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POST-REVOLUTIONARY ISLAMIC DISCOURSES ON MODERNITY IN IRAN: EXPANSION AND CONTRACTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY

In contrast to what might be expected after the triumph of a colossal revolutionary process and the establishment of a state deriving its power mainly from a strong ideological drive, in Iran the development of socio-political thought did not end with the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979. Indeed, the post-revolutionary period has witnessed a proliferation of socio-political discourses articulated by groups and individuals inside and outside the country, notwithstanding censorship and attempts to control the flow of information by the government.[1]

Within the post-revolutionary religiously oriented discourses, more vigorous than the secular socio-political discourses, two distinct trends are visible. One of these trends consciously seeks accommodation with the forces of the modern world, to an extent unsurpassed by previous religious discourses in Iran, especially with regard to its gradual espousal of modern democratic principles. This trend is closely associated with the thought of Abdulkarim Sorush, the leading figure among a group of philosophers and social thinkers at the forefront of the reform movement in post-revolutionary Iran. He enjoys a large following among the relatively young and well-educated Muslims who seek a more open and democratic society in the post-revolutionary conditions of Iran.[2]

Ironically, the second post-revolutionary religiously oriented trend of socio-political thought in Iran can trace its genealogy more to non-religious sources than to religious sources. The radical religious anti-modernist discourse, which has strong adherents among both the clerics and lay religious intellectuals and groups, owes most of its intellectual parentage, interestingly enough, to the "secular" Iranian philosopher Ahmad Fardid (1921–94), whose anti-modern interpretation of Martin Heidegger was very popular among some lay intellectuals in the 1970s. Despite its "secular" roots, this trend has adopted a strict religious rhetoric against modernity and human subjectivity. The central figure in this discourse is Riza Davari-Ardakani, a professor of

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philosophy at Tehran University with seminary training as well as formal education in Western philosophy at Tehran University. Davari's thought is representative of this trend, and he is the most profound and original figure in the development of this discourse. It should be realized, however, that contributors to this discourse, both among the conservative clerical intellectuals and lay religious intellectuals, are numerous and diverse in their intellectual backgrounds. What brings them together is Davari's utilization of some Western counter-enlightenment metaphysical assumptions to boost a traditional religious view of society and politics. Most of the intellectuals and journalists among this group have been involved in a polemical debate with members of the first group and have brought their ideas, especially those of Sorush, under severe attack for allegedly undermining the Islamic ethos.[3]

To be sure, the intellectual genealogy of the first trend, represented by Sorush, originates in the contradictory paradigm of Islamic revolutionary discourse of the 1960s and 1970s—that is, that of the so-called main architects of the Islamic Revolution, Ali Shari'ati, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Ayatollah Motahhari. However, Sorush's Islamic discourse and its democratic aspirations, especially in the second decade after the revolution, have gradually emerged from that paradigm and as a result exhibit fewer of its contradictions. This is not to say that Sorush's discourse does not relapse into the contradictions of its revolutionary ancestor once in a while, but compared with the vacillations of its intellectual parents, its own fluctuations are much more subdued. Having served at some of the highest echelons of the cultural state apparatuses of the Islamic Republic and given his active participation in the revolution, Sorush's intellectual career began in close affinity with the intellectual heritage of the Islamic revolutionary discourse. In fact, Sorush was a member of the High Council of Cultural Revolution, which as a revolutionary body in the early years following the revolution was in charge of the purging of the "inadequately Islamic" elements among university professors and students, many of whom were jailed or killed.[4] But as years have passed, Sorush has elaborated on and expanded the elements of modernity in Shari'ati, Motahhari, Khomeini, and other Islamic thinkers and has arrived at what seems to be the threshold of modern democratic principles.

In this article, I discuss these post-revolutionary Islamic discourses as represented by Sorush and Davari and the often very opposite views they expressed in relation to the central issues of modernity with which they have been grappling. This disputation often involves the ontological as well as the socio-political dimensions of conflicting views on modernity by proponents of two opposing camps.[5] I focus on the thoughts of Davari and Sorush because, as Mehrzad Boroujerdi has shown, they are the major theorists in these camps and the leading figures in the two major trends in the post-revolutionary Islamic discourse in Iran.[6]

As I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere, the Islamic revolutionary discourse of 1960s and '70s contained a central contradiction with regard to one of the pillars of modern world—namely, the principle of human subjectivity.[7] I have argued that the discourse of Shari'ati, Khomeini, and Motahhari simultaneously posited and negated human subjectivity and consequently affirmed and undermined both the human and citizenship rights of democratic modern institutions at the same time. The thesis of the present article suggests that (1) in the post-revolutionary period, this contradictory situation has been replaced by a bifurcation of Islamic thought in Iran; and (2) that

while the trend associated with Sorush tends to posit human subjectivity more or less unequivocally with significant results for democratic rights and institutions, the trend associated with Davari is bent on eradicating human subjectivity, with important negative consequences for the process of democratic-institution building in that country. The outcome of the struggle between these two intellectual trends and the corresponding political camps is crucial for the political future of Iran and by extension other countries in the region.

To examine these claims, I first propose to gain a theoretical interpretation of modernity by drawing on critical theory's tradition of evaluation and critique of the philosophy and phenomenon of modernity. In critical theory, the category of subjectivity has constituted a key feature of modernity. Subjectivity can be viewed as the property characterizing the autonomous, self-willing, self-defining, and self-conscious individual human agent. Subjectivity, very much rooted in the humanist tradition, tends to depict the human individual as the determinant of her or his own life processes and is closely related to notions such as human freedom and volition, consciousness, reason, individuality, rights of various types, and so on, but it is not reducible to any single one of these. An important aspect to keep in mind about subjectivity is that it is the repository simultaneously of emancipation and of domination. While the Cartesian *cogito* as the modern detached subject is the source of liberation (for example, as the foundations of the rights of citizenship), it is also responsible for the objectification of nature; the Other, such as the colonized and women; and the subject itself. Herein lies the very dialectical character of modernity and its emancipatory, as well as the potential for domination.[8] For this reason, from G. W. F. Hegel to Jürgen Habermas, many social thinkers and philosophers have attempted to reconcile this subject of modernity and its Other.

Often this reconciliation has been attempted in terms of what might be described as universalization of subjectivity, approximating its emancipatory potential. Hegel conceptualized this synthesis primarily in terms of universality. As such, universality, which is a somewhat more elusive category to analyze, may be perceived as the mutual recognition among the plurality of subjects of each other's subjectivity. Expressed differently and in a strictly historical context, universality is often perceived as the elimination of restrictions based on privilege, status, or other essential considerations. In a more restricted sense, universality is also considered bourgeois formal equality before the law. Hegel interpreted the two concepts of subjectivity and universality as epitomized in the notion of civil society but criticized civil society for what he called its formality and vacuity. For him the diremption or separation from nature and society and the moral "chaos" that is the result of the process of subjectification and radical human autonomy associated with subjectivity cannot be healed by the universality of civil society in its Kantian formulation. The disruption of the putative organic bonds in medieval society at the hands of human subjectivity has caused the alienation and separation of humans from nature and the individuals from the collectivity and each other. The Kantian attempt to redress this alienation is not adequate because civil society is nothing more than the liberal democracy in which alienation of humans from one another and from nature persists.

Hegel was one of the first and most prominent to attempt to address this crisis of formality in modern society and try to resolve the contradictions between subjectivity

and universality in a substantive (as opposed to formal) synthesis of the two principles. For Hegel, "substantive" meant the reconciliation of the subject with nature and society, while both the freedom of subjectivity and subject's communion with nature and the Other were preserved.[9]

Stated somewhat differently, the principle of subjectivity has given rise to freedom and the notion of individual and collective autonomy in the modern era. The unbridled subjectivity of modernity, however, also has been responsible for moral and political chaos and various types of domination of the "others." For this reason, much intellectual and political thought since Hegel in one way or another has attempted to address the abstract, monadic, and self-same subject of modernity and striven to embed it in a larger context.[10] The latest and one of the most comprehensive contemporary efforts at the synthesis between subjectivity and universality is elaborated in the works of Habermas. In his theory of communicative action he has attempted to shift the ontological foundation of modernity from mere subjectivity to that of intersubjectivity through language, with important implications for a theory of generalized citizenship at the political level.[11] Before we discuss the discourses of Sorush and Davari, it is necessary to contextualize the genealogy of their work.

MATRIX OF POST-REVOLUTIONARY ISLAMIC DISCOURSES: MEDIATED SUBJECTIVITY

Sorush's and Davari's discourses are grounded in the discourses of their revolutionary predecessors—that is, in the thought of Ayatollah Khomeini, Ali Shari'ati, and Ayatollah Motahhari. Despite enormous difference, the discourses of these three main architects of the Islamic Revolution shared a characteristic ambivalence toward subjectivity in their philosophical approach and a consequent vacillation in regard to citizenship in their political views. The most basic element that connected the discourses of Shari'ati, Khomeini, and Motahhari was a phenomenon that can be conceptualized as "mediated subjectivity." Mediated subjectivity refers to the notion of human subjectivity projected onto the attributes of monotheistic deity—attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, and volitism—which are then partially re-appropriated by humans. In this scheme, human subjectivity is contingent on God's subjectivity. Thus, although human subjectivity is not denied, it is never independent of the Divine's and in this sense is "mediated." In modern Islamic discourses, mediated subjectivity often is expressed in the notion of the human as vicegerent of God (*khalīfatullah fī al-arż*), or God's caliph or successor on earth.[12] This conceptualization is usually conducive to a perception of great conflict between Divine Subjectivity and human subjectivity, a conflict that gives rise to various other types of conflicts, one of the sharpest of which is the constant and schizophrenic shifting of ground between a confirmation and negation of human subjectivity in general, as well as a constant oscillation between individual subjectivity and a collective notion of subjectivity, accompanied, on the sociopolitical level, by a constant positing and negating of the possibility of political citizenship.

The post-revolutionary "Islamic" discourses of Sorush and Davari can be characterized as bifurcation of this ambivalence, resulting in a bipolar view of subjectivity and of citizenship in the period after the establishment of the Islamic Republic. In what

follows, I try to demonstrate that, while Davari has explicitly called for the negation of human subjectivity with important implications for the maintenance of the institution of the "Governance of the Jurist" (*vilāyat-i faqīh*) and hindrance of the development of civil society, Sorush's discourse is much more in tune with individual subjectivity in a very subtle manner that is conducive to a notion of inter-subjectivity and its political embodiment as universal citizenship. To be sure, Sorush's thought does slip back into the contradictions of ambivalence toward subjectivity once in a while, but unlike the oscillations of his intellectual pedigree, his fluctuations are much more restrained. Especially after the second decade since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Sorush has developed and expanded the notion of subjectivity, however inchoate and mediated, found in the thought of Shari'ati, Motahhari, Khomeini, and other Islamic thinkers to reach what may be considered the inception of modern democratic principles.[13]

However, the radical religious anti-modernist discourse associated with Davari, which has strong adherents among the clerics and some lay "religious" intellectuals and groups, has expanded the negation of subjectivity found as the other pole in the paradigm of mediated subjectivity.

I will discuss the views of Davari first, because even though the manner of the development of the two discourses is in many ways intertwined, the radical ontological assumptions of the conservative discourse represented by Davari seems to have provided Sorush with some of the grounds for adjusting his own assumptions. The gradual shift in Sorush's discourse is no doubt partly related to the social implications of the conservatives' theoretical positions articulated in their discourse. This does not mean, however, that Davari's positions have remained fixed, and as we will see, his own positions have changed also.

