Approaching Ibn 'Arabi: Foundations, contexts, interpretations

Author: James Winston Morris

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Foundations, Contexts, Interpretations

by

James Winston Morris

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INTRODUCTION

[to be completed—no more than 15 pages]

Part One

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INTRODUCTION

The initial indications in the Qur'an and hadith concerning the Prophet's Ascension (*miʿraj*) or nocturnal voyage (*isra'*, at Qur'an 17:1) and the revelatory vision in which it culminated (Qur'an 53:1-18) subsequently gave rise to a vast body of interpretations among the many later traditions of Islamic thought and spirituality.[1] Ibn 'Arabi's personal adaptation of that material, in at least four separate longer narratives, reflects both the typical features of his distinctive approach to the Qur'an and hadith and the full range of his metaphysical-theological teachings and practical spiritual concerns. For him, the Prophet's "nocturnal journey"—an expression he prefers both because it is that of the Qur'an and because it is more appropriate to the complete, "circular" nature of the movement in question[2]—is above all an archetypal symbol of the highest, culminating stages in the inner, *spiritual* journey that must be followed by each of the saints or mystical "knowers" who would

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[1] In this Introduction we have usually employed the expression "Mi'raj" ("Ascension") most commonly used in Islamic languages, although Ibn 'Arabi himself prefers to follow the Qur'an (for reasons detailed in the following note) in referring instead to the *isra'* of the Prophet and the saints. In most of the hadith accounts of this Ascension the revelations alluded to in the Qur'anic verses 53:1-18 play an integral (even decisive) role, and they are understood in that context by Ibn 'Arabi in all of his Mi'raj narratives. Ibn 'Arabi's own distinctive use of the canonical hadith materials is outlined in n. 9 below and followed in detail in the notes to the translation.

    For further references, see the general indications (from a historicist perspective) and bibliography in the articles "*Israʾ*" (B. Schreike) and "*Mi'raj*" (J. Horovitz and B.W. Robinson) in the *SEI* and *EI*; the full range of hadith and legendary materials studied in the opening chapters of M. Asin Palacios' *La Escatologia musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (Madrid, 1919)—there is also an abridged English translation, which eliminates many references to the Arabic sources, cf. *Islam and the Divine Comedy* (New York, 2008—originally London, 1926, first reprint London, 1968); and G. Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book* (Uppsala, 1950). See also the striking pictorial representations of many stages of the Mi'raj—incorporating, however, a wide range of legendary or popular materials not used by Ibn 'Arabi—by the 15th-century Timurid school of Herat in *The Miraculous Journey of Mahomet*: *Miraj Nameh* (New York, 1977).

[2] There are a number of shades of meaning in the Qur'anic expression *asra* (at 17:1 and in the related hadith) that help explain Ibn 'Arabi's preference for that term: in addition to its being used to describe a complete spiritual journey involving both "ascent" and "*return*" (*ruju'*)—a fundamental dimension he emphasizes especially in the *R. al-Anwar*—the term refers more specifically to a "*nocturnal* voyage," with all the implications of a "hidden," profoundly inner spiritual transformation that are so decisive for the "journeys" of the saints described in all these narratives. Finally, the verbal form clearly insists on *God* as the (ultimate) Agent and Source of this movement, pointing to the key factors of divine grace and individual "predisposition" that are also central to Ibn 'Arabi's consideration of this journey (whether for the Prophet or the saints), especially in the autobiographical context of the *K. al-Isra'*. (None of this is implied by the much broader and less specific Qur'anic usage of *mi'raj*—in the plural—at 43:33 and 70:3). These two shorter treatises by Ibn ʿArabī can be found in *Rasāʾil ibn al-ʿArabī* (Bayrūt, 1968).

participate fully in the heritage of Muhammad,[3] even if the subjective phases and experiences marking that route necessarily appear differently to each individual.[4]

Thus the theme of the Mi'raj provides Ibn 'Arabi with a single unifying symbolic framework for the full range of practical spiritual questions and theoretical issues (ontological, cosmological, theological, etc.) that are discussed in other contexts throughout the *Futuhat* and his other works.[5] If each of his treatments of the Mi'raj approaches those issues from its own particular standpoint and purpose—and with, in addition, very different literary styles and degrees of autobiographical openness—they all do share what is perhaps the most fundamental feature of all of his writing: the continually alternating contrast between the metaphysical (universal and eternal) "divine" point of view[6] and the "phenomenological" (personal and experiential) perspective of each individual

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[3]While acknowledging the uniquely "physical" nature of the Prophet's Mi'raj (in section II below), Ibn 'Arabi stresses the primary importance of the spiritual *isra'at*—even for Muhammad—in the proportions implied by the Prophet's "thirty-three" other, purely spiritual journeys mentioned at the end of that section (n. 46 below).

The crucial importance of the notion of the saints' participation in the prophetic "heritage" (*wiratha*) is assumed throughout all of these Mi'raj narratives: for Ibn 'Arabi, its ultimate verification (and perhaps even its source) is to be found in the revelation of the "Muhammadan Station" in section IV-I and in the corresponding passage from the *K. al-Isra'* (*Rasā'il ibn al-'Arabī,* pp. 12-14: see our translation and commentary in our article on "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabi and the Mi'raj," cited at n. 13 below.) For further references to this key notion in Ibn 'Arabi's religious thought, see chapter 5 of Michel Chodkiewicz's *Seal of the Saints* (Cambridge, 1993); and Hakim's *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī* (Beirut, 1981), pp. 1191-1201.

[4]A fundamental point that is openly stressed here in the reminder of Yahya (= John the Baptist, at the beginning of IV-F, the sphere of Aaron) that "each person has a path (*tariq*) that no one else but he travels," which ."..comes to be through the traveling itself." The more specifically personal, "autobiographical" dimensions of Ibn 'Arabi's Mi'raj accounts are most evident in the *K. al-Isra'* (see the important passage translated in our *JAOS* article cited at n. 13 below) and in the concluding section (IV-I) of this chapter from the *Futuhat*.

[5]This is brought out more fully in the cross-references in the notes to this translation. In particular, it is clear that the spiritual phenomena underlying this particular schema provided by the Mi'raj are not essentially different from the realities Ibn 'Arabi discusses elsewhere in terms of other traditional Sufi categories, such as the metaphor of the spiritual "journeys in God" (*asfar*) or the complex distinctions of "stations" (*maqamat*), "stages" (*manazil*), etc. employed throughout the *Futuhat* itself: see, for example, his revealing remarks concerning Ansari's classic *Manazil al-Sa'irin* and his own *Manahij al-Irtiqa'* near the end of the Ascension outlined in chapter 167 (II, 280—all citations to the *Futuhat* are from the reprint of the four-volume Būlāq Cairo edition, unless otherwise specified), and translated into French by S. Ruspoli in *L'Alchimie du Bonheur* (Paris, 1981), pp. 112-113.

[6]In addition to Ibn 'Arabi's own explicitly metaphysical language, that perspective is more dramatically represented in chapter 367 of the *Futuhat* (translated below) by the spirits of the

voyager. The aim of this sort of dialectic, as he pointedly reminds his readers at the very beginning of chapter 367 (= section I of the translation below), is quite clear: if the journey in question necessarily appears to move through time and distance, that is not so that we can eventually "reach" God—since "**He is with you wherever you are**"—but rather "**so that He can cause** [us] **to see His Signs**" (Qur'an 31:31) that are always there, "**on the horizons**" and "**in the souls**." The heavens of this journey, the prophets and angels who populate them, the Temple or the Throne where the final "unveiling" takes place—all of these, he insists, are so many places of the *Heart*.[7]

Modern readers who want to understand these narratives on this ultimate and most intimate level, however, must first find their way through an extremely complex set of symbols and often only implicit references to what are now largely unfamiliar bodies of knowledge: the task of interpretation is therefore not unlike that facing students of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (and more particularly the *Paradisio*). Therefore our annotation to this translation of chapter 367 of the *Futuhat* concentrates on providing that indispensable background in the following areas: (1) the actual Islamic source-materials in the Qur'an and hadith which provide the basic structure and key symbols for all of Ibn 'Arabi's Mi'raj narratives;[8] (2) the cosmological and astrological presuppositions which he generally shared with other traditions (more or less "scientific") of his

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different prophets, especially Adam, Idris and Aaron—all of whom tend to speak here, as is often the case with God in the Qur'an, from a transcendent divine or "supra-temporal" perspective.

