Shariati relies on poetry and mysticism to demonstrate the oneness of the universe.

In a bit of poetry he muses about the role one and zero in a number composed of one and an infinity of zeroes.

They do not exist but they do
They are zero
That is, they are hollow
They are nothing
They are absurd
They are meaningless
They are not really numbers either
They are not
 Because only *one* is really a number
 And it is a unit.⁵³

At first blush, the poem appears to suggest that the particularity and multiplicity of the world, which Shariati has taken pains to establish as the only starting point for authentic existence, constitute illusions generated from a base of unity. Because the metaphor is abstract, Shariati also appears to deviate from his distrust of logic detached from social context. Probably, though, he intends to argue by indirection that multiplicity and particularity depend upon unity. The zeroes in the number "1,000,000" lack meaning only if there is no one (or other digit) preceding them. Standing alone, they are absurd, meaningless. That many individuals living together as mere bits of matter similarly lack meaning and purpose. Their great number makes it easy to forget that they are first units, individuals, and authentic individuals, not mere numbers. They are something rather than nothing, because they share in the property of unity, that *tawhīd* of which Shariati speaks. This is one reason why self-knowledge, the introspection of the particular self, turns out to be knowledge of God, the root of the oneness of things.

Embedded in a poem, the metaphor of "One Followed by an Eternity of Zeroes," persuades more by its mystical than its logical qualities. In fact, Sufi-like, Shariati suggests that the human capacity for love serves to cement the individual into the universe.

[Love] has an unknowable source and can inflame and melt all of my existence; it even impels me to self-denial. Love grants me values higher and more sublime than expediency; and no physical, material or biochemical account can comprehend it. If love were taken away from man, he would become an isolated, stagnant being, useful only to the systems of production."⁵⁴

The effect of love cannot be verified, only felt, and the resulting hypothetical fusion of God,

nature, and man does not lend itself, either, to the test of rationality. But the failure of Shariati's thought to pass the test of rationality in its insistence on unitarism offers eloquent testimony that he belongs among the advocates of authenticity.

Islam, and especially Shi'ism, contribute to the sense of unity but seem nonessential. Islam emphasizes *tawhīd* in its scriptures and in its practices, such as the *hajj*, which draws Muslims out of themselves and into that communion with God and universe that Shariati tries to portray in his essay on the pilgrimage. But Shariati also describes Islam as the religion of humanity. "To adore God is to adore the values of man and consequently to become divine in constantly moving closer to God."⁵⁵ Presumably non-Muslims might also move toward God in proper human values embedded in a number of religions.

Ali offers to Shi'i Muslims an example of the love and truth united in a single nature. Iranians still mourn the family of Ali. The family evokes a love that lifts Iranians out of themselves and toward the sort of mystical unity of which Shariati speaks. Non-Shi'a, or non-Muslims, could participate in this overarching sense of oneness. In fact, Shariati says Islam endorses "one giant human society (*umma*) on the face of the earth which is based on economic and humane equality and on lofty and divine ideals."⁵⁶ That society would not necessarily be Shi'i or even Muslim. In fact, for it to be Muslim in the way much of the world is currently Muslim would mean a perpetuation of splintering. Only the "true Islam," extracted from its accidental circumstances, and "true Shi'ism," separated from ritual and myth, draw people beyond their particularistic understandings and toward the radical unity Shariati advocates.

Shariati fashions this delicate balance between unity and diversity under the same sort of pressures felt by other authenticists: on one hand, the need to defend the self against the other, to defend one's culture against universalizing theories of modernization, to combat the passivity of Muslims who would separate religious belief and practice from the concrete condition of Muslims in the twentieth century, to start toward revolution not by hypothesizing what the masses ought to believe but, like Gramsci, by acknowledging the hegemony of particularistic belief; on the other hand, he sees the natural human aspiration to overcome the gap between self and other, the need for peoples of diverse cultures to live together, the need for unity in the name of revolution and equality, and, perhaps most important, the heightened need for transcendent meaning in a world increasingly conscious of its estrangement. These pressures drive him toward a delicate balance similar to those crafted by Iqbal and Qutb, different in its assumption of Shi'ism as a starting point, like them in the ambivalence of its practical applications. Shariati resembles them in that he, too, believed the mystical energy of Muslims would tip that delicate balance away from particularism toward harmony, yet he is currently remembered as one whose ideas contributed to a culture-bound revolution, as Qutb continues to be remembered as an ideologue of Egyptian revolution, and Iqbal cannot escape his ultimate endorsement of Pakistani separatism.