DAVARI: LEAP FROM BEING (IN)TO ḤAQQ (TRUTH)

Riza Davari-Ardakani was born in 1933 in Ardakan, a provincial town in central Iran between Yazd and Isfahan. He grew up in Ardakan and studied there until the ninth grade. In 1951, when he was eighteen, he became a teacher, and two years later, after the CIA-sponsored coup against the liberal-nationalist government of Mohamad Mossaddeqq, he was laid off, probably because of his sympathies for the liberal-nationalist movement at the time. He then attended the seminary in Isfahan for a while, after which he went to Tehran and enrolled at the faculty of letters at Tehran University. There, by chance, he became interested in philosophy.[14] Davari received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Tehran University in 1967 and has been teaching there ever since. In an autobiographical interview with the journal *Kayhan Farhangi*, Davari mentioned the philosopher Ahmad Fardid as an important intellectual influence who "saved" him from "Durkheimian positivism and sociologism."[15] Davari's doctoral dissertation was on Greek political thought and Islamic philosophy, and he has published two treatises on Islamic philosophy based on his dissertation. He has also translated Camus' *Letter to a German Friend* into Persian. At the time of the revolution, Davari published a book titled, *Falsafih Chist*? (What Is Philosophy?), in which he laid out his major theoretical grounds. After the revolution, he published several books and numerous articles on socio-political issues, elaborating his theoretical

views. He has also held semi-official positions, serving as a researcher at the Islamic Republic's Academy of Philosophy and at the Iranian Academy of Science, and as the editor of the journal *Namih Farhang*, published by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.[16]

Like many other Iranian intellectuals in the second half of the 20th century, Davari found a point of departure in the concept of *Gharbzadigi*, or "Westoxication." But as we will see, his interpretation of this concept is very different from that of Jalal Al-e Ahmad, the man whose name has become synonymous with it.

Subjectivity and Reason as Westoxication

The term "Westoxication" was first coined by the "secular" philosopher Ahmad Fardid but was later adopted and promulgated by Al-e Ahmad to designate Iranians' loss of their subjectivity by surrendering their identity to the West. In his ground-breaking work *What Is Philosophy?*, Davari dismisses Al-e Ahmad's notion of Westoxication as a disease incidental to science, industry, and modern culture. As a result, he views modern science and technology as inseparable from modern culture as such.[17] The modern *technique* (in French transliteration), Davari argues, has imposed its dominion over everything, including humans, and if there is going to be any change, it should start in the way in which humans view the universe, themselves, and the origins of both.[18] Thus, Davari returns to Fardid's original conception of Westoxication as the preponderance of the "egotistic" and "narcissistic" aspects of human existence over other realms of life. In the rise of the West, Davari maintains, a world has been created in which humans consider themselves the center and axiom of everything. The rise of subjectivity in the West has caused the fall and occlusion of the Truth (*Ḥaqq*) and given rise to modern sciences ever since the Western humans advanced their hubristic claims of theomorphism.[19] Al-e Ahmad never penetrated to the bottom of Westoxication, Davari contends, because he never realized that it was the "Realm of Power," a code for Davari to refer to subjectivity, that underlies Westoxication. Reflecting Fardid's original concept of Westoxication, Davari believes that Al-e Ahmad never understood that the Western tradition of "humanism" constituted the core element of Westoxication and that, as such, Westoxication is not an affliction affecting Easterners only. First and foremost, it is an affliction of Westerners that has come to engulf all of humanity.[20]

One of the terms Davari chooses to render the concept of subjectivity is *nafsāniyyat*— literally, "selfness"—and carrying negative connotations historically in Iran.[21] Elsewhere he has made use of the French transliteration of *subjectivité* as the foundation of the modern world.[22] On many occasions, he has advanced the phrase *khud-bunyādī*— literally, "self-foundationism"—as the basic principle of modernity. Another key notion in Davari's discourse is the concept of *Ḥaqq*, which he uses synonymously with the Heideggerian notion of being. The Perso-Arabic term *Ḥaqq* has many meanings, including "right," "authentic," "fair," "correct," "reasonable," and "God's," among others. Drawing on the Heideggerian idea that in the anthropocentrism of the West in general, and modernity in particular, the being has been neglected,[23] Davari claims that with the emergence of subjectivity or *nafsāniyyat*, *Ḥaqq* has been eclipsed and the human has arrogated the station of *Ḥaqq* for itself:

Westoxication began when man arrogantly claimed the status of *Ḥaqq* for himself and in the West this claim, knowingly and unknowingly, became the foundation of all ideologies, views, rules, institutions and norms.[24]

In a different essay, Davari observes that *nafsāniyyat* may not be an accurate term to describe the ontological basis of modernity because traditionally it has a connotation of appetites (*hava*) and the two terms have usually been paired (*havā-i nafs*). Consequently, Davari has suggested another cognate of the same term, *nafsiyyat*, to translate the concept of subjectivity.[25] Davari's motive in making such a distinction seems to be to avoid the perennial opposition between reason (*'aql*) and appetites in Islamic tradition, since he has suggested that "Western reason" as such constitutes the core of modernity as a manifestation of subjectivity.[26] Thus, while Davari has implicated "reason" as one aspect of Westoxication, he has attempted to demonstrate a strong affinity between "reason" and appetites (*hava*) in modernity.[27]

Davari holds philosophy as such responsible for the emergence of human subjectivity and modernity. In his view, modern philosophy in particular is entirely the positing of subjectivity (he uses the term *ananiyat*, or egoism, in this context) of humanism and anthropocentrism.[28] According to Davari, at the beginning of history the philosopher is a lover of knowledge itself. In Hegel, however, philosophy is not love of knowledge any longer but knowledge itself, and the human claims to have reached absolute knowledge. One may call this "nihilism" or "Westoxication," but the reality is that it is the process of manifestation of the human as the truth (*ḥaqq*), from which many of the weaknesses and strengths of contemporary humans emanate.[29] Pre–Renaissance philosophy contains the seeds, Davari has contended, but it is modern philosophy that has led us to turn away from the Truth:

Notwithstanding the roots of Westoxication in Greek philosophy and its 2500 years of history, its specific and predominant form has emerged with the Renaissance. With the appearance of Westoxication, the old form of history is abolished and a new man is born who is no longer submissive to the *Ḥaqq* [Truth]. He forgets the *Ḥaqq* so that he can replace Him and to expropriate the earth and the heavens.[30]

In Davari's analysis, modern epistemology, especially that of Kant, is responsible for the creation of the modern benighted neglect of the Truth. Kant, in his estimation, reduced "existence" (*vujūd*) to the object of knowledge. As a result, two types of knowledge have become possible in modernity. One is the scientific knowledge of objects, and the other is the "knowledge of the conditions of the possibility and realization of such science," which is called "critical philosophy."[31]

Davari's discourse claims to be informed by a Heideggerian worldview. Thus, he views Western history as the realization of "Western" metaphysics:

That Kant has put aside the category of existence [*vujūd*] and emphasized knowledge, reducing philosophy to epistemology, was not merely an accident resulting from personal observations; rather it was necessitated by the unfolding of the history of metaphysics.[32]

In Davari's Heideggerian interpretation, modern science is a moment of metaphysics, and metaphysics has realized its absolute form in science and technology.[33] It is my contention that the notion of metaphysics in Islamic Revolutionary discourse of the 1970s, rooted in classical Islamic metaphysics, has developed in close parallel to the

so called Western metaphysics—that is, it is characterized by a flight from the *physis*, or nature, toward subjectivity, despite its distortions in its religious form and ultimate negation as the potential subject is invariably annihilated in the Being. As a result, Davari's views on metaphysics have the potential to run contrary to views traditionally held on this topic in Iran, and, as we will see later, he has tried to grapple with this issue in his discussion of classical Islamic philosophy. Thus, given the importance of modern science and technology for a country such as Iran, Davari's pronouncements on the metaphysical origins of science and technology have had far-reaching implications and created much debate on the issue.

Davari has proposed the notion of "representation" (*tamāthul*) as the link between subjectivity and modern science:

In the view of the classics, reason was one of the faculties of the ego with which it perceives and gains knowledge of the beings. But modern reason is the faculty of "representation" and an aspect of subjectivity (human self-foundation,) in which whatever that exists is mainly an object for the subject of knowledge. With this "representation" and reason, which is the representing faculty, modern science is born.[34]

One of the central themes in Davari's discourse is the question of imperialism and its ontological foundations. This issue has also been a prominent question in Iran in view of the anti-imperialist struggles of the past few decades. Davari has maintained that domination is an inherent part of the culture of modernity. By giving authority to humans and placing them at the center of the universe, the subject of knowledge is by nature seeking domination.[35] Imperialism, in Davari's scheme, is the logical extension of the sphere of domination gaining preponderance in modernity. As such, Davari has rejected, for example, the Leninist theory of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. In its stead, Davari has referred to imperialism as realization of the core element of modern culture, philosophy, art, and literature.[36] Accordingly, he has maintained a qualitative difference between modern imperialism and pre-modern conquests.[37] Furthermore, he has suggested that imperialism is an inevitable reality of modernity in which some peoples dominate and some others are dominated, because for every subject to be a subject an object of domination is necessary.[38] This pessimistic reading of Hegel's concept of "master and slave" has prompted Davari to conclude the impossibility of any form of universalization of subjectivity, because it is impossible for all to be dominant.[39] This is particularly significant for the peoples of the Third World, because even if they attempt to emulate the Western imperialist nations, they will at best become imperialists themselves.[40] This principle of international relations equally applies to inter-subjective relations, in which it is impossible to delimit the subjectivity of the "self" with that of the "other."[41]

This overly pessimistic view of modernity has led Davari to seek solutions to the ontological problems of modernity not in any form of intersubjectivity, but in the radical eradication of subjectivity altogether. However, his guides in this ontological quest ironically are not primarily Islamic sources but recent European philosophers of counter–Enlightenment persuasion. In his theoretical works written in early 1980s, Davari showed a remarkably accurate understanding of primary philosophers of modernity, notwithstanding his hostility toward them. Paraphrasing Heinrich Heine, Davari drew a direct line from Kant to Robespierre, portraying Kant as the designer and

teacher and Robespierre as a pupil putting his master's designs into practice.[42] On many occasions, Davari has also referred to the philosophy of Hegel and the enormous but unrecognized influence of his ideas on modernity.[43] But even Hegel, in Davari's analysis, is of no use in overcoming the ontological problems of modernity, because he views Hegel's philosophy as the ultimate expression of the revolution of subjectivity that has been in the works since the classical Greeks and assumed its final form in a philosophy of the Renaissance until its perfection by Hegel.[44]

Nietzsche, Davari has argued, is the transitional figure in the quest to overcome modernity. In Hegel, Davari maintains, the human is pressured to be self-consciousness first and only second to belong to nature, to which she or he must be reconciled. But Nietzsche's human is first and foremost an animal; consciousness comes second.[45] It is Heidegger, however, whom Davari credits with reversing the entire project of "metaphysics." What the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Saint Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche have in common is that theirs is a variation of metaphysics.[46] The plight of modern humans reflected in this "inauthentic" existence is rooted in the fact that they are alienated from the Being (*vujūd*) and cannot hear its summons.[47] It is Heidegger who demonstrated that the proper station of humans is to be attentive and heedful (as opposed to being forgetful) toward the Being.[48] Thus, Heidegger reveals to us the inner Truth of the West, which may help us liberate ourselves from the prison of Westoxication by penetrating into the depth of Western philosophy. Heidegger's promise, Davari maintains, is nothing less than an end to the gaudy and hypocritical oppression of the West.[49]