[7]Hence the central importance of the celebrated divine saying (*hadith qudsi*) with which he concludes the opening section (at n. 37): "My earth does not encompass Me, nor does My heaven,but the heart of My servant, the man of true faith, does encompass Me." He returns to stress the fundamental position of the Heart, in a more autobiographical and experiential context, in section IV-H (notes 168-172) below. For further references to this fundamental concept in Ibn 'Arabi's thought, see Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 916-921, and the famous chapter on the "wisdom of the Heart" (Shu'ayb) in the *Fusus al-Hikam* (Cairo, 1946), I, pp. 119-126; or R.W.J. Austin's translation in *The Bezels of Wisdom* (New York, 1980), pp. 145-157.

[8]These works provide a perfect illustration of Ibn 'Arabi's typical (and highly complex) approach to hadith. See our more general discussion of this topic in our article, "Ibn 'Arabi's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority" (*Studia Islamica* 71, 1990). He scrupulously and literally follows the sayings and deeds of the Prophet as recounted in the canonical collections—in this chapter (367), relying especially on the *Sahih* of Muslim (who devotes a special section [*iman*, 254-294] to the events connected with the Mi'raj) and, to a slightly lesser extent, on the *Sahih* of Bukhari—and most often develops his own spiritual interpretations from close attention to the slightest literal details of those narratives (thereby implicitly excluding the vast body of non-hadith legends that had become popularly associated with these events). Rather than focusing on the external differences or apparent contradictions among various hadith (which are quite apparent, for example, concerning the number or order of stages in the Ascension), Ibn 'Arabi typically—one might say "ecumenically"—concentrates on conveying the spiritual meaning and intentions implicit in *each* Prophetic saying, pointing to a level of understanding unifying what might otherwise be seen as differing or conflicting expressions. (This approach mirrors his more general attitude to the various Islamic sects and schools of law, and ultimately to the observable diversity of religions and beliefs.)

time;[9] (3) his own personal metaphysical and cosmogonical theories or "doctrines," which are basically those found throughout his other writings; and (4) his conception of the particular spiritual "heritages" and distinctive qualities of each of the prophets encountered during the Mi'raj, as they are developed in the *Fusus al-Hikam* and throughout the *Futuhat*.[10] Finally, since Ibn 'Arabi's four major Mi'raj narratives do share certain common features—and since several are available (at least partially) in French and English translations—it may be helpful, for comparative purposes, to point out some of the more distinctive features of each.

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[9]Fortunately, these elements are much less important here than in chapter 167 (see below), which assumes a far more detailed acquaintance with alchemy, Ptolemaic-Aristotelean astronomy (as transmitted, among others, by the Islamic philosophers), a wide body of traditional astrological lore concerning the particular influences of the stars, and additional "esoteric sciences." In any case, it is important to note that virtually all those matters—which Ibn 'Arabi treats there as inherently knowable by man's natural observation and "reasoning" (*nazar*)—primarily concern the symbolic framework for the Mi'raj narrative and not its universal spiritual "content," which is usually expressed in much more immediately accessible form in this chapter (367).

[10]Allusions in both of these areas are clarified in the footnotes as they are mentioned, usually by cross-references to related passages in the *Futuhat*, *Fusus* and other writings. We should add that other prophets not explicitly mentioned in the hadith and these narratives concerning the Mi'raj are elsewhere frequently associated by Ibn 'Arabi with particular heavenly spheres: see, for example, Noah's connection with the sphere of the sun, mentioned at the end of chapter 3 of the *Fusus*, and in reference to a longer account in Ibn 'Arabi's *K. al-Tanazzulat al-Mawsiliya*, cf. *Majmūʻat rasāʾil ibn ʻArabī* (Bayrūt, 2000), volume II.

The Other Mi'raj Narratives:[11] *Kitāb al-Isrā'*, *Risālat al-Anwār*, Chapter 167 of the *Futūhāt*

The *Kitāb al-Isrā',*[12] at once the earliest, the longest and the most personally revealing of the works discussed here, was composed in Fez in the year 594, apparently only a relatively short time after certain decisive personal inspirations concerning the ultimate unity of the prophets in the spiritual "station of Muhammad" and the inner meaning of the *Qur'an* in its full eternal reality that were soon to coalesce in Ibn 'Arabi's conception of his own unique role as "Seal of the Muhammadan Saints."[13] In an emotionally fluid and highly expressive Arabic style, drawing on an incredibly dense

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[11]There are also a number of other, shorter or less complete treatments of the Mi'raj theme in Ibn 'Arabi's extant writings, some of which are cited in notes below. The longest (and most accessible) is the passage on the Ascension of the Prophet—understood as the cosmic "Muhammadan Reality" or "Perfect Man"—in the *Shajarat al-Kawn* (Dimashq, 2003; and *RG*, no. 666), now available in translations by A. Jeffery, "Ibn 'Arabi's *Shajarat al-Kawn*," (*Studia Islamic* 10 & 11, 1959; Mi'raj section at pp. 145-160); and by M. Gloton, *L'Arbre du Monde* (Paris, 1982; Mi'raj section pp. 93-106). Although the French translation does give more useful references to the Qur'an and hadith background of this passage, neither version provides sufficient annotation to make intelligible most of this treatise's extremely complex metaphysical, theological and cosmological allusions, whose density is comparable to that of the *K. al-Isra'* (Bayrūt, 1968).

Unlike the treatments of the Mi'raj discussed below, the protagonist of this Ascension (in *Shajarat al-Kawn*) is the Prophet himself—although often described in metaphysical terms clearly applicable to the "Perfect Man" in general—, and Ibn 'Arabi does not bother to mention here the various intermediate stages of his celestial encounters with the earlier prophets which are so prominent in the other accounts (and in the original hadith). Instead he here assumes, as throughout the *Shajarat al-Kawn*, the universal presence of this cosmic "Muhammadan Reality," and takes a relatively few elements from the Mi'raj narratives (especially those of the divine Throne and the Prophet's different "steeds") as symbols for celebrating that central metaphysical theme.

[12]See *RG*, no. 313; this entry mentions several alternative titles and an extant commentary by Ibn 'Arabi's close disciple Isma'il b. Sawdakin, which is extremely useful in deciphering this difficult work. References here are to the text given in the *Rasa'il*, I, no. 13, pp. 1-92. The date and place of composition are mentioned in the author's own colophon (p. 92).

The recent article by Joanna Wronecka, "Le *kitab al-isra' ila maqam al-asra'* d'Ibn 'Arabi," (*Annales Islamologiques* 20, 1984), contains only brief first impressions of this book and the translations of a number of section headings (plus several verses from the concluding *munajat*), while announcing the author's plans to begin a dissertation on this subject at the University of Warsaw.

[13]See especially our translation and commentary of a crucial autobiographical passage (pp. 13-14 **WHAT IS THIS REFERRING TO ??)**—perfectly complementing the culminating stage of Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual ascension here (section IV-I below)—in "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabi and the Mi'raj," parts I and II (*Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107, 1987, & 108, 1988). The *K. al-Isra'* (Bayrūt, 1968) as a whole conveys a mood of excitement and immediacy that must reflect the relative proximity of some decisive (and perhaps not yet fully assimilated) personal spiritual

and allusive symbolic vocabulary[14] and combining long poetic interludes with rapidly moving rhymed prose—and culminating in a series of remarkable "intimate conversations" (*munajat*) with God (pp. 50-82)—, he constantly returns to celebrate and elaborate on the twin themes of the eternal Muhammadan Reality (encompassing all the prophets and their teachings) and the metaphysical universality of the *Qur'an* as they were inwardly realized and verified in his own mystical experience. Here the passage of this autobiographical "voyager"[15] through the heavenly spheres and the higher revelatory stages of the Mi'raj (pp. 11-49) is not so much a means for describing the successive steps of the spiritual path and "progress" of the saints more generally—as it is, to some extent, in all the other Mi'raj narratives—but instead primarily a framework for evoking and clarifying various aspects of the author's own spiritual achievement, as they mirror the even loftier rank of the Prophet (pp. 83-92). What is perhaps most noteworthy about this composition, in a way that reinforces Ibn 'Arabi's repeated assertions that he first received all of this only by divine inspiration (and not through an individual effort of reasoning), is the way the complex systematic metaphysical and ontological framework developed in the *Futuhat* is already entirely present, but for the most part only *implicitly*—expressed instead through an incredibly profuse array of symbols and allusions drawn from the Qur'an and hadith (and whose full explanation is to be sought, for the most part, only in later, more analytical prose works such as the *Futuhat*).