II. *Shariati's Internationalism*

Shariati generated a Shi'i theory of authenticity and contributed to the Iranian revolution, which has thus far remained nationalistic and xenophobic. While it is easy to see in retrospect that he would not have approved the institutionalization based on clerical rule, it is perhaps less obvious that his ideas do not necessarily sustain Shi'i nationalism, Iranian nationalism, or even a permanent restoration of the Islamic *umma*. Rather, Shariati appears extraordinarily conscious of the political pitfalls of authentic thought, wary of its potentially divisive consequences, and devoted to seeking a cure. In his view, unitarism will necessarily emerge from the proliferation of particularisms. Internationalism will triumph over nationalism.

This commitment stems from the expression Shariati gives to the authentic impulses of voluntarism and unitarism, which seem to triumph over the better known trademarks of his and other authentic thought: radicalism and particularism. Politics must begin from a particularistic cultural base, which is the only possible meeting point for elites and masses, but voluntarism means that human beings ultimately make and control their culture. They must do so with the tools at their disposition at a given moment. Tomorrow's circumstances may differ from today's; the cultural politics of today may prove inappropriate tomorrow in the light of the ongoing, revolutionary discovery of the oneness of human beings that lies beneath the cultural veneer. Nothing prevents human beings, fully in control of their destiny, from fashioning a political structure on this increasingly unified framework. In fact, evolving circumstances may require it.

Voluntarism Revisited

Shariati's debts to existentialism reveal themselves in his conception of human beings as self-conscious, creative, choosers.⁵⁷ As generators of their own cultures, histories, and personalities, they have imposed constraints on their own choices. The development of material society represents human choice and then comes to dictate choice. Technology arrives to liberate human beings from natural necessities and only to look like a shackle in another era. Freely chosen religion deteriorates into ritual and dogma that restrict choice and diminish moral responsibility. What is chosen in one generation is inherited as a constraint in the next.

From this perspective, humankind has split into ethnicities, races, classes, language groups, and religions by virtue of a set of choices that perpetuate themselves and determine behavior. In the face of such diversity, European imperialism took two approaches. In the case of Africa, Europe sought to demean native cultures, languages, and religions, and to replace them with European versions; the recovery of African cultures in a nationalistic vein thus constituted a necessary phase in African liberation, in Shariati's view. In the case of the Muslim world, on the other hand, Europe reified Islam and the cultural mosaic of Middle Eastern societies through both scholarship and policy, contributing to the stultification of tradition. As a result, the mere reassertion of culture would only contribute to subservience rather than liberation, as would the wholesale adoption of European values. Progress thus requires liberation both from ossified tradition and the externally imposed sameness of modernity. In both Africa and the Muslim world, liberation requires cultural choice; it requires the modification of the cultural constraints upon behavior, rather than passive acknowledgment or mere reproduction.

Shariati expresses admiration for Camus's definition of becoming: "I revolt, therefore I am." It is the "free thinkers" role to rebel against constraints and thereby generate options for himself and for others. To break out of the "prisons" in which human beings find themselves, whether naturalistic, historicist, or technological, they must study and explore. To liberate oneself from historical determinism one studies history. To liberate oneself from the clutches of naturalism, one studies science; to liberate oneself from technology one studies the philosophy of technology; and to liberate oneself from the constraints of religious tradition, free thinkers must engage themselves in religious studies. Shariati mapped an extensive program of Islamic studies for the Husayniyah Irshad⁵⁸ with a view toward opening up choices through research on the evolution of culture in concrete historical conditions. He saw culture as a vast grab-bag of possibilities, as yet little explored and exploited by the Shi'a of Iran. Historical, literary, philosophical, linguistic, and artistic research could transform culture from constraint into empowerment.