Such views of metaphysics have the potential to lead Davari into opposition to Islamic metaphysics. Recognizing the emphasis on "reason" in the Islamic tradition, Davari has made attempts to reconcile his thoughts and Islamic notions of reason. As a result, in some of his post-revolutionary writings, he has attempted to accommodate the religious notions of reason, with his attack on metaphysics as the unfolding of human reason.[50] While Davari has attempted to reconcile his thought with Islamic religiosity, he has not spared Islamic philosophy—not even the "rational" theology of *Kalām*—from his attacks. He has charged that the rational Islamic theology known as *Kalām* has been too much under the influence of philosophy so that some of texts of the former are indistinguishable from the latter.[51] Moreover, he has suggested, the truth of Islamic religion did not need the rationalistic arguments of *Kalām* to stand.[52] Yet Davari is more sympathetic toward *Kalām* than Islamic philosophy, because *Kalām* recognizes human "poverty" and "inability," whereas philosophy is based on human power and reason.[53] Islamic philosophy, Davari has contended, is in essence Greek and as such does not belong to Islamic religiosity, and religion has no need for it.[54]

In contrast to Islamic philosophy, Davari has written, mysticism (*taṣawuf*) has had nothing to do with humanism and has been the complete antithesis of humanism.[55] In the mystical tradition of the Sufis, human essence lies in contingency:

Human essence lies in his "nobodyness" and nothingness. He has no real existence and essence. His essence lies in annihilation.[56]

Davari's adoption of "philosophy of Being" thus leads him to embrace the Sufi notion of annihilation of the subject, a process that involves a leap from the Heideggerian

conceptualizations of the Being, arising from the Europeans' experience of modernity, to the Sufi notions of submerging in the *Ḥaqq* (Truth). However, for Davari the reversal of metaphysics and annihilation in the Truth is not a mere theoretical construct, as the Islamic Revolution of 1979 represents the embodiment of this process.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979: The Antidote to Westoxication

In the Introduction to *What Is Philosophy?*, which was published shortly after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Davari described the revolution as a reaction to Westoxication that portends the end of domination of the West and the beginning of a new era in which religion would dampen the "holocaust of Westoxication."[57] He also described the Islamic revolution in terms of the renewal of humans' covenant with God, a covenant that was broken in modernity:

The Islamic Revolution must . . . summon a return to the beginnings and a renewal of the Covenant. This renewal of the Covenant requires that we [Iranians] break the covenant to which we acquiesced in Westoxication. If we break away from this covenant with Westoxication it will be remembered in the world and would undermine the current covenant. . . . [W]e take refuge in God and ask Him for assistance in our renewed Covenant, a covenant which constitutes the future of mankind.[58]

In his explanation of the contents of this renewed Covenant, Davari invoked Kierkeggard's conception of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son as the price of renewal of the covenant. Thus, he suggested submission to God, symbolized by the sacrifice of all worldly attachments, to achieve a renewal of the Covenant with the True Beloved.[59]

In the manner of proponents of the great world revolutions, Davari allows his ambitions free rein and views the Iranian Revolution as a type of revolution that might usher in the end of modern revolutions inspired by the revolution of subjectivity. In a passage worth quoting at length, Davari observes that if a people undermined the current world politics,

they would be at the threshold of a revolution which is in essence different from the revolutions of modernity. The French revolution and anti-imperialist revolutions of the subjugated nations, have all been [waged] in order to establish and realize the truth of the West. But there is another [type of] revolution which undermines the West and, when expanded, will overthrow the West. With this revolution mankind may renew the forgotten Covenant of the past and in a way a new era will be established. This revolution would no longer be the realization of philosophy as a new horizon would open in which mankind would be encouraged to . . . question the [regime of] *technique*. . . . [T]he experiment of the Islamic revolution will shed light on many things.[60]

This radical interpretation of anti-imperialist strategy in Davari's discourse is reflected in his thoughts on the impossibility of reconciliation between modernity and what he considers to be Islam. In contrast to that of many Islamist theorists of the 20th century, in Davari's discourse, there is very little space for reconciliation between Islam and modernity. Such a reconciliation for Davari would entail becoming accomplices with imperialists of the East (i.e., the former Soviet Union and its allies) and the West who have expropriated and dominated everything in the world. The purpose of the Islamic Revolution had not been to compete with the United States and the

Soviet Union or to surpass them in monopolizing domination.[61] Davari recognizes the enormity of the power of modernity that surrounds the Islamic Revolution in Iran. But this does not mean that modernity must stay and Islamic Revolution should adapt itself to its demands. With the expansion of the Islamic Revolution all social and political categories such as law, politics, and technology should conform to Islam, because Islam cannot conform to these and remain Islam.[62]

The only concession that Davari makes in this regard is in the sphere of modern science and technology. Apparently sensitive to social forces demanding modern science and technology, especially as a result of the war and economic difficulties after the revolution, Davari seems to have adjusted his positions on this issue gradually, but strategically.[63] In the early years of *What Is Philosophy?* when he articulated his more theoretical views, Davari viewed technology as the very essence of modernity, as he called the latter the "sovereignty of *technique*" (*vilayat-i tiknik*). In his later and less theoretical writings, however, he reluctantly accepted the necessity of science and technology.[64] As long as the "sovereignty of *technique*"—that is, the domination of modernity and the West—exists, the need for technology in a country such as Iran remains:

The purpose of our revolution has not been to achieve ideal perfection in modern civilization, but until the West starts to crumble from within, we will not shun technology and technological sciences and will earnestly seek modern science.[65]

As we can see from this passage, Davari's attitude toward modern technology is merely utilitarian, necessitated by the contingencies of Iran's situation. Iran needs the modern positivist sciences and technology to survive, but these must be confined to the achievement of evil, but necessary, this-worldly needs, otherwise technology's dominance will be established again.[66] Davari's acknowledgment of the indispensability of technology for Iran, however, goes against his earlier theoretical articulations. To try to solve this problem, he suggests a distinction between what he calls the "founding" of technology and that of "adopting" it. Iranians may avoid the founding of technology and its cultural parent, subjectivity, by adopting and appropriating this illegitimate, but attractive, child of Europe:

Modern *technique* has already been founded, but other nations, who have not been involved in its creation, can use Europe's experience and appropriate and borrow science and modern technology. In other words, a distinction must be made between the founding of technology and its borrowing. If the tree of modern *technique* cannot grow in a gnostic (*'irfānī*) intellectual environment, it cannot be concluded that gnostic thought destroys *technique* everywhere . . . the gnostic thought does not deprive mankind from amenities that technology has provided, rather liberates them from bondage to technology and objects.[67]

Davari has contended that this approach toward technology would not result in a renewed dependence of Iran on the West.[68] Presuming that his assumption is correct, however, one may ask whether this attitude would not lead again to the prevalence of positivist aspects of subjectivity and instrumental rationality without the cultural and emancipatory aspects of subjectivity to insure democratic institutions to check positivism. Davari's answer to this hypothetical question is likely to be in the negative, because in the West itself, where both aspects of subjectivity and modernity have existed more or less together, profound changes are currently taking place. The col-

lapse of the Soviet Union (intellectually a part of the West) and the lack of enthusiasm in Western thought for modernity all foretoken the collapse of the rest of modern civilization also:

Today the conditions of the West have changed. That means there is nothing in Western thought to advance the power of the West and modernity any longer. The Soviet Union with all its territory, population and God-given natural resources, is abolished. The West also, like the Soviet Union has lost its endurance and longevity. The West has no more hope in the future and its thinkers view philosophy as finished and talk of the end of modernity. They have called the contemporary period the "limbo" of postmodernity, which is the shaking of the foundations of modernity before the start of a new era.[69]

Politics of the Leap (in)to Ḥaqq

If Davari has been somewhat receptive to science and technology of modernity, he has been much less sympathetic toward other aspects of modernity, such as political institutions and norms. As a being belonging and subordinated to the Truth (*Ḥaqq*), our human polity is determined by God. As it was the case in this golden age of early Islam, the Islamic government is neither a democracy nor despotism, but the rulers execute the Divine laws.[70] Moreover, Davari has averred, such notions as rights and (modern) politics are based on "Western reason," and the latter in turn is grounded on the accursed humanism and subjectivity and is therefore unacceptable.[71]

This anti-liberal position has led Davari to criticize the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of the early 20th century as the realization of the ideas of Westoxicated Iranian intellectuals of the period.[72] He has correctly pointed to the weak social roots of the democratic ideas and institutions that the Constitutional Revolution was promising to establish in Iran, and its actual failure, but he has expressed no regrets for this sad outcome. He has referred to the Constitutional Revolution as a foreign "sapling" that never developed roots in the social and cultural soil of Iran and became increasingly wilted, "until its dried root had to be uprooted and thrown away."[73] More important, Davari has suggested, the popular uprising at the time of the Constitutional Revolution was not for democracy, but merely against the despotism of the Qajar shahs, implying the irrelevance of democratic institutions in a religious society.[74]

Davari's anti-democratic sentiments are not confined to Iranian borders, as he has attacked the principle of the freedom of religious beliefs in the Declaration of Human Rights, along with many of the institutions of modernity:

The freedom of religious beliefs in the Declaration of Human Rights means alienation from religion; it means leaving the individuals to their own devices so that they may do whatever they want with religion in their private lives and have any religion they want. . . . [M]odern man sees his own image in the mirror of *Ḥaqq* and instead of entering into a Covenant with *Ḥaqq*, he has entered into a covenant with himself. Therefore it is inevitable and natural that such a man would turn his back to religion and cover up his act with claims to nationalism, internationalism, liberalism, collectivism and individualism.[75]

Faithful to the anti-subjectivist ontology in his discourse, Davari has articulated thinly disguised sentiments against literacy projects as a concrete measure in terms of universalization of subjectivity in a country such as Iran, where a large proportion of the population still suffers from illiteracy:

Assuming that literacy programs and other similar projects are practical and simple, it does not mean that illiterate people in the world cause wars. . . . Beware of the abuse of the knowledge and the practice which results in the eclipse of *Ḥaqq*.[76]

In a similar vein, as I mentioned earlier, Davari's ontology has led him to dismiss the anti-imperialist struggles of other nations as futile or, at best, resulting in the assimilation of the anti-imperialist struggle to the oppressor, since these struggles are also grounded in human subjectivity and modernity.[77] The only true and effective anti-imperialist campaign is the one that aims at the root of the problem—that is, the notion and practice of human autonomy upon which the Islamic movement in Iran has embarked.[78]

Fully in agreement with his ontology of the *Ḥaqq*, Davari believes that there should not be any separation between religion and politics.[79] This position has led him to support the doctrine of "Governance of the Jurist" (*Vilāyat-i Faqīh*), which has served as the ideological and political mainstay of clerical rule and the anti-democratic institutions of the Islamic government in the post-revolutionary era. In his declared support for the doctrine of the Governance of the Jurist, however, Davari is careful to distinguish between a despotic clerical rule and what he considers to be the execution of the Divine mandate:

Islamic polity is the exercise of the Divine Sovereignty, and this can be accomplished by those who are not only experts in the knowledge and practice of religious laws, but also those who, in their closeness to the *Ḥaqq*, their eyes, ears, tongues, and hands have become His eyes, ears, tongue, and hands. The Islamic government is the government of the "confidants" [*awliya*] of God, whereas the prevalent meaning of politics is the management of social and economic affairs in which man is viewed as a being whose existence is the aggregation of material and mundane needs and abilities.[80]

Moreover, in a different article in the same book, Davari distinguishes between the regime of the Governance of the Jurist and totalitarian systems. In general, he differentiates between two types of rule. One is exercised by humans over humans, and the other is the sovereignty of God (*Ḥaqq*) over humans. In the first case, if the rule is that of one or a few individuals over the collectivity, it would be despotism, and if it is the rule of the majority over the collectivity, it is democracy. In both instances—the despotic and democratic forms of government—what matters is the rule of human desires, appetites (*hava*), and the "sovereignty of *technique*" in which in the current world is engulfed. In the case of Divine sovereignty, its human representation—that is, the theocratic state—is on the one hand obedient to God and has guardianship over the people, and on the other hand is their servant. However, Davari is aware of the close affinity between a theocratic state and despotism and warns that, "it is possible that some individuals or groups, in the name of religious government, take to despotism and oppression . . . in which case the government is despotic and it is one of the worst forms of despotism. Therefore, the truth of the 'Governance of the Jurist' is not despotism, as it cannot be compared to democracy either."[81]