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inspiration. More specifically, the *K. al-Isra'* does not yet seem to distinguish with complete clarity between what Ibn 'Arabi later calls the "*maqam muhammadi*" (the spiritual "station of Muhammad")—or that supreme part of it uniquely reserved for himself as the "Seal of Muhammadan Saints"—and what he then calls the "station of Proximity (to God)" (*maqam al-qurba*) attained more generally by the highest rank of the saints, the *afrad* or *malamiya*. In the *K. al-Isra'* he frequently alludes to his own attainment of a lofty "Muhammadan station," but still employing terms—as continued to be the case with many later Sufis—that also suggest he is speaking of a spiritual rank ultimately accessible to other Muslim saints as well.

For a careful discussion and extensive references concerning the broader context of this important question for our understanding of Ibn 'Arabi's own spiritual autobiography, see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, chapter 9 (Cambridge, 1993), as well as the famous opening passage of the *Futuhat* recounting Ibn 'Arabi's subsequent experience (or complete recognition) of his "investiture" as the "Seal of the Muhammadan Saints": this event is described in the *Khutbat al-Kitab* (*Futuhat* I, pp. 2 ff.; *OY* ed., I, 43-55), and is also accessible in a French translation by M. Valsan in "Avant-Propos" (*Etudes traditionnelles* 311, 1953, pp. 300-311).

[14]*bayn al-marmuz wa-l-mafhum* (*Rasa'il* I, no. 13, p. 3): most of this labyrinth of symbols and allusions to the Qur'an and hadith (usually through only a single word or brief phrase) could potentially be elucidated by extensive reference to the *Futuhat* and other works. However, such a commentary would often require page-long notes of explanation for virtually every other word—an approach which could not hope to convey the poetic, immediately expressive emotional quality that is the essential trait of this work.

[15]The autobiographical nature of the *K. al-Isra'* is not even thinly disguised. At p. 66, Ibn 'Arabi explains his continued reference to himself as a "*salik*" in terms of his desire to emphasize the fact that "even now (i.e., after reaching the highest spiritual station) I am still voyaging"—in other words, as evidence that he is not claiming "union" in the sense of some absolute mutual identity with God.

Compared to the literary and doctrinal complexities of the preceding work, the *Risalat al-Anwar*, a relatively brief prose treatise composed at Konya in 602 A.H. (near the beginning of Ibn 'Arabi's long stay in the Muslim East), is stylistically far more accessible and its contents are more readily understandable—features which (along with the existence of an excellent commentary by 'Abd al-Karim Jili) no doubt help account for its popularity with modern translators.[16] Written in response to a request by a Sufi friend and fellow master, this study, as its full title partly indicates,[17] is above all *practical* in intention and *experiential* (rather than primarily doctrinal or metaphysical) in its terms of reference and expression; it is aimed at the needs of a reader who, already necessarily possessing a considerable degree of personal accomplishment and experience, is intimately involved with the spiritual direction of disciples at earlier stages of the Path. While the allusions to the Mi'raj proper (pp. 9-13; = English tr., pp. 40-46) are very brief—mentioning for the most part only the cosmological powers or spiritual qualities traditionally associated with each of the heavenly spheres and the Qur'anic "cosmography" of the Gardens of Paradise, the divine "Throne," "Pen," etc.[18]—, it does provide an indispensable complement to the other Mi'raj narratives in two critical areas: (1) its relatively detailed discussion of the essential practical methods and preliminary stages preparing the

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[16]For the date and place of composition, see *RG*, no. 33; the long list of manuscripts there may likewise reflect the relatively accessible character of this short work. Page references are to the Arabic text in the *Rasa'il* I, no. 12, pp. 1-19. To facilitate reference by non-Arabists, citations of this text in the notes below also mention the relevant sections from both of the following French and English translations. The complete English translation by T. Harris, *Journey to the Lord of Power* (New York, 1981), although without any annotation, does have the advantage of being accompanied by long and useful selections from Jili's commentary, which itself consists largely of citations (mostly unidentified in the translation) from related sections of the *Futuhat*. The concluding chapter of Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, consists of a translation of most of the *R. al-Anwar* (original in *Rasā'il ibn al-'Arabī*) accompanied by an extensive set of explanations and complementary developments drawn from many of Ibn 'Arabi's writings, including more particularly selections from the two Mi'raj-narratives (chapters 167 and 367 of the *Futuhat*) discussed below.

The first European translation of this text, by M. Asin Palacios, in *El Islam Cristianizado* (Madrid, 1931), was neither complete nor annotated. Asin's work is now also available in French translation, *L'Islam christianisé*, (Paris, 1982), with the translation of *R. al-Anwar* on pp. 321-332.

[17]"The Treatise of Lights, Concerning the Secrets Bestowed on the Person in Spiritual Retreat (*sahib khalwa*)." (Other titles are mentioned in *RG*, no. 33.) For the Sufi practice of spiritual retreat more generally, see the references in the article "*khalwa*" (by H. Landolt) in *EI*. Chapters 78-79 of the *Futuhat* (II, 150-152), on the stations of *khalwa* and *tark al-khalwa*, involve a more metaphysical approach to the subject; see also French tr. by M. Valsan, "Sur la notion de khalwah." (*Etudes traditionnelles* 70, 1969).

[18]These cosmological features are all most elaborately developed in chapter 167 of the *Futuhat* (described below). In particular, the *R. al-Anwar* does not contain any of those personal encounters with the prophets symbolically associated with each sphere (or with each planet's respective "spiritual entity" [*ruhaniya*], such as Mercury, Mars, Venus, etc.) that make up the major part of the Mi'raj-narrative in both chapters of the *Futuhat*, as well as in the corresponding section of the *K. al-Isra'*.

way for the inner realization of these more advanced spiritual insights; and (2) Ibn 'Arabi's repeated emphasis on the fundamental importance of the concluding phase of the saints'"*return*" to a transformed awareness of the physical and social world (in its immediate relation with God) and to the particular responsibilities and activities—whether teaching and spiritual guidance, or the less visible tasks of the representatives of the spiritual hierarchy—flowing from that realization.[19]

Finally, the long chapter 167 of the *Futuhat*, "On the Inner Knowledge of the Alchemy of Happiness,"[20] uses the framework of the Mi'raj to retrace, in ascending order, the many levels of Ibn 'Arabi's complex cosmology or cosmogony.[21] Its primary focus (compared with the other works mentioned here) is on the "objective" metaphysical realities underlying the spiritual insights described in more experiential terms in the other narratives: in this respect it often resembles the *Fusus al-Hikam*, and the treatment of the various prophets encountered during this heavenly voyage (e.g., Jesus, Aaron or Moses) often closely parallels that found in the corresponding chapters of the *Fusus*. This feature is further underlined by Ibn 'Arabi's narrative technique of comparison, throughout this ascension, between the initiatic spiritual knowledge granted to the "follower of

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[19]The extensive commentary by M. Chodkiewicz (*Seal of the Saints*, chapter 10) provides important references to many other works of Ibn 'Arabi (especially sections of the *Futuhat*) further illustrating both of these key themes. (The latter point, in particular, is also stressed in a number of important sections of chapter 367 translated below.)