Shariati's writing emphasizes Islamic heritage, and especially the Shi'i tradition, of Iran to the virtual exclusion of other moments in its history. His reasons for doing so would appear to be thoroughly political: for one, the Shah had sought to resurrect memories of ancient Iranian

greatness to bolster the glory of the Peacock Throne; for another, surely more important, he believed the great masses of Iranians felt thoroughly a part of Islamic culture. The success of the revolution confirmed his point. Any effort to lead the Iranian people out of their alienation would require work from within the constraints imposed by popular perceptions of Islam, especially if the intent were to change rather than reinforce those perceptions and further rigidify tradition. The gap between elites and masses had first to be diminished, in Shariati's view, so that elites could articulate options generated from within a culture recognized as having general validity. Only research, only "Islamology" as he calls it, could uncover those options. "An enlightened person in an Islamic society, regardless of his own ideological convictions, must, of necessity, be an Islamologist."⁵⁹

The Shah invoked ancient Iranian culture in an attempt to stabilize and rigidify, albeit unsuccessfully; Shariati invokes culture in the hope of bringing together elites and masses in a common understanding of the choices lurking in their common historical experience. He pushes for the detailed exploration of particularism not to reinforce it but to escape it. The Shah sought to utilize the trappings of Ancient Iran in a thorough modern, utterly different context. Shariati encourages thorough investigation of the changing circumstances in which Islam and Shi'ism evolved, as well as a thorough understanding of the modern context in which choices must be made.

We must accurately understand the world, modern civilization, Western culture, the colonial powers, and the apparent and hidden relationships between the East and the West. In particular, we must understand the specific aims of Islam--as a religion, as a culture, and as a history that affects a large segment of human society. We must discuss all intellectual issues, schools of thought and ideologies which constitute the prevailing trends of the world, ideologies which whether we like it or not influence our own thoughts and feelings, and particularly those of our intellectuals. We must also comprehend the objective international realities, factors and powers involved, the available resources and the existing conditions.⁶⁰

Such realism never seems to have troubled the Shah in his search for "authenticity." For Shariati authenticity lies with a set of choices emerging from the self within its cultural matrix; authenticity is a state of becoming, not a state of being, and for that reason it does not necessarily point to a specific political configuration appropriate to any time or place.

In fact, the more Shariati probes the Islamic tradition in its greatest specificity, the more he finds human behavior rather than Shi'i or Islamic behavior. For example, his essays on Fatima seek to demonstrate that she fills no stereotype. No one had mapped a role for her. No revelation specified her behavior. He portrays her as a unique person, who responded to her circumstances and fashioned an extraordinary place for herself in Islamic history. She was a daughter, a wife, a Muslim, a woman, but first and foremost a human being. She followed the "be yourself" motto dear to advocates of authenticity.

Similarly, Shariati's impressive treatment of the *hajj* consistently emphasizes the ways in which rituals drive pilgrims to peel off layer after layer of non-essentials and to feel, in community with each other, their primordial humanity before their Creator. Distinctive clothes give way to simple, common dress. Differences of class, race, gender, age and origin disappear. Egos melt in the sea of humanity. Selfishness evaporates with the example of Abraham in submission to God. By rediscovering the love of God, the pilgrim liberates himself from human instincts.

It may be concluded that you can free yourself from the fourth jail [the first three

are nature, history, and society] through 'love'! This knowledge endows you with such a degree of consciousness and creativity that allows you to build yourself up to the will of Allah and not to be merely a servant of nature.⁶¹

For Shariati, then, the *hajj* permits a voyage of the individual toward God and, hence, toward the discovery of the human essence. The *hajj*, though culturally specific, broadens the horizons of a pilgrim to encompass of history and humanity.

Shariati returns to a favorite theme, the zero and the one, to illustrate the nature of choice available to human beings.

Man is a creature who descended upon this earth and was left alone. Therefore, you are only an existing phenomenon and must construct your own nature. You are a Zero or a nothing who may become everything! You are a 'doubt' or a 'possibility' who may acquire the shape of a man. If you choose to be human and consciously discover your nature (faith), you will be able to liberate yourself. You will be able to find the fate of history and realize that history is the fate of man through the ages as well as an evolution from zero toward Allah. From one nothing you begin to know man and his values and so you adopt humanity."⁶²

Of, in what is perhaps the ultimate expression of voluntarism, he writes: "The text of your fate will be written by others if you 'do not know'; but you will write it if you 'know'".⁶³ Knowing means understanding nature, history, society, and the self, and knowing the self requires not just logic but a faith in God that draws one out of the self, narrowly conceived, and toward the rest of humanity. Shariati develops the argument with references to the Qur'an and careful extrapolations from the ritual of pilgrimage, but he argues unambiguously that the search for authenticity in an Islamic context carries one not just toward what it means to be a Muslim but what it means to be authentically human, to escape alienation by understanding one's circumstances and exercising choice.