Shortly after the revolution of 1979, the question of the nation-state versus the larger Islamic state, along with the issue of the type of sovereignty—that of Divine or national–popular sovereignty—became a major source of political debate in Iran. Davari addressed these issues in two books on nationalism, national sovereignty, and

revolution. In an essay titled, "The Essence and Forms of Nationalism," Davari attacked the notion of civic nationalism based on popular sovereignty—in turn grounded in the idea of universalizable subjectivity—because of its subjectivist element:

From its very beginning [in Europe] nationalism meant that the populace should be independent of any compulsion in their exercise of power, creation of laws and norms and the control of social relations and transactions. And because in that period the established power was the Church and its rule, nationalism was instituted in opposition to the Church. But what was the source of this spirit of independence, and how man found the courage and the strength to rebel against the Church which he considered the shadow of the heavens? We might say that this spirit of independence emerged shortly after man considered himself the center of the universe and the source of knowledge, power and will; when a revolution took place in the political, social, economic as well as in the intellectual spheres.[82]

In the same article, Davari assailed the right of individuals as individuals, or even as a collectivity, to participate in government and the process of governing themselves as an "innovation" brought about by the anthropocentrism of modernity and closely tied to the notions of national sovereignty and nationalism.[83]

In another essay in the same book, Davari explicitly rejected the notion of popular and national sovereignty:

[N]ational sovereignty and a constitution in their origin and essence are incompatible with religion since the chief principle of all constitutions is based on a [notion] that sovereignty derives from people's will and the people must legislate, whereas in religion sovereignty belongs to God and the rulers [merely] execute Divine ordinances.[84]

Davari even warned that those pronouncements of Khomeini on topics of social participation against oppression must not be interpreted as encouraging the notion of national sovereignty.[85] It is important, however, to note that Davari also rejected the *ipseism* of nationalistic movements and sentiments that can result in chauvinistic nationalism.[86]

As we saw earlier, with regard to modern science and technology, Davari, apparently as a result of social pressure, retreated from some of his earlier radical positions. On other issues he also made some concessions, but they seem to be mostly rhetorical in nature. On the question of freedom and equality, for example, he stated a belief in their "roots in human nature." But at the same time, he dismissed "modern" notions of freedom and equality because of their anthropocentric roots in the Renaissance.[87] In another essay, he made a distinction between freedom and what he labeled the "license" of liberalism.[88] These vague and mostly rhetorical maneuvers notwithstanding, Davari did not make any substantial change in his persistent and anti-subjectivist discourse.

The persistence in the basic tenets of Davari's discourse is above all reflected in his polemics against his opponents, primarily Sorush. In many magazine articles and essays published in his books, Davari has criticized and opposed Sorush on many topics. All in all, if one can describe Davari's discourse in terms of an effort in the direction of contraction of subjectivity and reason, Sorush's discourse is best described as an expansion of subjectivity and even a liberation from the confines of mediated subjectivity, the paradigm in which both Davari's and Sorush's discourses nevertheless originated.

SORUSH: THE EXPANSION OF MEDIATED SUBJECTIVITY

Abdulkarim Sorush is a pen name for Hussein Hajfaraj Dabagh, who was born in a lower-middle-class family in southern Tehran in 1945. For secondary-school, he attended ʿAlavai High School, which had just been established by pious Bazari merchants. The ʿAlavai School was established to provide a curriculum rich in modern science as well as emphasizing a religious environment and subjects. For higher education, Sorush attended Tehran University and studied pharmacology. After earning his degree, he spent two years in the army completing his national service, and after that he was sent to the southern port city of Bushihr to render part of his medical service. Soon thereafter, he left for London to pursue his education.

At the university in London he first studied analytical chemistry but later developed an interest in philosophy and the history of science.[89] With the start of the revolution, Sorush returned to Iran and published his first socio-political works. After the revolution, Sorush served at some of the highest echelons of the cultural apparatuses of the Islamic Republic. He was appointed to the High Council of the Cultural Revolution, which was charged with revamping and Islamicizing the entire education system in Iran shortly after the revolution. Sorush has also taught philosophy and philosophy of science at the University of Tehran, as well as conducted research at the Institute for Cultural Research and Studies.[90] Since 1995, however, Sorush has come under severe attack, at times physical, by some elements among the conservative Islamic forces.

Eschewing the Theomorphic Metaphysical Path to Subjectivity

Sorush's earliest book, published in 1978—just before the triumph of Islamic Revolution—bore the title *Naqdi va Daramadi bar Tazad-i Dialiktiki* (A Critique and Introduction to Dialectical Contradiction). In this book, which has been reprinted several times, Sorush criticized the "dialectical method" and what he considered to be the cosmologies associated with it for being rigid and not lending themselves to critique or revision. Instead, he advocated the Popperian method, based on the notion of "falsifiabiltiy," because of its purported flexibility and fluidity.[91] But Sorush went even further and charged that the dialectical method was grounded in the metaphysical approach and as such inappropriate for a valid understanding of the world and social events. In the same book, Sorush criticized a version of the "journey to subjectivity" articulated by Abulhasan Banisadr, who was destined to become the ill-fated first president of the Islamic Republic.[92]

In his other works, Sorush has faulted the notion of a human journey toward a theomorphic subjectivity that constituted one of the important ontological bases of the Islamic revolutionary discourses of the pre-revolutionary era in the 1960s and '70s. In an article originally published in *Kayhan Farhangi* in 1985, and later reprinted in his book *Tafarruj-i Sunʿ* (Promenading Creation), Sorush criticized the notion of humans as a "becoming-toward-perfection."[93] In the same article, obliquely criticizing the expectation of moral perfection by citizens, Sorush blamed the Islamic government for setting unrealistically high moral standards for Iranians. He advised government officials that the first lesson for managing a polity is tolerance for human imperfection.[94] In another essay, he denied that the mission of the prophets was to elevate humans to perfection:

The prophets were not sent to angels and they did not view humans as imperfect angels so that they would transform them to perfect angels. Man is man and he is not to be transformed into an angel.[95]

In yet another essay, Sorush warned against the desire on the part of humans to achieve the status of divinity as the first step toward corruption and evil.[96] He also warned that the application of the notion of human perfectibility and theomorphism to the political sphere might result in particular privileges on the part of some individuals to accord themselves special rights as the vicegerent of God on earth.[97]

Thus, it seems that Sorush's eschewing of the path to metaphysics and theomorphism, which constituted an essential aspect of the discourses of Shari'ati, Motahhari, and even Khomeini, is motivated by the post-revolutionary political developments such as the Islamic state's intolerance for human imperfection, manifested in rigid moral requirements, as well as the elitist monopolization of political power by the clerics. However, one more very significant motivation can be added to Sorush's eschewing of the metaphysical path. The theomorphic "journey toward subjectivity," albeit strongly rooted in Islamic metaphysics, could not develop any further in a religious society such as Iran. Such a development could have been perceived as a challenge to divine subjectivity and would create a strong backlash. Indeed, Davari's discourse is partially the embodiment of this backlash. As a result, realizing that the theomorphic journey to subjectivity could proceed no further in a religious context, Sorush had to take a detour.

Epistemological Detour: Knowledge of Religion as the Object of Subjectivity

In an article published in 1992 in the weekly journal *Kayhan Havai*, Sorush identified the "essence" of modernity as the emergence of certain new types of knowledge that did not exist before.[98] These include modern ethics, sociology of religion, philology, and the study of tradition and ideology. These new branches of knowledge have created an unbridgeable gap between modern humans, on the one hand, and the ancients and the world of "objects," on the other.[99] In this way, Sorush substituted a detour for the direct "metaphysical" discussion of subjectivity by emphasizing epistemological dimensions of the knowing subject. To this subjectivist epistemology Sorush added a hermeneutic element and analogized the external world to a text in need of interpretation:

Analogizing the external world to a written text is an eloquent simile. This means that no text reveals its meaning. It is the mind of the philologist which reads the meaning in the text. Phrases are "hungry" for meanings. They are not pregnant with meaning, albeit they are not satisfied with any food either. Accordingly, the meanings of the phenomenon are not written on them and are not obtained by simple looking. The observer must know the "language" of the world to read and understand. Science and philosophy teach us this language (or languages). And these languages are neither stagnant nor perfect, but in constant transformation.[100]

In a related vein, Sorush argued that our understanding of the world is necessarily historical, because social and human institutions "instead of being fixed by nature are fluid," and we can truly observe them only when we "sit at their ontological stream and watch their flow."[101]

Most significant, in what is probably the most important book he has published, *Qabz va Bast-i Tiʾuriki Shariʾat* (The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of the Shariʾa), Sorush applied this subjectivist approach to knowledge, to our understanding of religion and sacred data:

[Just] as no understanding of nature is ever complete, and always [in need of being] enriched by newer scientific works and the arrival of competing views and historical developments, so are understandings of religion. This applies both to Jurisprudential [*Fiqhī*] views as well as convictions and beliefs [*naẓariyyat-i iʾtiqādī va uṣūlī*]. Muslims' understanding of God, Resurrection, Providence [*qażā va qadar*] reveal some of their meanings in theory and practice [gradually]. Similarly, Jurisprudential views such as the "Governance of the Jurist" and the [Qurʾanic precept of] "Injunction to Do Good and Avoid Evil," etc., reveal their exact meanings in the historical process.[102]

In this interpretive approach to religion, Sorush repeatedly points out that our knowledge of religion is contingent on other human categories of knowledge that emerge historically. He has argued that religious knowledge that is derived from the "Book, the Tradition and the Biography of religious leaders" is a "consumerist" (i.e., receptive) type of knowledge and as such directly influenced by "productive" branches of knowledge (i.e., physical and social sciences as well as philosophy and the humanities). There are no religious types of knowledge that are not contingent on these "external" and human branches of knowledge, and because the latter are always in flux, the former will also change.[103] Further, Sorush has argued, there is a close relationship between modern philosophical anthropology (i.e., modern view of humans) and our knowledge of nature, epistemology, and religious knowledge as they constitute the "parts of a circle."[104] As a result, the style of religiosity is different in each epoch, and religious knowledge is subject to "contraction and expansion" in different individuals and different periods, depending on the changes in human branches of knowledge of the time.[105] The contingency of the religious types of knowledge on other branches of human knowledge, in Sorush's view, even applies to the words of God:

The discovery of the innermost [meanings] of the words of God . . . is directly contingent upon the development of human knowledge [*maʿārif-i basharī*], including the mystical, philosophical, and scientific types of knowledge.[106]

At this point, it is important to note that Sorush makes a crucial distinction between "religion in itself" and our understanding or "knowledge of religion." The essence of "religion in itself," which is a Divine creation, is constant and not subject to change. But our understanding or comprehension of religion, which leads to religious knowledge, is a human phenomenon and as such subject to change and interpretation.[107]

In fact, it seems that Sorush has made a distinction between the two categories along the same lines of Kantian distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal knowledge. In this distinction, "religion is sacred and heavenly, but knowledge of religion is mundane and human. What remains fixed is religion, but what changes is religious knowledge."[108] This approach, Sorush claims, allows the reconciliation between what is "eternal," and sacred, on the one hand, and what is changeable and profane, on the other hand, which would result in the revival of Islam and its harmony with the (modern) age.[109] Thus, Sorush claims that his theory of "contraction and

expansion" may reconcile tradition and change, the "earth" and the "heavens" as well as "reason" and "revelation."[110] He has repeatedly described religion in itself as "silent" (*ṣāmit*) and in need of human interpretation, which constitutes our knowledge of religion. He has even gone as far as to claim that what the first Shiʾi imam, Ali, understood of God could be different from our contemporary understanding of the Divine Essence.[111]