[20]II, 270-284; also available in French translation by S. Ruspoli, *L'Alchimie du Bonheur Parfait*. (The translator promises (p. 26) a more complete commentary in the future.) An earlier partial French translation of this chapter, without notes or commentary, was also published by G. Anawati, in "L'alchimie du bonheur, d'ibn ʿArabī (kimyā al-saʿāda)" (*Revue de l'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes orientales du Caire, Melanges 6,* 1961).

[21]The best general survey of this difficult subject (although by no means complete) probably still remains the introduction (pp. 29-159) of H.S. Nyberg's *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-'Arabi* (Leiden, 1919), based largely on Ibn 'Arabi's *K. Insha' al-Dawa'ir*. Within the *Futuhat*, one of the most comprehensive treatments can be found in chapt. 360, (III, 416-448), while the same themes are also developed in the earlier chapters 4-12 (I, 98-149). A much briefer and more accessible account can also be found in the translation and introduction, by D. Gril, of Ibn 'Arabi's short *R. al-Ittihad al-Kawni* (*RG*, no. 317), entitled *Le Livre de l'Arbre et des Quatre Oiseaux* (Paris, 1996, reprint of 1984 edition). See also the related cosmological chapters from the *Futuhat* translated by W. Chittick in *The Meccan Revelations*, volume one (New York, 2002).

This cosmological perspective accounts, in particular, for the many additional "levels" or "sites" marking the final phases of this Ascension in chapter 167—especially the third, purely "noetic" (*ma'nawi*) stage (II, 282-284; *Alchimie*, pp. 130-141)—which are not explicitly mentioned in the hadith concerning the *isra'*. These distinctions correspond to the initial, most abstract stages of Ibn 'Arabi's cosmological system, and in fact he even stresses there that the "rationalist" thinker accompanying the saint also participates to a considerable extent in the awareness of the universal metaphysical-cosmological principles perceived at that stage. In terms of their *spiritual* content, therefore, these stages do not constitute a "higher" or more "advanced" station than the culminating revelation described in the final section of chapter 367 (= IV-I below).

Muhammad" (representing the methods of the saints and Sufis more generally) and the limited cosmological and theological insights available to his companion, the archetypal "man of reason."[22] In general, the elucidation of many of those complex allusions would require extensive reference to some of the most obscure and unfamiliar aspects of the Shaykh's thought.

Ibn 'Arabi's Own Mi'raj: Chapter 367

Ibn 'Arabi's long treatment of the Mi'raj in chapter 367 of the *Futuhat* is marked by some distinctive features that make it considerably more accessible (at least for most modern readers) than either chapter 167 or the *Kitab al-Isra'*. To begin with, it is written for the most part in relatively straightforward expository prose; the style does presuppose a profound acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabi's systematic terminology and symbolism (largely drawn from the Qur'an and hadith) as it is to be found throughout the *Futuhat*, but the role of unfamiliar Arabic literary and artistic effects is relatively less important. Secondly, the focus of this chapter is almost exclusively on the universal spiritual dimensions of the Mi'raj, especially as expressed in the language of the Qur'an and hadith, in a way that should already be familiar to readers of the *Fusus al-Hikam*; unlike chapter 167, it does not presuppose such extensive acquaintance with the vocabulary and symbolism of other relatively esoteric medieval Islamic sciences (alchemy, astrology, etc.). Similarly, the encounters with the individual prophets associated with each heavenly sphere can often be readily illuminated by comparison with corresponding passages elsewhere in Ibn 'Arabi's writings.[23] And finally, as so often in the *Futuhat*, the genuinely autobiographical passages,[24] especially at the conclusion of Ibn 'Arabi's own spiritual ascent (section IV-I below), add a powerful new dimension of clarity and persuasive force to what otherwise might appear to be simply a complex intellectual and symbolic "system."

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[22]*sahib nazar*: the insights of this allegorical character (or psycho-spiritual "type") reflect features of several different "rational sciences" of Ibn 'Arabi's day, including *kalam* (especially for its "negative theology" or *tanzih* concerning the highest insights into the divine nature), the popular mixture of astrology (concerning, e.g., the particular influences and qualities of various planets) and Aristotelean-Ptolemaic astronomy, and even more "esoteric" sciences of the time, such as alchemy. (However, it should be stressed that the alchemical vocabulary used in this particular chapter is not at all mysterious; it is used here in a clearly spiritual, symbolic sense whose meanings— corresponding to familiar Sufi technical terminology—are copiously illustrated and explained elsewhere in Ibn 'Arabi's work.)

[23]Such cross-references in the notes are concentrated on other chapters of the *Futuhat* and corresponding sections of the *Fusus al-Hikam*, especially given the relatively greater accessibility of translations and commentaries of the latter.

[24]Although all of section IV, the greater part of this chapter, is narrated in the "first person," that is often clearly a literary device, in those cases where the prophets are explaining what readers can readily recognize as Ibn 'Arabi's own characteristic insights and perceptions. However, section IV-I clearly summarizes his own direct personal experiences of what were evidently—judging by his ensuing account of what was "seen" there—some of the most important stages on his own spiritual path.

The overall structure of this chapter is quite clear, consisting of four successively broader and more detailed elaborations of the central theme of the inner spiritual meaning of the "nocturnal journey," a theme whose ultimate premises and metaphysical-theological context are briefly evoked in the opening lines (section I), already summarized at the beginning of this introduction. In section II, Ibn 'Arabi takes up the hadith accounts of Muhammad's Mi'raj—which provide the formal framework for the rest of the narrative—and adds his own allusions to many of the key themes developed at greater length in the following sections. In section III, he provides a condensed, still highly abstract schematic outline of the "spiritual journeys of the saints" (*awliya'*), expressed in his own distinctive metaphysical-theological terminology (i.e.,"in His Names in their names"). Finally, the greater part of the chapter (= section IV) is taken up with Ibn 'Arabi's account, narrated in the first person and closely following the path of the Prophet, of the climactic stages of his own personal spiritual journey.[25] If the autobiographical guise at first seems only a sort of didactic literary device, at the end (section IV-I) he does conclude with the description of a decisive personal "revelation," a compelling spiritual experience that seems to have contained—or at least confirmed—virtually all the most distinctive points of his later thought and conviction, the forms of divine knowledge which he goes on to elaborate in a long enumeration of "what he saw" in that culminating "Muhammadan Station."

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[25]Which, as he reminds us at the beginning of Section IV, closely parallels his earlier autobiographical descriptions of the same personal spiritual itinerary in the *Kitab al-Isra'*; see our translation and commentary of a key corresponding passage from that work in the article cited at n. 13 above.

Chapter 367: Concerning the Inner Knowledge of the Waystation of the Fifth *Tawakkul*, Which None of the People of Realization Has Discovered, Because of the Rarity of Those Apt to Receive It and the Inadequacy of (Human) Understandings to Grasp It[26]

[I. **Introduction: the Context and Purpose of the Spiritual Journey**]

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[26]III, pp. 340-354; sections omitted from our translation are clearly indicated in the accompanying notes or summarized (within brackets) in the body of the text.

The enigmatic title of this chapter is partially illuminated by a brief passage near the end (III, 351.21-22), where this mysterious "fifth *tawakkul*" is again briefly mentioned as one of the distinctive forms of spiritual knowledge Ibn 'Arabi saw in his culminating vision of the "Muhammadan Station": ."..And I saw in it the knowledge of the person who acts deliberately and (at the same time) relies on God, and this is the fifth *tawakkul*, and it is (expressed in) God's saying in Sura 73: '[...***There is no god but Him***,] ***so take Him as your Trustee*** (*wakil*)!' (73:9)."