Particularity thus appears to be an accidental result of thousands of years of misguided human choice. Voluntarism precedes particularity but also supersedes it, for culture can be both created and modified. Particularity marks the world as we know it; the great cultural gaps that divide us and set East against West, rich against poor, and Sunna against Shi'a constitute an undeniable aspect of reality, which one ignores at the risk of alienation. For the great masses of humanity, these particularities appear immutable. But the struggle for authenticity, while rooted in the recognition of particularity, draws the enlightened toward an understanding of the human capacity for choice and, as a result, toward the capacity to escape the "prisons" of particularity. Authenticity rides on the triumph of voluntarism over particularism. In political terms, authenticity does not appear to require Shi'ism, the nation-state, the Islamic umma, or any particular political configuration in the long run. In the short run, however, the authority of an Imam may be useful, the nation-state may serve to combat colonialism, class-consciousness may serve to promote equality, and ethnic solidarity may contribute to the struggle for justice. But these human choices reflecting constantly changing circumstances; the larger reality is the oneness of history, dominated by God.

Unitarism Revisited

Shariati describes history as combat between monotheism and polytheism, with monotheism both the starting point and the ultimate objective. He paints a state of nature that echoes Rousseau:

Long ago, people lived as a brotherhood. Forests and rivers were their commonwealth. They all had their share sitting at the free table of nature. Fishing and hunting was a means for acquiring food for survival. God was the only owner and all peoples were considered equal.⁶⁴

Then came quarrels between Cain and Abel, which initiated the era of polytheism. The "old" polytheism meant belief in a plurality of divinities; the new polytheism embraces a host of idols, which may be ideologies (fascism, socialism), instincts (love, power), heroes (political), or lifestyles (materialism). These are the modern enemies of "monotheism," according to Shariati.

Such polytheism must ultimately give way to unitarism, in Shariati's estimation, as is the case for someone such as Qutb, for that matter. For Qutb, though, the reasoning is rather simple; the world must rally to the "true" Islam. Since the world does not now share a single faith, Qutb's assertion that a single faith will prevail does not seem plausible. Shariati, on the other hand, seems to suggest that the search for authenticity must necessarily be conducted in every cultural context. His recipe for the search does not presuppose Islam. He argues that there is no single, universal recipe for enlightenment. The search for the self must be conducted according to the cultural milieu and the historical period. Obviously it cannot begin with Islam in a non-Islamic culture. Shariati writes:

...A return to self means a return to that particular human self which has been formed throughout history, has given us spiritual personality and cultural identity, and has shaped our intellectual direction. I mean that continuous true spirit which, although buried under historical debris, events, scenes and incidents and although covered with the burden of the past and the troubles of the present, has an 'uninterrupted motion' that reaches contemporaries. I mean that reality which carries with it our essential humanity, our sublime moral or ideological spirit and our spiritual resources and facilities....The self that I have in mind is an 'eternal man.' It is an old person who embodies and personifies those millions of human beings who have lived in many centuries and have experienced changes, revolutions, various cultures, and ideologies. At the present we are that person.⁶⁵

The image differs from the Allegory of the Cave; rather than peering at shadows on the wall, human beings must comprehend, recognize, and shed all the layers of history and culture that define their identities but obscure their essential humanity. One finds Truth not by leaving the cave for the sunlight and a painful encounter with the Form of the Good but by peeling away the layers of human history and culture. There is nonetheless to be found in Shariati a firm belief in "human nature."

It is based on nature that Allah created all of mankind, that is, human nature and not the nature of those who rely on Eastern or Western empires and favor one ruler or class over another. It is a nature that considers humanity to be Allah's representative and guardian of the earth. It is a nature that gives mankind sovereignty over the world and freedom from being a hostage.⁶⁶

While he rejects European humanism for its association with imperialism, he nonetheless observes, "The oneness of the human race is a sacred truth."⁶⁷ It need not be demonstrated.

Such a position puts Shariati's commitment to particularism in jeopardy and the distance he takes from European universalism in some doubt. From his preoccupation with the world of "becoming," he ends up by asserting the importance of "being." While rejecting the necessity of modernization theory and Marxism, he retains the teleology of Marxism, Islam, and Christianity.

History, marked by extraordinary vicissitudes and diversity of cultures, is nonetheless sweeping humanity closer together, toward a discovery of its essential oneness. But this great onrush occurs not from faith alone or from mechanisms of society but from the multiple, self-discovering pursuit of cultural authenticity; the pursuit of difference leads back toward commonality. Islam is but one of the streams for the enactment of the process.