Based on these theoretical constructs, Sorush has advocated the notion of a "dynamic jurisprudence" (*fiqh-i puyā*), as opposed to the traditional jurisprudence of the conservatives. In his view, only this dynamic jurisprudence can provide solutions to some of the practical problems that the Islamic government has faced in its encounter with modernity—problems that are rooted in the clerical state's conflict with the modern juridical sphere, economics, culture, arts, media, and so on.[112] Relying on this epistemological approach to subjectivity, Sorush has attempted a reconciliation between religiosity and *rawshanfikrī* (lit., "intellectualism"), a code for the cultural aspect of modern human subjectivity and moral autonomy as agency. In his view, a religious *rawshanfikri*—an oxymoron from the viewpoint of the conservatives and some radical secularists—is possible, considering the epistemological dichotomy and the simultaneous dialogue between the inner essence of religion and human understanding of it.[113]

It is my contention that what Sorush has been striving for in his theoretical efforts is nothing less than an epistemological subjectivity in which the human subject treats the "religious knowledge" as the object of subjectivity. In eschewing metaphysics and theomorphically grounded subjectivity, for the reasons explained earlier, Sorush, for the most part has avoided direct refererence to the concept of human vicegerency or to the Islamic concept of the human as God's successor on earth. Instead of such a direct approach to human subjectivity, Sorush has emphasized the Qurʾanic grounding of human vicegerency in "knowledge."[114] Human subjectivity perceived in terms of the agent of knowledge rather than an actor at large, which may be derived from the theomorphic approach, is less conducive to the idea of a human subjectivity that may challenge the divine power.

The fact that Sorush does not follow up the "metaphysical" path to subjectivity that his predecessors Shariʿati, Mutahhari, and even Khomeini developed earlier, does not mean his discourse stays clear of the notion of human subjectivity. To be sure, he rarely refers to Qurʾanic verses for this purpose, but instead invokes the mystical tradition, especially the poetry of Rumi (d. 1273) to achieve this goal.[115] In fact, in some of his writings, Sorush displays a vacillation between positing and negating human subjectivity, similar to what was the characteristic of the mediated subjectivity of the revolutionary discourse of his predecessors. He goes through many of the vacillations regarding human free will versus necessitarianism and other related issues that characterized the discourses of his revolutionary predecessors.[116] Yet his ambivalence and oscillations are much more subdued than those of his predecessors, and in his argument against Davari, he posits an ontology of human subjectivity more or less unequivocally.[117]

Sorush's methodology, and his discourse in general, by his own admission is much indebted to Karl Popper. Sorush finds the "probabilistic" modern science that he reads in Popper much more compatible with the principles of a democratic society and

polity than the "absolutist philosophy" of ancients.[118] Given his training in philosophy and the history of science, it seems natural that Sorush's detour to subjectivity passes through the realm of modern sciences. For this reason, we need to examine Sorush's discourse with regard to its relationship with modern sciences and positivism.

Social Construction of Probabilistic and Intersubjective Science

Utilizing what he considers to be the contingent nature of Popper's notion of "falsifiability" as the validating cornerstone of modern science, Sorush has advanced a view of science that is much more "probabilistic" than positivistic and absolute. In this regard, he has, for example, criticized Marxist groups in Iran for the rigidity of their thought based on dialectical materialism and proposed an epistemology grounded in the notion of Popperian falsifiability.[119] Sorush has dismissed the charges of positivism attributed to the Popperian methodology by stating that what constitutes positivism in traditional scientific methodology is the insistence on the notion of "verifiability" and induction, both of which the Popperian methodology has disavowed and overcome.[120]

Sorush has found in a scientific methodology a means to resist the fanaticism and obscurantism of some of the religious conservative forces who gained power after the Islamic revolution. Invoking the European experience in fighting religious fanaticism, Sorush has warned that

the story of Galileo should not be repeated in the Islamic Republic. . . . We do not want what happened to Galileo [to] take place in this country and under the aegis of the Islamic Republic. That means we do not want religion to be an impediment to science.[121]

Sorush has warned against those conservative elements who, in the name of struggle against "cultural imperialism," have tried to stamp out humanistic culture from Iran since the revolution through such desperate measures as closing the universities and waging war against all modern foreign and domestic cultural products, such as video tapes and satellite reception. In this respect, Sorush has cautioned the Iranians not to deprive themselves of the fruits of the achievements of others:

[W]e do not wish to deprive ourselves from the achievements of others. . . . [W]e believe that the [fruits] of humanity's thought are valuable and needed by all of humanity, unless through critique some of these [thoughts] may be falsified. Therefore, the rule should not be to close the doors upon ourselves, not using other's thoughts. On the contrary, the principle is to not deprive ourselves of others' thoughts.[122]

Even "human sciences" cannot be divided into Eastern or Western and dismissed because of their origins:

Our first thought about human sciences is that we should reflect on those sciences, instead of writing them off merely because they come from the East or the West. If someone believes that "thought" is dependent upon geography or historical periodization, s/he does not understand thought. Thought makes history.[123]

Sorush's insistence on the scientific method also emanates from his efforts to reduce the over-ideologization of most spheres of social life after the Islamic Revolution. By maintaining an unbridgeable gap between science and valuation, Sorush has attempted to promote the purported neutrality of science to remedy the heavy-handed reliance

on ideology in post-revolutionary social sciences in Iran.[124] Aware of the heightened sensitivity of the religious elements to the secular culture of modernity, and at the same time realizing the indispensability of modern human branches of knowledge, Sorush seems to have taken refuge in the putative neutrality of natural sciences.[125]

Given Sorush's educational background and his early socialization in the positivistic cultural milieu of the Pahlavi era, it is not surprising that at times he had displayed some strong gravitation toward positivism.[126] Nevertheless, Sorush's general tendency has been to distance himself from positivism while maintaining a strong confidence in natural sciences. He has done so, as we just saw, by incorporating Popper's notion of "falsifiability" into the methodology of science, as well as by subscribing to a conception of science as a social construction. For this purpose, in his book *Tafarruj-i Sun'*, Sorush referred to Wittgenstein's dictum regarding the impossibility of a private language and the dialogical, social, and participatory nature of language.[127] He also cited Peter Winch and supported his view of the intersubjective construction of social norms and institutions:

Peter Winch believes that man's life is entirely comprised of conventions and agreements that he creates, consents to and practices, or cancels them and replaces them with other norms. Social institutions are nothing but social conventions. . . . [These conventions include categories] such as marriage, ownership, "superintendence" [*riyasat*], honor, insult, voting, punishment, reward, etc. One of the most obvious and most visible conventions is language itself and as we saw if people have private languages . . . social life becomes impossible. Language is a convention that is a social construct. . . . Language is a paradigm and a model for Mr. Winch and he believes that understanding in society and social behavior is similar to [the process of] understanding in a language. That means the model for social sciences must be language.[128]

Based on these observations, Sorush has extrapolated these intersubjective premises to the natural sciences and declared that "[t]he objectivity of science depends on its being public."[129] In the same book, Sorush referred to the discursive nature of the construction of science and its "social identity." "What exists only in the mind of an isolated thinker," Sorush declared, "is not science. . . . Science must lift the veil from its face and expose itself to the judgment and critique of others. What constitutes science is the product of public critique and understanding as well as the meanings given to terms by the scientific community."[130] Based on these premises, Sorush has advocated the free exchange of different viewpoints and ideas that may be conceived as an alternative for the attainment of "Truth"—a proposition quite different from what Davari and his cohorts consider "Truth" to be—with significant social and political implications.[131]

The Secular Ramifications of Sorush's Thought

Sorush's discourse and his circuitous path to posit a form of human subjectivity entails certain potential for secularization that needs to be examined in some detail. In his book *Rawshanfikri va Dindari*, Sorush discussed Ali Shari'ati's work and its effect on the secularization of religion. As if addressing his own critics, Sorush asked rhetorically how Shari'ati would not be positively affected by the ideas of Voltaire, Descartes, and Sartre, given his familiarity with the obscurantism of the Church in medieval Europe.[132] Interestingly, this observation seems also to apply to the disenchanting

effects of his own writings. As we saw earlier, Sorush argued that religious knowledge is contingent on other branches of knowledge that are available in a given period. Based on this, he implied the recognition of a secular cosmology embodied in modern philosophical anthropology and sociology as the standard to validate religious cosmologies and the search for a religiosity that is "attentive" to human needs.[133] He has even gone as far as to claim that

values and responsibilities (good and evil) . . . and conventions (language, customs, etc.) are characterized [by the fact that] they do not inhere in Truth, and change by human decision. They are not universal or eternal. . . . [T]hey are not true or false.[134]

In a similar way, Sorush has viewed the notion of Divine Providence in terms of human subjectivity:

History is not dependent on an "external sphere." No hand from outside diverts it, and there is no [external] force over history. This is true even with regard to a Divine view of history. . . . God's actions are realized through the agency of the natural dispositions of beings, or [in case of humans,] their wills. . . . Men have lived in history as their humanness has necessitated, and what has occurred in history has been natural and there has been no cause except men's humanness giving rise to historical events.[135]

In his more recent articles, published in magazines such as the monthly *Kiyan*, Sorush has cast a shadow of doubt on hitherto absolute and determined categories such as ethics. In an article in *Kiyan* published in 1994, Sorush claimed that absolute ethics belongs only to the gods, not to the human sphere. Ethics, he maintained, is not an exact and systemic science and will never reach an ideal precision and rigor.[136] Even if we assume that good and evil are absolute, we cannot determine what course of action the actor must take at difficult ethical crossroads.[137] Furthermore, ethics is as subject to temporal and spatial consideration as other categories of knowledge and thus, its injunctions are not absolute and eternal.[138] As an important thesis in this article, Sorush stated that "ethics, therefore, is contingent on life and must befit it, not *vice-versa*."[139] In the article, Sorush also assailed the "transcendental" and absolutist ethics of the revolutionary period and its tragic consequences. As an alternative, he has proposed a conceptualization of ethics based on "exceptive" and fluid principles.[140]

One of the most important concepts that Sorush has repeatedly thematized is the notion of "temporalizing religion" (*aṣrī kardan-i dīn*). Based on his earlier notion of the contingency of religious knowledge on other secular and human branches of knowledge of the period, Sorush has argued not only that life and the "age" should become religious, but also that religion must become temporal and humanized, an idea that seems inevitable only in the aftermath of the revolution of subjectivity.[141]

Expansion of Political Philosophy

There is no doubt that Sorush has been one of the key contributors to the expansion of the horizons of political philosophy in post-revolutionary Iran, despite his (relatively minor) ontological vacillations.[142] However, in his political discourse, Sorush has been even more consistent in his support for political democracy. Sorush has exposed the totalitarian tendencies in the discourse of his religious opponents and criticized the moral sclerosis that seized Iran after the revolution. In this respect,

Sorush has warned against the populist rhetoric inherent in a discourse like Davari's and championed the cause of "critical reason" against what he deems to be the demagoguery of "mass society."[143]

The cornerstone of Sorush's political discourse seems to be the notion of "faith," a concept that was elaborated on by Shari'ati also as the foundation of political action by the collectivity. Unlike Shari'ati, however, Sorush sees faith in political thought as an affair, and a prerogative, of the individual. In an article published in *Kiyan*, Sorush argued that the faith of an individual can be possible only if she or he is free to choose. Consequently, in an argument that closely parallels the Kantian concept of moral autonomy of the individual as the sine qua non for subjectivity, Sorush contended that faith and freedom of the individual constitute two inseparable categories that can lay the foundations of a religious democracy:

The faith of each individual is the exclusive experience and the "private property" of that individual. Each of us finds faith as an individual, as we die as an individual. There may be collective rituals, but there is no collective faith. . . . The realm of faith is the realm of resurrection, and in resurrection people come as individuals. . . . True faith is based on individuality and freedom. . . . The foundation of religious community is consented faith. [Moreover], not only can faith not be forced; it cannot be homogenized, either, and to the extent that people have different personalities, faiths are also variegated and nuanced.[144]

It is very significant that, compared with other contemporary religious intellectuals in Iran such as Muhamed Mujtahid Shabistari and Muhsin Kadivar, Sorush is much more forthcoming and explicit in recognizing the centrality of the individual and in thematizing it in his discourse.[145]

Sorush makes a distinction between liberal democracy and secular society, on the one hand, and a "religious democracy" with pluralistic principles, on the other. In a liberal democracy, according to him, the freedom of "inclinations" (*amyāl*) and desires is the foundation of pluralism and secular society, but a "religious democracy" may be built on the basis of freedom of faith.[146] In another article published in *Kiyan*, Sorush identified one of the main tasks of a democratic religious state to be the protection of the freedom of faith and creation of a social condition conducive to such freedom.[147]

Congruent with these premises, Sorush has placed a special emphasis on the idea of human freedom in the more overtly political aspect of this discourse:

Freedom is prior to everything. I have recently come across some speakers in our society who, in the way of criticism and reproach, have said, "[F]or some [i.e., for Sorush] freedom is a foundation." Yes, why shouldn't freedom be a foundation? Even if we accept religion, submissiveness, and obedience, we do so because we have freely chosen them.[148]

Sorush has grounded his notion of human freedom in thought and reason. Thus, he argues that "emotionally" based action leads to the surrender of the subjectivity of the individual to the "other." It may be true, Sorush has argued, that reason might engender antagonism and conflict, but its principle outcome is independence, and that prevents the surrender of one's subjectivity to the other.[149] In this respect, Sorush has approached some of the Frankfurt School's analysis of fascism, and he has even referred to the notion of "escape from freedom" by Erich Fromm. [150] This position has

led Sorush to criticize the power of ideology in post-revolutionary Iran and recommend freedom of convictions and beliefs:

Freedom of beliefs is the legitimate offspring of epistemological falsifiability. . . . The difference between the modern and the old world is the difference between certainty [of conviction] and uncertainty [of freedom], and this difference led to the humans' transcending ideology in the modern world, whereas in the old world, convictions were always prior to humans. Humans were both killed and killed for their convictions, but today people are not victims of intolerance because of their convictions which is considered against human rights.[151]

From early on in his career, Sorush has criticized the concept of "Governance of the Jurist," at first obliquely, but later increasingly openly and directly. In a series of articles published in *Kiyan*, Sorush revealed the incompatibility of the concept and institution of clerical rule enshrined in the notion of the "Governance of the Jurist" with the idea of popular sovereignty. He pointed out that, because the Governing Jurist derives his right to rule from God, not much is left for the populace in the arena of governing. "At most" he wrote, people's role is "to discover who has this right [to rule]."[152] Sorush has also appealed to the constitution of the Islamic Republic, which has allowed for the convening of an "Assembly of Experts" charged with overseeing the selection of the "Governing Jurist"—and, in case of the latter's incompetence, his dismissal. He has argued that because the Assembly of Experts is elected by popular vote, and because the "Governing Jurist," as the highest source of power in the Islamic Republic, derives his legitimacy from this assembly, the sovereignty of the Iranian people is guaranteed, if not directly, at least implicitly, by the constitution. And once people's sovereignty is recognized, it cannot be partial, and thus full sovereignty, even over the position of the Governing Jurist (*Vali-i Faqih*), belongs to the people.[153] On this basis, Sorush has posited the notion of popular sovereignty overriding that of the Governing Jurist:

If you have the right to oversee the government, it can easily be demonstrated that you also have the right to govern . . . As soon as the right is released it will occupy all the space. Without a doubt the foundation of the democratic government is that people constitute the "principle" in it. That means people are the creator, the critic and observer of the government.[154]

In connection with his conceptualization of a religious democratic state, Sorush has emphasized the concept of mutual rights and responsibilities. He has observed that, in contrast to traditional society, where the emphasis is on responsibilities instead of rights, in a democratic society rights and mutual rights as responsibilities are stressed. Further, as Imam Ali has demonstrated, Sorush has argued, mutual rights are most significant in the relationship between the citizens and the state.[155]

As we saw earlier, Sorush has posited the notion of a religious democracy that is distinct from liberal democracy, a distinction that is grounded in the putative differences between freedom of faith and freedom of "inclination," respectively. Both societies are founded on respect for individual freedom, but in the former, freedom derives from the free choice of faith, and in the latter from liberty in inclination and desire. Accordingly, Sorush has associated "liberalism" with lack of faith and a society in which religion is deliberately put under siege, whereby, to establish human rights, the "rights of God" are abandoned.[156]

By contrast, in a religious democratic society, both human rights and the rights of

God are respected.[157] It is significant that, in his theorizing on the concept of a religious democratic state, Sorush has asserted that, in contrast to some Islamic thinkers' discussion of democracy, he would not start from Islamic principle such as *shurā* (Consultation), *Ijmā'* (Consensus), or *Bay'a* (Contract). Instead, he would ground his theory of religious democracy in such concepts as human rights, justice, and delimitation of power.[158] Moreover, in his scheme for religious democracy, "reason" that is socially and intersubjectively grounded, and therefore fluid, constitutes the foundations on which this democratic religious state would operate. As Sorush has put it in his rather arcane language:

[A]n unjust rule is not religious and the foundation of justice is the fulfillment of the needs of the people and realization of their rights and elimination of discrimination and oppression. Therefore, there is a stable connection between justice and human rights . . . and since justice is an extra-religious category . . . therefore the discovering of just methods of government, distribution and limitation of power and the areas of human rights will primarily have their roots in reason and not religion. . . . [A]s a result of the emergence of reason, that is "fluid social reason" ['*aql Jam'i sayyal*] . . . the road for the appearance of an epistemological pluralism, which is the very foundation of democracy, would be paved.[159]

In a democratic religious society based on these principles, Sorush has argued, there is no need for revolution and violence to limit the powers of the rulers, correct their policies, and select and dismiss them. Separation of powers, universal education, empowerment, de-monopolization of the media, freedom of speech, existence of different free associations, checks and balances on power, freedom of political parties, public elections, and a Parliament—all constitute mechanisms for achieving those goals. Thus, Sorush has declared, democracy is not incompatible with religion:

The faithful abandoning their faiths and total laicization of religion and the undermining of its Divine foundation is not necessitated by democracy. . . . What is incompatible with democracy is forced religiosity or punishment of "a-religiosity" and if these are, in some people's opinion, permissible in the "Theocratic" [*Fiqhī*] government, in a democratic religious state, they are impossible and undesirable.[160]

Despite Sorush's insistence on the distinction between liberal democracy and religious democracy, there seems to be little difference between this type of democratic polity and any other. Sorush himself seems to have recognized this when he stated that, in his conceptualization of a religious state, "because people are religious, the state is religious and not because the state is religious people must become religious."[161] Furthermore, as far as the form of this type of state is concerned, Sorush himself has suggested that it is not different from other democratic states, and the only difference is that, only because the society is religious, therefore, "the state machinery would be in the service of the faithful."[162] In what may be surprising to some, Sorush has alluded to the United States as a possible model for a religious democratic society by referring to the notion of American democracy as discussed by de Tocqueville, where even though religion and politics are separate, religion has been a guiding principle in American society and polity and where ethics of universality found in religion has played a mediating role between the freedom of individual subjectivity and the rights of the collectivity embodied in democracy.[163]

CONCLUSION

Ayatollah Khomeini, Ali Shari'ati, and Ayatollah Motahhari shared a characteristic ambivalence toward human agency in their philosophical approach and a consequent vacillation in regard to the foundations of a civil society in their political views. As a result of this vacillation, the Islamic revolutionary discourse of the 1960s and 1970s in Iran has been characterized by a constant and schizophrenic shifting of ground between a confirmation and negation of human subjectivity as the foundation of right-bearing individual as modern citizen. There was also a constant oscillation between individual subjectivity and a collective notion of subjectivity, accompanied, on the socio-political level, by a constant positing and negating of the possibility of political citizenship.

The post-revolutionary "Islamic" discourses of Sorush and Davari can be characterized as the bifurcation of this ambivalence, resulting in a bipolar view of subjectivity and of citizenship in the period after the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Davari, as the representative of a strong anti-modern trend, has explicitly called for the negation of human subjectivity, with important implications for the maintenance of the institution of the "Governance of the Jurist" and hindrance of the development of civil society. The only meaningful concession that Davari has made to modernity is his advocacy of the positivist aspect of modernity as mere adoption of technology. The adoption of merely positivistic aspects of modernity and rejection of the larger context of modern world in which human and citizenship rights, based on a notion of universal human subjectivity, are grounded seems to be very much in the agenda of an influential faction among the conservative political forces in Iran's post-revolutionary power politics. Responding to popular demands for economic development and social and political rights, especially after the second decade since the 1979 revolution, the conservative forces in post-revolutionary Iran are forced to make concessions with regard to some aspects of the modern world. They have chosen to accommodate the positivistic aspects of modernity as science and technology, and the discourse of Davari as the most significant and profound thinker among this group clearly reflects this turn of events.[164]

Sorush's discourse, in contrast, is much more in tune with individual subjectivity in a very subtle manner that is conducive to a notion of intersubjectivity and its political embodiment as universal citizenship. This is not to say that the intellectual trend associated with Sorush does not relapse into the contradictions of ambivalence toward subjectivity once in a while, but compared with the vacillations exhibited by its intellectual parent, its own fluctuations are much more subdued. As the years have passed, Sorush has elaborated and expanded the element of subjectivity found in the discourses of Shari'ati, Mutahhari, Khomeini, and other Islamic thinkers and has arrived at what seems to be the threshold of modern democratic principles. The notion of the individual as the carrier of human subjectivity and its corollary, the right-bearing citizen, is indeed a novelty in Islamic discourses in Iran, and its dissemination and universalization constitute the philosophical foundations of modernity and democracy in that country. One can easily see the strong influence of Sorush's thought in more overt political discourses of a reform movement in Iran that is engaged in a struggle to forge the rudiments of a democratic polity with a local idiom. Sorush is a political author, and the evolution of his thought seems far from having reached an end. Yet

his discourse seems to bear the promise of setting the stage for achieving subjectivity at a universal level without, one must hope, falling into the trap of positivistic subjectivity characterizing Iranian modernization since the eclipse of the achievements of the Constitutional Revolution of the turn of the century.

Since the revolution of 1979 it is often assumed that Iran has rejected basic tenets of modern civilization. There is no doubt that, since the revolution, the Iranians have experienced much pain and suffering, and the Islamic regime has been responsible for much of it. Moreover, it is true that Iranians have jettisoned some of the more visible aspects of modernity in the revolutionary period. However, they have allowed other aspects of modernity to enter the Iranian consciousness that were not easily noticeable at first. It is often thought that the reformist movement in Iran represents a complete break with the revolutionary period and has little in common with the early impulses of the revolution. Yet the notion of mediated subjectivity and the contradiction that it embodies explains how the Islamic Revolution in Iran contained important aspects of modernity while simultaneously rejecting these very aspects. The post-revolutionary period is witnessing the bifurcation of this contradiction, where the forces that negate modernity and those that reinforce it are separated and coming into opposition to each other.