Elsewhere (chapter 198, II, p. 420, 36th *tawhid*), Ibn 'Arabi explains this same Qur'anic verse as a reference to man's inherent ontological status as a pure "servant," with no possessions of his own, a description resembling the inner state of "pure servanthood" Ibn 'Arabi also realized in his culminating revelation (IV-I below). Similarly, a key phrase in this description, "to act deliberately" (*itta'ada*), is applied in Ibn 'Arabi's cautionary advice earlier in chapter 367 (at n. 143 below; = III, 349.13) to those Sufis who would mistakenly take the ecstatic state of "annihilation in God" (*fana'*, implying a heedlessness of the external world) to be the end and goal of the spiritual Path. All of these hints seem to point to this highest form of "trust in God" as reflecting an advanced inner state of spiritual insight in which the saint's absolute reliance on God—an attitude that in lower stages of *tawakkul* is usually conceived of as implying a sort of ascetic disdain and unconcern for the "secondary causes" (*asbab*) or things of this world—is now seen as simultaneously "affirming the secondary causes" (a phrase from opening poem of this chapter, at III, 340.15), which are finally perceived in their true metaphysical status, as necessary and intrinsic manifestations of the ever-present divine Reality. This form of *tawakkul* would thus closely correspond to Ibn 'Arabi's characteristic emphasis on the superiority of the state of "enlightened abiding" in the world (*baqa'*) characterizing those saints who—like the Prophet—have "returned" (the *raji'un*) from the station of divine Proximity while retaining the ongoing realization of that insight in the world.

The term *tawakkul*, "trust" or "inner confidence" in God, occurs many times in the Qur'an and gradually became a key term in Sufi spiritual psychology; see, for example, chapter 118 of the *Futuhat* (II, 199-201), on the *maqam al-tawakkul*, where Ibn 'Arabi mentions at the end that "the levels of *tawakkul*, for the true Knowers, are *487*...." Near the beginning of the *R. al-Anwar* (Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, p. 151; T. Harris, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, p. 30) he also discusses *tawakkul* as the last of the preparatory stages before the spiritual Mi'raj, marked by four distinctive "charismatic powers" (*karamat*).

...God said "***There is nothing like His likeness*** [***and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing***]" (Qur'an 42:11),[27] so He described Himself with a description that necessarily belongs only to Him, which is His saying: "***And He is with you wherever you are***" (Qur'an 57:4).[28] Thus He is with us wherever we are, in the state of His "descending to the heaven of this world during the last third of the night,"[29]

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[27]This famous Qur'anic verse, with its paradoxical "double negations" (corresponding to the *shahada*) of God's "resemblance" to created things, is usually treated by Ibn 'Arabi as a classic reference to the mystery of the simultaneous immanence (*tashbih*) and transcendence (*tanzih*) of the Divine Reality reflected in the Perfect Man—which is the central intuition of all his work. Often he even interprets the expression "***His Likeness***" in this verse as a direct reference to the Perfect Man, alluding to Adam's creation (according to a famous hadith) "in the image of the Merciful": see the famous discussions of this verse in the chapters on Noah (ch. 3) and Hud (ch. 10) in the *Fusus al-Hikam*, and further references in the *Futuhat* I, 62, 97, 111, 220; II, 129, 510, 516-17, 541, 563; III, 109, 165, 266, 282, 340, 412, 492; IV, 135, 141, 306, 311, 431. In addition to the ambiguity of the expression *kamithlihi* (which can also be read simply as "like Him"—i.e., like *God*), Ibn 'Arabi likewise stresses the apparently paradoxical contrast between the absolute insistence on divine transcendence at the beginning of this verse and the apparent anthropomorphism of its conclusion.

Thus, according to either reading, the absolute universality of the divine Presence implied by this verse includes all the particular, "restricted" modalities of the divine "descent" (*nuzul*) and Self-manifestation indicated in the following verses and hadith—each of which is likewise the subject of numerous discussions throughout the *Futuhat*.

[28]For Ibn 'Arabi, this verse is simply a direct implication of the broader truth implied in the opening verse: this inner correspondence between the different manifestations of God and the Perfect Man (*al-Insan al-Kamil*), at all the levels of being (or "worlds") is assumed throughout the rest of this chapter. More generally, the reality of the divine "compresence" (*ma'iya*, "with-ness") with all things expressed in this verse is discussed in many parts of the *Futuhat*, including a number of the shorter metaphysical or cosmological excerpts included in this anthology.

[29]A reference to a famous "divine saying" (*hadith qudsi*) which Ibn 'Arabi included in his own collection of such hadith, the *Mishkat al-Anwar* (no. 56, and cited from the *Sahih* of Muslim); available in English translation by S. Hirtenstein and M. Notcutt in *Divine Sayings*, p. 65: "God, ever mighty and majestic is He, says, when He descends during the third part of the night: 'I am the King! Who is there that calls out to Me, that I may answer him? Who is there that asks of Me, that I may give to him? Who is there that asks pardon of Me, that I may forgive him?'"**[MORRIS'S TRANSLATION→"Our Lord descends every night to the heaven of this world when the last third of the night remains, and then He says: 'I am the King! Whoever calls on Me, I answer him. Whoever asks (something) of Me, I give to him. Whoever requests My forgiveness, I forgive him."]** This hadith is recorded, with a number of minor variations, by Muslim, Malik, Bukhari, Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, and Ahmad b. Hanbal: see detailed references and variants in W. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam* (The Hague, 1977), pp. 177-178.

As Ibn 'Arabi explains in detail in the latter part of chapter 34 of the *Futuhat* (*OY* ed., III, 320-332), the "night," in this hadith, "is the place of the descent in *time* of God and His Attribute" (of Mercy), and this "last third of the night"—which, Ibn 'Arabi insists, lasts *forever*—is none other than the Perfect Man (the first two "thirds" being "the heavens and the

in the state of His being *mounted upon the Throne* (Qur'an 5:20; etc.),[30] in the state of His being in the "Cloud,"[31] in the state of His being *upon the earth and in heaven* (Qur'an 43:84; etc.),[32] in the state of His being *closer to man than his jugular vein* (Qur'an 50:16)[33]—and all of these are qualifications with which only He can be described.

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earth," man's "two parents"). The following verses and hadith (at notes 30-32 here) are interpreted in chapter 34 as references to different ontological degrees or "moments" of that universal divine Self-manifestation.

[30]There are seven Qur'anic verses referring to God's being "mounted (*istawa'*) on the Throne," often following "the creation of the heavens and the earth" (i.e., what lies "beneath" or constitutes the Throne in its cosmological sense). For Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of these verses, see the extensive references to the *Futuhat* in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī,* pp. 791-803 (on the many meanings of the divine "Throne," *'arsh*) and pp. 622-629 (on *istiwa'*).

For Ibn 'Arabi, however, an even more fundamental meaning of the "Throne" is "the Heart of the man of true faith" (which is "the Throne of the Merciful," according to a famous hadith), i.e., the Perfect Man (see Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 916-921, on the *qalb*). The inner connection between these two senses is brought out explicitly in the famous *hadith qudsi* discussed at n. 7 above and quoted at n. 37 below, and is a basic assumption throughout sections III and IV below, since the "Heart" is precisely the "theater" of the entire journey: that point is made most forcefully in sections IV-G and IV-I below. Elsewhere, (e.g., in chapter 34, *OY* ed., III, 320 ff.), Ibn 'Arabi frequently stresses the particular importance of the Qur'anic specification (at 5:20) that it is "the Merciful" (*al-Rahman*), the Source of all being, Who is "mounted" or "seated" there.

[31]A reference to the following hadith, concerning the Prophet's response to the question "Where was our Lord before He created the creation?": "He was in a Cloud (*'ama'*), without air above it and without air below it, and He created His Throne upon the Water." (This famous hadith is found in the collections of Ibn Maja, Tirmidhi and Ahmad b. Hanbal.) Our translation here reflects Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation in chapter 34 of the *Futuhat* (*OY* ed., III, 323 ff.), where he also stresses the fact that this particular ontological reality concerns the divine Name "Lord" (*rabb*)—and not "the Merciful" (see n. 29).

For the broader meaning of the term *'ama'* ("the Cloud") in Ibn 'Arabi, see the references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 820-826 and in the *Futuhat* II, 310, as well as its treatment in the penultimate stage of the cosmological *mi'raj* in chapter 167 (S. Ruspoli, *L'Alchimie*, pp. 138-140).