Such a vision makes Shariati thoroughly liberal in the American sense of that word, as a believer in evolutionary progress. Surely he is not to be seen as a liberal in the classic sense, as a believer in individual human rights even at the expense of human equality. Although a radical in his rejection of both tradition and modernity, his vision is, like that of Marx, based on a notion of continuing, incremental, partial changes than on one great cataclysmic struggle to right all evil and enact the truth. Moreover, he follows Marx in the hope that the eventual victory over human alienation will produce a great coming together. Unlike liberals such as Locke or Rousseau, who presuppose the existence of something called a "people", and unlike most Islamists, who take the *umma* as the political building block, Shariati's logic and faith drives him to embrace a thoroughgoing internationalism, almost Marxian in its fervor. While he praised nationalism as a "progressive" force in opposing colonialism, he could not embrace it in an absolute sense any more than he could justify, from his principles, the defense of any arbitrary set of political arrangements. Such arrangements and associations fall into the domain of human choice, which necessarily shifts with the historical and cultural terrain.

The commitment to unitarism runs through all authentic thought. For the romantics, the pursuit of the self leads one closer and closer to nature. Death is the ultimate realization of selfhood and also the reunion with the natural world. For Nietzsche the campaign leads to the discovery of the notion of eternal recurrence, the great flow of experience in which differences dissolve into sameness. For many Islamists, such as Qutb, faith and struggle pull people together into a group and then a community. What distinguishes Shariati's thought is its position between a Nietzschean mysticism and Qutb's commitment to practical politics. His is a gently utopian vision that welcomes all political tools at appropriate moments but leaves open the future for the gradual breakdown of particularisms; it is a commitment to authenticity that attempts to eschew the dangers of commitment to heroic figures, formulas dredged up from the past, or groups proclaiming themselves to be purveyors of Truth. To dismiss him as a mere "ideologue of the Iranian revolution" and an exponent of Shi'i authenticity would be to miss what may be his greatest contribution, his suggestions about the possible reconciliation of the fact of sharpening cultural difference with the increasing need for political unification.

The contradictions in Shariati's thought result from the intractability of this dilemma. Political success still seems to lie with those who embrace one or the other extreme: the universality of culture and norms, as in the Western world (albeit applied to particular, arbitrarily mapped entities), and to the particularists, who would exploit difference even at the cost of civil war and genocide. Shariati, who is often said to be more concerned with politics than philosophy, charts a political course integrating these strands from within the Islamic context. Because neither Western universalism nor an arbitrary and intolerant particularism is any longer viable as a basis for political construction, Shariati deserves a fresh hearing.

Notes

1. See Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Ali Shariati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," in John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford, 1983).
2. Shahrough Akhavi, "Shariati's Social Thought," in Nikki R. Keddie, ed., *Religion and Politics in Iran* (New Haven: Yale, 1983).
3. See Abbas Navabi, *Reform and Revolution in Shi`i Islam: The Thought of Ali Shariati*, Dissertation, Indiana University, 1988.
4. Navabi writes, *op. cit.*, p. 188: "Shariati's own view of Shi`ism as revolutionary ideology shares some of Shi`i elitism and authoritarianism. But that only means that Shariati was confused and inconsistent. He was still in search of an 'orientation' and was not quite sure how to integrate the many ideas that influenced him." Yann Richard writes: "Shariati thus takes the traditional theory of *ijtihad*, mixing it with democratic principles, but makes no historical or theological analysis, so that it is hard to know his precise position. This lack of precision does not keep young Iranian intellectuals and others from rallying to Shariati." See his section, "Contemporary Shi`i Thought," in Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale, 1981), p. 225.
5. That is Navabi's general conclusion. Fouad Ajami takes a similar position in "The Impossible Life of Moslem Liberalism: The Doctrines of Ali Shariati and their Defeat," *The New Republic*, June 2, 1986.
6. This is the thrust of Akhavi's critique, for example
7. See Ajami, *op. cit.*
8. Mohammed Arkoun, *Pour une critique de la raison islamique* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1984); in English, see his *Rethinking Islam* (Boulder: Westview, forthcoming.)
9. Ajami paints him as a failure; the Islamic Revolution overwhelmed his brand of liberal modernism.
10. This formulation of the idea of authenticity owes much to Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1972); to Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity* (New York, Atheneum, 1970); to Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1986); to the works of Jacques Berque; and to the reading of works by Rousseau, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Gramsci, and others.
11. See my "Arkoun and Authenticity," *Peuples méditerranéens*, January-March, 1990 (50), pp. 75-106.
12. Navabi, *op. cit.*, supports this general argument, although his principal objective is to assess measures Shariati's thought on the spectrum of reform-revolution. He writes, p. 184: "...Shariati with all his genuine and justified opposition to cultural imperialism and cultural alienation considered himself, like Abduh and Iqbal before him, as an Islamic member of 'a world cultural community' rather than as a medieval representative in the modern world."
13. *Art Awaiting the Saviour*, trans. Homa Fardjadi (Houston: Free Islamic Literatures, 1980), p. 6.