The significance of this process lies in the fact that the modernity that is developing in Iran has a very strong local origin, and it has affected a large number of Iranians who otherwise would not have been much touched by imported varieties of modernity. The psychic transformation and "spiritual" mobilization that the Iranian masses have experienced in the past two decades has created a populace that is beginning to consider itself invested with rights of various type. This transformation toward universal subjectivity is the first step toward the creation of a citizenry that is conscious of its individual, collective, and human rights and demands them. The significance of the development of essential tenets of modernity and of the democratic ethos from an Islamic context cannot be over-emphasized, because it has the potential to carry to large numbers of individuals into the modern world.

The discourses of Sorush and others like him, such as Muhammad Mujtahid Shabistari, represent the expansion of the subjectivist elements in mediated subjectivity without emphasizing the theomorphic approach that characterized the thought of their revolutionary predecessors. The further development of the logic of the theomorphic approach could have brought the process of modernity into serious trouble in a profoundly religious society, because human subjectivity could easily be perceived as challenging divine subjectivity and sovereignty. The subtle detour that both Sorush and Shabistari have taken toward an epistemological approach to subjectivity saves them from this possibility. Another very important feature of this approach is that it is much more conducive to the principle of intersubjectivity. The epistemological approach involves a hermeneutics that places the human in a position of subjectivity by treating the text as the "object." However, because the text, sacred or otherwise, always presupposes an author who is a subject, the relationship that holds between the two sides of the hermeneutical process is not that of subject–object but that of subject–subject. The hermeneutical approach that Sorush and his colleagues are introducing entails an intersubjectivity that is much needed in the further development of the discourse of modernity in Iran, which seems to be ready to enter a new phase in its long and tortuous quest to cross the threshold of the modern world.

NOTES

[1]Several factors can be recounted to provide historical and social contexts to explain this turn of events. Schematically, these factors can be summarized in terms of the socio-political changes that have taken place in Iran since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The disenchantment of the lay intellectuals with the Islamic ideology soon after the completion of political and cultural dominance by the clerical establishment in the early 1980s prepared the background for the emergence of different discourses and the evolution of religious discourse. The total mobilization for the war with Iraq (1980–88) required popular participation in the social and political affairs of the country, which the clerics had to encourage during the revolution and extend during the war. This participation created popular demand for, and an expectation of, more democratic participation that could not but be recognized and articulated in some of the post-revolutionary discourses. The factionalism among the clerical elite ruling the country has also contributed to the development of discourses after the revolution. The economic hardship that has visited Iran since the revolution has also had an impact on the cultural sphere. The faltering economy caused by the war, mismanagement, Western sanctions, and reduction in oil revenues has had cultural consequences, chief among them a desire for economic development that has been expressed by most classes and social strata. This in turn has generated a national discussion of the issue of modern technology in a society mobilized by religious ideology. The paired issues of economic development and modern technology have necessitated the broaching of the larger cultural context of modernity, especially the notions of democracy and freedom and their affinity with religion and religious institutions. For the perception of the necessary link between economic development and the larger context of democracy, see, for example, Siyyid Mohammad Khatami, *Tawsiʾih-i siyasi*, *Tawsiʾih-i Iqtisadi va Amniyat* (Political Development, Economic Development, and Security) (Tehran: Tarh-i Naw, 2000).

The complexities of social life in post-revolutionary Iran have been further increased by three other factors. One has been the rapid and manifold expansion of urban areas accompanied by the cultural changes peculiar to city-dwelling. Life in the city, with its impersonal relations, the rule of the money nexus, and fast pace, has been exacerbated in Iran by post-revolutionary economic difficulties, resulting in a changing cultural ethos that demands adjustment to the realities of modern urban life. Second is the rapid growth of the number of young in the population. The vast proportional increase in the youth profile in an increasingly dense urban setting has brought about a challenge posed by young people, not least by young women, to the archaic and atavistic cultural policies pursued by the Islamic regime. The effects of "globalization"—especially its influences on the cultural sphere through the short-wave radio, video, satellite television, and the Internet, and consequently on socio-political discourse—has been considerable in Iran. For further historical and social contexts of Iranian intellectual development in general, as well as post-revolutionary developments, see Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996); Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); and Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourses and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[2]As early as the mid-1990s, Eric Hooglund, a keen observer of Iran, noticed Sorush's wide social base among different strata. See Eric Hooglund, "The Pulse of Iran," *Middle East Insight* 11, 5, (1995): 41. In this regard, Afshin Matin-asgari has correctly identified Sorush as "Iran's leading intellectual dissident of the 1990s": see Afshin Matin-asgari, "Abdolkarim Sorush and the Secularization of Islamic Thought in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 30, 1–2, (1997): 100.

[3]For the views of some of the other people who contribute to this discourse, see, for example, Ataʿullah Karimi, *Faqr-i Tarikhnigari: Barrasi-i Intiqadi Maqalat-i Qabz va Bast-i Shariʿat az Doktor Surush* (Poverty of Historicism: A Critical Review of the Essays of Contraction and Expansion by Doctor Sorush) (Tehran: ʾAlame Tabatabai, 1990); Sadiq Larijani, *Qabz va Bast dar Qabz va Basti Digar* (Contraction and Expansion in Another Contraction and Expansion) (Tehran: Markaz-i Tarjumi va Nashr-i Kitab, 1993).

[4]Matin-asgari, "Abdolkarim Sorush," 97.

[5]In this article I intentionally refrain from using a compare-and-contrast model to represent Davari's and Sorush's ideas. Instead, I discuss their views separately. Otherwise, because of the complexity of the issues involved, the discussion would be overwhelming and confusing.

[6]See Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals*, 156–65, and *idem*, "The Encounter of Post-Revolutionary Thought

in Iran with Hegel, Heidegger and Popper," in *Cultural Transitions in the Middle East*, ed. Serif Mardin (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

[7]See Farzin Vahdat, "Metaphysical Foundations of Islamic Revolutionary Discourse in Iran: Vacillations on Human Subjectivity," *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, no. 14 (1999).

[8]The most important work on the contradictory nature of modernity and its emancapatory and dominating character is still found in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

[9]On the dialectical relationship between the two categories of subjectivity and universality and Hegel's objection to Kant's "formality" and his own attempt at a substantive synthesis between them, see Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). See also Lawrence E. Cahoone, *The Dilemma of Modernity: Philosophy, Culture and Anti-Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); David Kolb, *The Critique of Pure Modernity: Hegel, Heidegger and After* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and Fred Dallmayr, *G. W. F. Hegel*: *Modernity and Politics* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1993).

[10]For a very helpful discussion of the contemporary debates about the efforts to embed the unbridled subject of modernity without compromising the freedom of subjectivity, see Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), and idem, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[11]See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol.1. Reason and the Rationalization of the Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), and idem, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. 2. Lifeworld and System: Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987). For a discussion of the theory of generalized citizenship at the political level, see idem, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

[12]The Qur'anic concept of the human as God's vicegerent on earth that explicitly informs the discourse of Shari'ati and Motahhari— Khomeini does not refer to it as explicitly and frequently as the others—also constitutes an important theme among other Islamic thinkers in Iran such as Mihdi Bazargan and Ayatollah Mahmud Taliqani. For an analysis of their discourse, see Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993); H. E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[13]For other personalities and groups contributing to this trend, see Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals*, 156–75.

[14]Riza Davari-Ardakani, "Rahburdha-i Jadid-i Falsafih: Guftugu ba Doktor Riza Davari-Ardakani" (New Paths to Philosophy: Interview with Doctor Riza Davari-Arkadani), *Kayhan Farhangi* 12, 124 (1996), 7.

[15]Ibid., 8.

[16]Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals*, 158.

[17]Riza Davari-Ardakani, *Falsafih Chist?* (What Is Philosophy?) (Tehran: Anjuman-i Islami-i Hikmat va Falsafih-i Iran,1980), xiix. For Heidegger's views on technology that inspired Fardid's and, in turn, Davari's views on the issue, see Heidegger's famous essay, "The Question Concerning Technology," in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

[18]Davari-Ardakani, *Falsafih Chist?*

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid., 59.

[21]Ibid., xiix.

[22]Riza Davari-Ardakani, *Falsafih dar Buhran* (Philosophy in Crisis) (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1994), 369.

[23]For a good analysis of Heidegger's overall views on modernity, see Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *Heidegger and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). For Heidegger's notion of human forgetfulness toward Being, see for example, Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 43–44. For a more accessible version of some of Heidegger's ideas, see his interview with the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel*, "Only a God Can Save Us: *Der Spiegel*'s Interview with Martin Heidegger," in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993).

[24]Davari-Ardakani, *Falsafih Chist?*, xiiiv.

[25]Idem, *Falsafih dar Buhran*, 65.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., 67.

[28]Idem, *Falsafih Chist?*, 49.

[29]Ibid., xxi.

[30]Idem, *Inqilab-i Islami va Vaz'-i Kununi 'Alam* (The Islamic Revolution and the Current Conditions of the World) (Tehran: Markaz-e Farhangi-i 'Alame Tabatabai, 1982), 58.

[31]Idem, *Falsafih Chist?*, 96

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid., 83. The following passage from Heidegger can be viewed as representative of how he thought the historical process of the development of Western metaphysics has objectified nature: "The essent [whatever is, nature] does not vanish, but the world turns away. The essent is no longer asserted (i.e., preserved as such). Now it is merely found ready-made; it is datum. The end result is no longer that which is impressed into limits (i.e., placed in its form); it is merely finished and as such available to everyone, already-there, no longer embodying any world—now man does as he pleases with what is available. The essent becomes an object, either to be beheld (view, image) or to be acted upon (product and calculation). The original world-making power, *physis*, degenerates into a prototype to be copied and imitated. Nature becomes a special field, differentiated from art and everything that can be fashioned according to plan. The original emergence and standing of energies, the *phainesthai*, or appearance in the great sense of a world epiphany, becomes a visibility of things that are already there and can be pointed out. The eye, the vision, which originally projected the project into potency, becomes a mere looking at or looking over or gaping at. Vision has degenerated into mere optics (Schopenhauer's 'world eye'—pure cognition . . .). True, there are still essents. There are more of them, and they make more of a stir than ever. But being has gone out of them. The essent has been made into an 'object' of endless and variegated busyness, and only thereby has it retained an appearance of its permanence"; Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven. Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), 62–63.

[34]Ibid., 129.

[35]Ibid., 153.

[36]Davari-Ardakani, *Inqilab-i Islami*, 28.

[37]Ibid., 149–51.

[38]Ibid., 165.

[39]Ibid. The best source for Hegel's idea of the master–slave dialectic is G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). The best elaboration and interpretation of Hegel's notion of the master–slave dialectic is still Alexander Kojeve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969).

[40]Ibid., 171.

[41]Riza Davari-Ardakani, *Nasionalism, Hakimiyat-i Milli va Istiqlal* (Nationalism, National Sovereignty and Independence) (Isfahan: Porsesh, 1985), 95.

[42]Idem, *Inqilab-i Islami*, 110. For a good illustration of Heinrich Heine's life and thought, see Jeffry L. Sammons, *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[43]Davari-Ardakani, *Falsafih Chist?*, xxi.

[44]Davari's reading of Hegel's philosophy is relatively sophisticated, but he almost entirely overlooks Hegel's efforts to overcome the ontological problems of subjectivity and modernity: see Davari-Ardakani, *Falsafih Chist?*, section on Hegel.

[45]Ibid., 206.

[46]Ibid., 225.

[47]Ibid., 153–54.

[48]Ibid., 232.

[49]Idem, *Falsafih dar Buhran*, 56–57.

[50]See, for example, idem, *Inqilab-i Islami*, chap. 2, and idem, *Falsafih dar Buhran*, 53–65.

[51]Idem, *Falsafih Chist?*, 245–46.

[52]Ibid., 254.

[53]Ibid., 270.