[32]This phrase is contained (with minor variations) in a number of other Qur'anic verses (3:5; 10:61; 14:38; 22:70) all insisting on God's intimate acquaintance with all things: see, for example, "***Our Lord, surely You know what we say openly and what we hide: not a thing upon the earth and in heaven is hidden from God***" (Qur'an 14:38); or even more appropriately, "***He is God in the heavens and upon the earth; he knows your secret*** [*sirr*] ***and what you proclaim, and He knows what you gain***" (Qur'an 6:3).

[33]Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the divine "nearness" (see the related notion of "with-ness," *ma'iya*, at n. 28 above) expressed in this Qur'anic phrase is intimately bound up with the reality of

Hence God does not move a servant from place to place in order that (the servant) might see Him, but rather "so that He might cause him to see of His Signs" (Qur'an 41:53; etc.)[34] those that were unseen by him. He said: "***Glory to Him Who made His servant journey one night from the Sacred Place of Worship to the Furthest Place of Worship, whose surroundings We have blessed, so that We might cause him to see of Our Signs***!" (Qur'an 17:1)[35] And similarly, when God moves (any)

"perpetual creation" (*khalq jadid*) expressed in the rest of the verse and its immediate context: ."..***yet they are in confusion about the (ever-) renewed creation; but surely We created man*** [*al-insan*] ***and We know what his soul insinuates to him and We are closer to man than his jugular vein***" (Qur'an 50:15-16). As indicated in the Introduction, for Ibn 'Arabi the spiritual "station of Proximity" (*maqam al-qurba*), in which one actually realizes the full extent of this intimate relation with God, is the ultimate goal of the Ascension of the saints outlined in this chapter: that relation is outlined schematically, in the theological language of *'ilm al-kalam*, in section III and discussed in more experiential terms in the final two parts of section IV. (See the extensive references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī,* pp. 936-940 and Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, index s.v. [*maqam al-qurba*].)

[34]While Ibn 'Arabi is alluding in particular to the "reason" for the Prophet's Ascension described at Qur'an 17:1 (see following note), the same phrase (with only minor variations in the pronouns) is addressed to mankind more generally in a number of other Qur'anic verses (27:93; 31:31; etc.). Of these, certainly the most important and best known is the verse 41:53—to such an extent that it is clearly assumed whenever Ibn 'Arabi mentions the divine "Signs" (*ayat*): "***We shall cause them to see Our Signs on the horizons and in their souls, so that it becomes clear to them that He is the Truly Real*** [*al-Haqq*]—***or is your Lord not enough, for surely He is witnessing every thing***! ***What, are they in doubt about meeting their Lord? Does He not surely encompass all things***?" Especially important, for Ibn 'Arabi as for so many other Islamic thinkers, is the insistence in this verse on the *coincidence* of the Signs "on the horizons," i.e., in the external world (but note also Muhammad's decisive revelation at the "*Loftiest Horizon*," Qur'an 53:7) and those "in the souls," in the totality of awareness of the "Perfect Man" (*al-insan al-kamil*).

Secondly, Ibn 'Arabi always emphasizes the *causative*, active meaning of the verb form *'Ara* as "to *make* someone see," not just "to show": for him, God's "Signs" are *already* there, in the totality of our experience, but usually "unseen" (*ghaba*)—i.e., not perceived as such. Thus the whole purpose of the spiritual journey is simply to open our (spiritual) eyes to the reality of "things" as Signs, or as Ibn 'Arabi goes on to explain immediately below (and in more detail in section III), to recognize the divine Names "in *our* states." All this is implicit in the famous prayer of the Prophet likewise assumed throughout this chapter: "O my God, cause us to see things as they really are!"

[35]The *masjid al-haram* ("Sacred Place of Worship") was a common name for the sanctuary of the Kaaba at Mecca, but there is some disagreement in the hadith surrounding the identification of the *masjid al-aqsa*: it was sometimes, especially in later traditions, identified with the site of the Temple at Jerusalem (*al-bayt al-maqdis*, "the sacred House") where Muhammad stops to pray before his heavenly ascension according to several hadith accounts (including that followed by Ibn 'Arabi below); but the earlier traditions agree that it refers to the "furthest point" (*al-darah*) or goal of the Mi'raj (i.e., where Muhammad received the culminating revelation described in Sura 53), and is therefore more or less identical with the "Inhabited House" or heavenly Temple of Abraham (*al-bayt*

servant through his (inner spiritual) states in order also to cause him to see His Signs, He moves him through *His* states.[36] ...(I.e., God) says: "I only made him journey by night in order that he see the Signs, not (to bring him) to Me: because no place can hold Me and the relation of all places to Me is the same. For I am such that (only) 'the heart of My servant, the man of true faith, encompasses Me,'[37] so how could he be 'made to journey to Me' while I am '*with him wherever he is*' (Qur'an 57:4)?!"

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al-ma'mur), the symbol of the Heart discussed in section IV-H (notes 168-172) below. Ibn 'Arabi implicitly seems to follow the latter interpretation. See also the articles from the *SEI/EI* cited in n. 1 above.

Throughout this chapter (and in the *K. al-Isra'*, etc.) Ibn 'Arabi generally uses the Qur'anic expression *isra'* to refer to the Prophet's ascension and its spiritual analogues—possibly because the term *mi'raj* might appear limited only to the "ascending" portion, whereas Ibn 'Arabi always is at pains (as in sections III and IV-F below, and at the end of his *R. al-Anwar*) to emphasize the critical importance of the "descending" phase of return (*ruju'*), which distinguishes the highest rank of the saints (and of course the prophets). We have consistently translated *isra'* and its related verbal forms here as "journey," but it must be kept in mind that the Arabic term refers specifically to a *nocturnal* journey: for Ibn 'Arabi, especially, this nuance no doubt corresponds to the fact that the spiritual *isra'*, at least, is an inner, "secret" process largely hidden from outward observation, especially in those saints (the *afrad* or *malamiya*) who have followed it through to the end.

In the *K. al-Isfar 'an Nata'ij al-Asfar* (*Rasa'il*, II, no. 24), pp. 17-21, Ibn 'Arabi offers an elaborate interpretation of this same Qur'anic verse (17:1) focusing—as is typically the case in his reading of the Qur'an—on the complex inner significance of the grammatical and lexical details of its particular Arabic expressions, such as the apparent duplication of "at night" (*laylan*) and *asra* (meaning "to cause to journey at night"), etc. Our translation cannot convey most of those nuances or alternative meanings.

[36]Here, as so often with Ibn 'Arabi (see especially section III below), the pronouns are rather ambiguous; in this case the intended meaning is clarified by the following untranslated lines (III, 340.25-30) which cite several other hadith and Qur'anic passages where God shows some of "His" creations to certain prophetic messengers in order to teach them a particular lesson. Here Ibn 'Arabi implicitly contrasts this *spiritual* journey of the saints (and ultimately of all men) through their inner "states"—i.e., the "Signs in your souls" of verse 41:53 (see notes 34 and 72)—with the physical (or possibly "imaginal") journey through *places* which, as he explains below (end of section II), was the exclusive privilege of the Prophet on this single occasion.

[37]An allusion to the celebrated *hadith qudsi* already mentioned at n. 7 above: "My earth does not encompass Me, nor does My heaven, but the heart of My servant, the man of true faith, does encompass Me." This famous divine saying (not found in the canonical collections, but favored by many Sufi authors) is cited repeatedly by Ibn 'Arabi, who takes it as a classical reference to the role of the "Heart" (of the "Perfect Man," as realized by the accomplished saints) as the complete mirror of the divine *tajalliyat*. See the references at notes 30 and 33 above, and all of section IV-H (notes 167-173) below.