14. *What Is To Be Done*, ed. Farhang Rajaee (Houston: Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986), p. 10.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
16. *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies: An Islamic Critique*, trans. R. Campbell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1980), p. 35.
17. *Histoire et destinée*, trans. F. Hamèd and N. Yavari-d'Hellencourt (Paris: Sindbad, 1982), p. 29.
18. *What Is To Be Done*, p. 38.
19. *Histoire*, p. 26.
20. *Man and Islam* trans. Fatollah Marjani (Houston: Free Islamic Literature, 1981), p. 40.
21. *What Is To Be Done*, p. 21.
22. See Roger M. Savory, "Orthodoxy and Aberrancy in the Ithnā `Asharī Shī`ī Tradition," in *Islamic Studies Presented to C. J. Adams*, ed. W. Hallaq, 1991, pp. 169-181.
23. See *Red Shi`ism*, trans. Habib Shirazi (Houston: Free Islamic Literatures, 1980).
24. *Histoire et destinée*, p. 36.
25. *Fatima is Fatima*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar (Tehran: Shariati Foundation, c. 1980), p.65.
26. *Histoire et destinée*, p. 36.
27. *Red Shi`ism*, p. 8.
28. *Ibid.*, 12.
29. Akhavi, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
30. Akhavi, *ibid.*, 131.
31. *Histoire et destinée*, p. 28.
32. *Art Awaiting the Saviour*, p. 13.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Culture and Ideology*, trans. Fatollah Marjani (Houston: Free Islamic Literatures, 1980), p. 6.
35. *Ibid.*, 11.
36. *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, p. 30.

37. *Ibid.*, 101.
38. *Man and Islam*, p. 106.
39. *What Is To Be Done*, p. 15.
40. *Ibid.*, 4.
41. *Culture and Ideology*, p. 11.
42. *What Is To Be Done*, p. 16.
43. *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, p. 114.
44. See Steven R. Benson, "Islam and Social Change in the Writings of `Alī Sharī`atī: His *Hajj* as a Mystical Handbook for Revolutionaries," *Muslim World*, 1991 (81), pp. 9-26, for an excellent analysis of the mystical themes in Shariati's little book on the pilgrimage.
45. Steven Runciman observes that Augustine, whose main thrust was to integrate Christianity with Greek philosophy, to universalize its teachings, saw pilgrimage as irrelevant to Christianity, Augustine . Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1951), I, 40.
46. *Hajj*, trans. Ali A. Behzadnia and Najla Denny (Houston: Free Islamic Literatures, 1980), p. 7.
47. *Ibid.*, 6.
48. *Ibid.*, 10.
49. *Ibid.*, 35.
50. *Ibid.*, 150.
51. See discussion of wisdom and love in *Fatima Is Fatima*, p. 33)
52. *Histoire et destinée*, Chap. 20.
53. *One Followed by an Eternity of Zeroes*, trans. Ali Asghar Ghassemy (Houston: Free Islamic Literatures, 1980), p. 18.
54. *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, p. 112.
55. *Histoire et Destinée*, p. 100.
56. *What Is To Be Done*, p. 55.
57. "Modern Man and His Prisons," in *Man and Islam*, p. 49
58. See "What Is To Be Done: A Practical Plan for Husayniah Irshād," in *What Is To Be Done*.

59. *Ibid.*, 27.
60. *What Is To Be Done*, p. 64.
61. *Hajj*, p. 79.
62. *Hajj*, p. 79.
63. *Ibid.* [All caps in the translation with three exclamation points at the end.]
64. *Hajj*, p. 125.
65. *What Is To Be Done*, footnote 22, p. 69.
66. *Ibid.*, 96.
67. *Ibid.*, 16.