[54]Ibid., 289–90.

[55]Ibid., 298.

[56]Ibid., 299.

[57]Ibid., xxii–xxiii.

[58]Ibid., xxiii.

[59]Idem, *Inqilab-i Islami*, 122.

[60]Ibid., 131.

[61]Ibid., 210–11.

[62]Ibid., 263.

[63]Idem, "Rahburdha-i Jadid-i Falsafih," 142–43.

[64]Idem, *Inqilab-i Islami*, 211.

[65]Ibid., 237.

[66]Idem, *Falsafih dar Buhran*, 99.

[67]Ibid., 141–42.

[68]Ibid., 137.

[69]Ibid., 18.

[70]Idem, *Inqilab-i Islami*, 100.

[71]Ibid., 84.

[72]Ibid., 94.

[73]Ibid., 96.

[74]Ibid., 99.

[75]Ibid., 52.

[76]Ibid., 139–40.

[77]Ibid., 172–74.

[78]Ibid., 175.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid., 254.

[81]Ibid., 174–76. Other proponents of anti-subjectivist discourse have expressed views on the doctrine of the "Governance of Jurist" that are much less sophisticated than those of Davari. Shahriyar Zarshinas, for example, has unequivocally supported the notion of political rule by the clerics without discussing the possibility of despotism in his discourse: see Shahriyar Zarshinas, *Jami'i-i Baz, Akharin Utupi Tamaddun-i Gharb* (Open Society, the Final Utopia of the Western Civilization) (Tehran: Sazman-i Tablighat-i Islami, 1992), 51–52.

[82]Davari-Ardakani, *Nasionalism*, 22.

[83]Ibid., 20.

[84]Ibid., 163.

[85]Ibid., 42.

[86]Ibid., 23.

[87]Idem, *Falsafih dar Buhran*, 53–54.

[88]Ibid., 484.

[89]Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals*, 158.

[90]Ibid., 158–59.

[91]On "falsifiability" as the proper methodological approach to science, see Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Hutchinson, 1959). See also C. G. F. Simikin, *Popper's Views on Natural and Social Sciences* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993).

[92]Abdulkarim Sorush, *Naqdi va Daramadi bar Tazad-i Diyaliktiki* (A Critique and Introduction to Dialectical Contradiction) (Tehran: Sirat, 1994 [1978]), 140. "Journey to subjectivity," closely related to the notion of mediated subjectivity, refers to the metaphysical foundations of a theomorphic transcendental movement. It is often formulated as an ontological movement, or journey, from our "lowly" base in nature and matter to the realm of perfection akin to that of the divinity. It informs the discourses of many of Islamic revolutionary thinkers in Iran and approximates modern human subjectivity by assigning divine attributes to humans, but it usually ends in the annihilation of the human subject in the divinity.

[93]Idem, *Tafarruj-i Sunʿ* (Promenading Creation) (Tehran: Intisharat-i Sorush, 1987), 263.

[94]Ibid., 265–66.

[95]Idem, *Hikmat va Ma'ishat* (Philosophy and Life) (Tehran: Şerat, 1984), 62.

[96]Ibid., 158.

[97]Ibid., 171.

[98]Idem, "Paraduks-i Mudirnizm" (The Paradox of Modernism), *Kayhan Havai* 12, 275 (1992), 12.

[99]Ibid.

[100]Idem, *Qabz va Bast-i Ti'uriki Shariʿat* (The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of the Sharia) (Tehran: Sirat, 1991), 192.

[101]Ibid., 198.

[102]Ibid., 214–15.

[103]Ibid., 79–80.

[104]Ibid., 88.

[105]Ibid., 89.

[106]Ibid., 203.

[107]Idem, "Paraduks-i Mudernizm," 12.

[108]Idem, *Qabz va Bast-i Ti'uriki Shariʿat*, xi. For further analysis of Sorush's distinction between religion and knowledge of religion and its political implications, see Matin-asgari, "Abdolkarim Sorush."

[109]Ibid., x.

[110]Ibid., ix.

[111]Ibid., 45.

[112]Abdulkarim Sorush, *Rawshanfikri va Dindari* (Modern Enlightenment and Religiosity) (Tehran: Nashr-e Puyeh, 1988), 51.

[113]In *Rawshanfikri va Dindari*, Sorush attempts to achieve a reconciliation between the two sides of one of the largest cultural chasms in the second half of 20th-century in Iran.

[114]Sorush, *Hikmat va Ma'ishat*, 48. In addition to treating "religious knowledge" as the object of interpretation by the human agent, Sorush suggests the same attitude in treating the content of historical data as an object of interpretation by active human agency: see Sorush, *Qabz va Bast-i Ti'uriki Shariʿat*, 162.

[115]Idem, *Tafarruj-i Sunʿ*, 146–48.

[116]For a similar but distinct discussion on contradictions and tensions in Sorush's discourse stemming from his interest in mysticism, and particularly that of Jalal al-Din Rumi, see Matin-asgari, "Abdolkarim Sorush."

[117]See, for example, Sorush, *Tafarruj-i Sunʿ*, 295, where he rejects Davari's "philosophy of Being" and discusses different aspects of human agency and subjectivity with regard to nature.

[118]Abdulkarim Sorush, "Danish va Dadgari" (Knowledge and Justice), *Kiyan* 4, 22 (1995), 14.

[119]Idem, *Naqdi va Daramadi*, 132.

[120]Ibid., 117.

[121]Idem, *Tafarruj-i Sunʿ*, 196.

[122]Ibid., 195.

[123]Ibid., 191.

[124]Idem, *Naqdi va Daramadi*, 173.

[125]Ibid., 197.

[126]For example, Sorush maintains that the strongest impetus for social change emanates from natural sciences, which influence humanities and other "human sciences," including religion: see idem, *Qabz va Bast-i Ti'uriki Shariʿat*, 233.

[127]Idem, *Tafarruj-i Sunʿ*, 301. On Wittgenstein on language, see John Canfield, *Wittgenstein, Language and World* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981). See also John Cook, *Wittgenstein, Empiricism and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[128]Sorush, *Tafarruj-i Sunʿ*, 45. On the idea of language as a model for social interaction, see Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967). See also Habermas's discussions of Peter Winch in Habermas, *Communicative Action, Vol. 1*, 53–67.

[129]Sorush, *Tafarruj-i Sunʿ*, 51.

[130]Ibid., 177.

[131]Ibid., 184–85. Another indication of Sorush's dissociation from positivism is his critique of behaviorism and the "stimulus-response" paradigms in social sciences: See Sorush, *Tafarruj-i Sunʿ*, 68.

[132]Sorush, *Rawshanfikri va Dindari*, 79.

[133]Idem, *Qabz va Bast-i Ti'uriki Shariʿat*, 109.

[134]Idem, *Naqdi va Daramadi*, 185.

[135]Idem, *Tafarruj-i Sunʿ*, 261.

[136]Idem, "Akhlaq-i Khudayan" (The Ethics of Gods), *Kiyan* 4, 18 (1994), 23.

[137]Ibid.

[138]Ibid.

[139]Ibid., 25.

[140]Ibid., 26–30.

[141]Idem, *Qabz va Bast-i Ti'uriki Shariʿat*, 215.

[142]It cannot be overemphasized that Sorush, like his predecessors in Islamic discourse, is afflicted by some oscillation between affirmation and negation of human subjectivity, but his fluctuation is much more subdued, and hence his discourse much less contradictory.

[143]Abdulkarim Sorush, "Guzarish-i Safar-i Doktor Sorush bi Landan" (Report of Doctor Sorush's Trip to London), *Kiyan* 6, 33 (1996), 67.

[144]Idem, "Mudara va Mudiriyyat-i Mu'minan: Sukhani dar Nisbat-i Din va Dimukrasi" (Conciliation and Administration of the Faithful: A Discourse on the Relation between Religion and Democracy), *Kiyan* 4, 21 (1994), 7.

[145]For the ideas of Shabistari and Kadivar, see Farzin Vahdat, "Post-revolutionary Discourses of Mohammad Mojtaed Shabestari and Mohsen Kadivar: Reconciling the Terms of Mediated Subjectivity, Part I and II," *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, nos. 16 and 17 (2000).

[146]Sorush, "Mudara va Mudiriyyat-i Mu'minan," 8.

[147]Abdulkarim Sorush, "Tahlil-i Mafhum-i Hukumat-i Dini" (The Analysis of the Concept of Religious Government), *Kiyan* 6, 32 (1996), 39. In his more theoretical and abstract writings, Sorush considers only the individual as "real" and the collectivity as a theoretical construct whose reality is merely hypothetical. This ontological priority of the individual over the collectivity seems be the grounding of his later political writings in which the individual is central. See Sorush, *Naqdi va Daramadi*, 79. If one is concerned that, by his emphasis on the individual, Sorush has titled the ideal balance between individual subjectivity and universality and collectivity, one must remember that Sorush's discourse, by virtue of being located in the Islamic tradition, is already heavily universalistic, and any movement against it is in the direction of a balance between these two pillars of modernity.

[148]Abdulkarim Sorush, "'Aql va Azadi" (Reason and Freedom), in *Farbih tar az Idiuluzhi* (Richer than Ideology) (Tehran: Ṣirat, 1996), 253. In emphasizing this idea of freedom, Sorush is careful not to neglect the concept of social justice. He writes in the same article, "The conflict that some have projected between freedom and justice (under the rubric of the conflict between democracy and socialism), that if we choose freedom, justice is destroyed and if we pick justice, freedom is sacrificed, is a spurious conflict": ibid., 254.

[149]Ibid.

[150]Ibid., 247.

[151]Idem, "Hukumat-i Dimukratik-i Dini" (The Democratic Religious Government) in *Farbih tar az Idiuluzhi*, 273. Owing to the contradictory nature of the paradigm of mediated subjectivity in which Sorush's discourse originates, while he has been a strong supporter of freedom of individual subjectivity he has upheld, at least in his early writings, the necessity of the veil (*hijab*) for women. See idem, *Idiuluzhi-i Shayṭani: Dugmatizm-i Niqabdar* (Satanic Ideology: Masked Dogmatism) (Tehran: Yaran, 1982), 101.

[152]Idem, "Tahlil-i Mafhum-i Hukumat-i Dini," 5.

[153]Ibid.

[154]Ibid.

[155]Idem, *Hikmat va Ma'ishat*, 209–13.

[156]Sorush does not provide an example of this type of "liberal" society.

[157]Sorush "Hukumat-i Dimukratik-i Dini," 273–74.

[158]Idem, "Mudara va Mudiriyat-i Mu'minan," 3.

[159]Ibid., 4. One can see here the close affinity between Sorush's notion of democracy based on "fluid social reason" and Habermas's idea of general will formation based on "discourse ethics" of intersubjectivity: see Habermas, *Communicative Action. Vol. 2*, 81–82, *passim*.

[160]Sorush, "Mudara va Mudiriyat-i Mu'minan," 4.

[161]Idem, "Tahlil-i Mafhum-i Hukumat-i Dini," 10.

[162]Ibid., 11.

[163]Idem, "Mudara va Mudiriyat-i Mu'minan," 12.

[164]Davari's more recent position on issues pertaining to modern technology is by and large captured in the following passage "Now that the Western order is more or less dominant all over the world, one of the

aspects of this, and perhaps the most visible, is the political aspect. We, and many countries of the world, have received much evil and oppression from the West and we need to confront their politics [of oppression]. But we can succeed only if this confrontation is thoughtful. . . . [T]he best form of this confrontation is partaking of power and technology, and obviously those [people] who are sharing the rationality [i.e., instrumental rationality] and power of the West are in a much better position than those who have remained in the imitative stage: see Riza Davari-Ardakani, *Dar barih-i Gharb* (On the West) (Tehran: Hirmis, 1998), x.