[II. **The Narrative Framework: the *Mi'raj* of Muhammad and His Many Spiritual Journeys**]

[The long following section (III, 340.32-342.34) combines a virtually complete quotation of one long hadith account of the Prophet's *Mi'raj*[38]—whose sequence of events and heavenly encounters with the spirits of earlier prophets provides the narrative framework for all of Ibn 'Arabi's different versions of that voyage—with a number of the Shaykh's personal observations. These brief remarks either foreshadow themes developed at greater length in the rest of the chapter (and in his other treatments of the Mi'raj theme) or else allude to interpretations (e.g., of the drinks offered the Prophet at the beginning of his journey, or of the rivers of Paradise) that he discusses more fully in the other contexts and chapters of the *Futuhat*. However, four of those asides are significant enough to deserve special mention here.

The first of these is Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the statement in this hadith that Muhammad "descended from Buraq (his celestial steed) and tied him up with the same halter the (other) prophets had used to tie him." For the Shaykh, "all of that was only so as to affirm (the importance and reality of) the secondary causes[39]..., although he knew that Buraq was commanded (by God) and would have stayed there even if he had left him without tying the halter."

The second of these parenthetical remarks occurs in the lowest heaven (the one immediately surrounding this sublunar world), when Muhammad is brought face-to-face with all the blessed and

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[38]Although Ibn 'Arabi does not identify his hadith sources in this section or explicitly distinguish his "quotations" (or paraphrases) from his own more personal comments and explanations, the particular "*hadith al-isra*'" (III, 340.30) which he follows for the basic order of events and encounters up to the "Lotus-Tree of the Limit"—both here and in the other Mi'raj narratives discussed in the introduction—is the first one given in the corresponding section of **Muslim's *Sahih* (*iman,* 259, from Anas b. Malik).** Here and in his other Mi'raj narratives he adds many additional details (e.g., the four mystical "rivers" flowing from the Tree of Life, the sound of the divine "Pens," the milk and other drinks offered the Prophet) which are taken for the most part from the following related traditions in Muslim (*iman*, 260-294)—although most of these hadith are also to be found in the other canonical collections with minor variations in the order and description of the events. Here, for example (at III, 341.12-14), Ibn 'Arabi explicitly mentions the fact (i.e., as an exception) when he refers to a particular hadith taken from Bukhari. Relevant details concerning these particular hadith and Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation of them underlying individual events or locations during the Mi'raj are discussed in the notes to the corresponding parts of section IV below.

[39]*ithbat al-asbab*: i.e., the affirmation of all the "realities" or phenomena other than God (the ultimate and Primary Cause). This assertion of the reality and importance of all phenomenal existence as perceived from the highest and most comprehensive spiritual perspective—a central leitmotif of Ibn Arabi's thought, and an attitude by no means shared by all Sufis—was already stressed in the title and opening line of the poem beginning this chapter, where he stresses that the true, ultimate state of "*tawakkul* (absolute trust and reliance on God) affirms the secondary causes." See the discussion of this point, in connection with the mysterious "fifth *tawakkul*" mentioned in the title of this chapter, at n. 27 above.

the damned among the descendants of Adam.[40] "Then (Muhammad) saw himself among the different individuals belonging to the blessed, at Adam's right hand, and he gave thanks to God. And through that he came to know how it is that man can be in two places (at the same time) while remaining precisely himself and not anyone else: this was for him like the visible (physical) form and the (reflected) forms visible in the mirror and (other) reflected images."[41]

The third such passage is Ibn 'Arabi's statement, in connection with the Prophet's visit to Jesus in the second heaven, that "He was our first master, through whose assistance we returned (to God); and he has a tremendous solicitude (*'inaya*) for us, so that he does not forget us for a single hour."[42]

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[40]The existence of those two groups on either side of Adam is mentioned in the second long Mi'raj hadith (from Abu Dharr) given by Muslim (*iman*, 264); however, that hadith does not mention Muhammad's seeing *himself* there, so that this aspect may possibly be Ibn 'Arabi's own addition.

[41]For the simultaneous presence of each soul—even if we are usually unaware of the fact—in its own Garden (or Hell) already during "*this* life," see the illustrative passages in this anthology (eschatology section) taken from chapter 302 (III, 12-13) and chapter 73, question 62 (II, 82).

More generally, this experience of the simultaneous presence of one's essential individual reality (*'ayn*: translated as "precisely himself" in this passage) in different planes of being is only one illustration of Ibn 'Arabi's universal perception of the reality of all manifest being as theophanies (*tajalliyat*, *mazahir*, etc.) of the "Realities" or Names within the divine Essence and of the "eternal individual entities" (*a'yan thabita*) in the divine Knowledge—a conception for which he frequently uses this image of mirrors and reflections. See the famous metaphysical development of this image in the first two chapters of the *Fusus al-Hikam*; in the *Futuhat* I, 163 and IV, 2; and further references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī,* pp. 499-505, as well as the striking set of diagrammatic representations of these "mirrors" of God and man provided by Haydar Amuli in the introduction to his vast commentary on the *Fusus al-Hikam*, *Nass al-Nusus* (Tehran, 1974), edited by H. Corbin and O. Yahya (plates 3-30).

[42]The special role of Jesus in the beginning of Ibn 'Arabi's own spiritual path is alluded to repeatedly in the *Futuhat*: "He was looking after us when we entered upon this Path we are following today" (I, 15.26); "I returned (to God: *tubtu*) at the hands of Jesus" (IV, 77.30); "Our return to this path was through good tidings (*mubashshira*) at the hand of Jesus, Moses and Muhammad" (IV, 172.13); and "we found that station (of immediate spiritual 'feeding') within ourselves and had the immediate experience (*dhawq*) of it at the beginning of our journeying, with the spiritual reality (*ruhaniya*) of Jesus" (III, 43.20-21). This may be connected with Ibn 'Arabi's mention that his own first Sufi shaykh, Abu al-'Abbas 'Uraybi, was distinguished by his special spiritual relationship with Jesus (*'isawi*): see references in the *Futuhat* at I, 223; II, 365; and III, 539.

In addition to the chapters of the *Futuhat* (ch. 20, 35-36, 195, etc.) and the *Fusus* (ch. 15) specifically devoted to Jesus, see more particularly the sections concerning Ibn 'Arabi's conception of Jesus' perennial spiritual function as the "Seal of *Universal* Sainthood," mirroring the Shaykh's own role as "the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood." Those references are summarized in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, chapters 5-9.

The final observation concerns the nature of the Prophet's vision (*ru'ya*) of God at the culminating stage of his Ascension, after God—in the words of the hadith—"had revealed to him what He revealed."[43] "Then He ordered (Muhammad) to enter; so he entered (the divine Presence), and there he *saw* exactly what he had known and nothing else: the form of his belief did not change."[44] This question of man's "divine vision" and knowledge is at the heart of Ibn 'Arabi's own long discussion with Moses later in this chapter (IV-F below) and underlies his accounts of his own personal vision at the all-encompassing "Muhammadan Station" (in IV-I below).

At the end of this section, after pointing out that it was only the Prophet's insistence on the actual bodily—rather than ecstatic or visionary—nature of this ascension that aroused the scepticism and hostility of his contemporaries,[45] Ibn 'Arabi concludes: "Now (Muhammad) had thirty-four times[46] in which (God) made him journey at night, and only one of them was a nocturnal journey in his (physical) body, while the others were with his spirit, through a vision which he saw."]

[III. The Spiritual Journeys of the Saints][47]

As for the saints, they have spiritual journeys in the intermediate world[48] during which they directly witness spiritual realities (*ma'ani*) embodied in forms that have become sensible for the

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[43]This succinct phrase, whose implications Ibn 'Arabi expands in thousands of words here and in his other treatments of the Mi'raj, is all that is actually stated by the various hadith in regard to this ultimate stage of the Ascension; here they clearly echo the Qur'anic verse 53:10 (*awha...ma awha*) concerning Muhammad's vision of one of "*the Greatest Signs*" at 53:18. "Revealed" here translates *wahy*, the highest form of divine "inspiration" distinguishing the prophetic messengers (*rusul*).

[44]For Ibn 'Arabi's complementary treatment of this decisive question of man's "vision" (*ru'ya*) or contemplation of God—as differing only "qualitatively," but not in its "form," from the contents of his innermost "beliefs"—in an *eschatological* perspective, see the illustrative passages in chapter 73, questions 67 and 71 (II, 85-86).

[45]It is not clear how Ibn 'Arabi means for the reader to reconcile this insistence (repeated at the beginning of section III below) on the "bodily" nature of this particular journey of the prophet with his earlier statement in this chapter (at III, 340.34) that "Buraq is a mount from the *barzakh*" (i.e., from the intermediate, imaginal world), as well his own frequent interpretation of the Prophet's visions as taking place on that plane of being. However, for Ibn 'Arabi, the events and perceptions taking place in the *barzakh* are also "bodily" and "sensible" in a certain respect. See also, in this regard, Ibn 'Arabi's pointed advice to his fellow spiritual voyagers (in section III below) not to mention the "*way*" in which one travels—which is likely to lead to controversy—but only what one has actually *seen*, which in itself remains beyond dispute.

[46]We have not been able to locate a hadith source for this assertion. In any case, the relative proportions this implies do suggest the primary importance of the *spiritual* journey of each soul, which is the essential subject of the rest of this chapter (and of Ibn 'Arabi's other major treatments of Mi'raj theme).

[47]III, 342.34-345.25; passages omitted from the translation are indicated and summarized as they occur.

imagination; these (sensible images) convey knowledge of the spiritual realities contained within those forms. And so they have a (spiritual) journey on the earth and in the air, without their ever having set a sensible foot in the heavens. For what distinguished God's Messenger from all the others (among the saints) was that his *body* was made to journey, so that he passed through the heavens and spheres in a way perceptible by the senses and traversed real, sensible distances. But all of that from the heavens (also belongs) to his heirs,[49] (only) in its spiritual reality (*ma'na*), not its sensible form.

So as for what is above the heavens,[50] let us mention what God made me directly witness in particular of the journey of the People of God. For their journeys are different (in form) because they are embodied spiritual realities, unlike the sensible journey (of the Prophet). Thus the ascensions (*ma'arij*) of the saints are the ascensions of (their) spirits and the vision of (their) hearts, (the vision) of forms in the intermediate world and of embodied spiritual realities. And we have already mentioned what we directly witnessed of that in our book called *"The Nocturnal Journey,"*[51] along with the order of (the stages of) the voyage....

Therefore whenever God wishes to journey with the spirits of whomever He wishes among the heirs of His messengers and His saints, ***so that He might cause*** them ***to see His Signs*** (Qur'an 17:1)—for

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[48]*isra'at ruhaniya barzakhiya*: in the rest of this chapter the forms of *asra* (*isra'*, etc.) are translated simply as "journey," without the adjective "nocturnal," which would be misleading (if taken literally) in English. As already noted above, Ibn 'Arabi's own usage in this context refers to the inward, "invisible" nature of these spiritual voyages (i.e., from the perspective of an external observer), not to the time they may occur.

[49]i.e., the saints: for the central importance of Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the saints as "heirs" of the different prophets (and all of them ultimately as heirs of the "Muhammadan Reality," whose heritage encompasses all the earlier prophets), see Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 1191-1201, Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints*, chapters 3 and 5, and of course the massive illustration of this theme throughout the *Fusus al-Hikam*.

[50]This phrase has two possible meanings: if it refers to the purely spiritual or noetic (*ma'nawi*) phases of the mystical journey symbolically surpassing even the outermost celestial sphere, then this would roughly correspond to Ibn 'Arabi's enumeration of the forms of knowledge gained in his culminating vision, at the end of this chapter (IV-I), a stage which is described in more detail in Chapter 167 of the *Futuhat* (S. Ruspoli, *L'Alchimie*, pp. 131-141) and in the *Kitab al-Isra'* (*Rasa'il* I, no. 13, pp. 45 ff.). Or if—as appears more likely here—it refers to what is spiritually "above" the *physical* spheres and planets (and therefore the intellectual sciences that can be deduced from their observation, as outlined in chapter 167), then Ibn 'Arabi is pointing to the entire "autobiographical" spiritual narrative in the *K. al-Isra'* and the rest of this chapter (= section IV below).

[51]*Kitab al-Isra'*: see the discussion of the autobiographical nature of this work in the introduction to this chapter (notes 12-15), the key passage describing Ibn 'Arabi's own culminating revelation translated in our *JAOS* article cited at n. 13 above, and further cross-references at each stage of section IV below. This paragraph is followed by a short poem (III, 343.6-17), not translated here, recapitulating the "order of the journey," i.e., the various symbolic stages (seven heavens, Lotus-tree of the Limit, divine Throne, etc.) found in virtually all of Ibn 'Arabi's versions of the Ascension.

this is a journey to increase (their) knowledge and open the eye of (their) understanding—the modalities of their journey are different (for different individuals):[52] and among them are those whom He causes to journey *in* Him.

Now this journey (in God) involves the "dissolving" of their composite nature.[53] Through this journey God (first of all) acquaints them with what corresponds to them in each world (of being), by passing with them through the different sorts of worlds, both composite and simple.[54] Then (the spiritual traveler) leaves behind in each world that part of himself which corresponds to it: the form of his leaving it behind is that God sends a barrier between that person and that part of himself he left behind in that sort of world, so that he is not aware of it. But he still has the awareness of what remains with him, until eventually he remains (alone) with the divine Mystery which is the "specific aspect"[55] extending from God to him. So when he alone remains (without any of those other

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[52]"modalities of their journey" = *masrahum*, which could also refer to their "point of departure," the "place" or "time" of the journey, the particular "route," etc. See section IV-F below, where Yahya (John the Baptist) explains to Ibn 'Arabi that each journey is different and "each traveler creates his own path."

Elsewhere Ibn 'Arabi, often following earlier Sufi writers, offers a variety of typologies for the soul's spiritual voyage: e,g., the fivefold division of *suluk* in chapter 189 (II, 380-382); the classical "four journeys" (*asfar*); or the more elaborate division into dozens of "stations," "stages," "meeting-places," etc. underlying the chapter divisions of the *Futuhat* as a whole. The key distinctions in such cases differ according to the particular focus and intentions of each section, and such categories therefore do not necessarily overlap in a systematic fashion. (Thus, for example, the three essential aspects of the saints' voyage "in God" described in this section seem to be treated as *separate* journeys in other contexts.)

[53]*hall tarkibihim*: i.e., the process of "dissolution" or "disassembly" into its constituent elements (organic, mental, psychic and spiritual) of the original "composition" (*tarkib*) constituting the psycho-social "self" (*dhat*) in the broadest sense—as opposed to the *sirr* (n. 55), the "innermost reality" or "secret" that is the true essence of each individual. The terms "dissolving" (*tahlil*) and "reintegration" (*tarkib*) are drawn from a larger body of alchemical vocabulary which Ibn 'Arabi uses in this spiritual sense throughout the *Futuhat*, most notably in chapter 167 (see introduction above), on the "Alchemy of Happiness."

[54]The term "world" (*'alam*) refers here to the different "levels of being" or ontological "planes" (*nash'at*, *hadarat*, etc.) of divine manifestation; the "simple" ones being the purely noetic (*'aqli*) or spiritual Realities, while most phenomena are a "composite" (*murakkab*) involving some degree of materiality or manifest form in either the physical or intermediate, imaginal worlds.

[55]*al-wajh al-khass*: this key technical term of Ibn 'Arabi designates each creature's unique and unchanging inner "existentiating" relationship with God, prior to whatever knowledge or other transformations that may be acquired through its actions and "mediated" relationships in the course of life. (See the extensive references from the *Futuhat* in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 1139-1142.)

The paradoxical relationship (of simultaneous identity and non-identity) between this "divine Mystery" or "secret" (*al-sirr al-ilahi*) and the voyager's own innermost reality (*sirr*) is brought out more openly in the culminating stages of Ibn 'Arabi's own *mi'raj* recounted in

attachments to the world), then God removes from him the barrier of the veil[56] and he remains with God, just as everything else in him remained with (the world) corresponding to it.

Hence throughout this journey the servant remains God and not-God.[57] And since he remains God and not-God, He makes (the servant) travel—with respect to Him, not with respect to (what is) not-Him—*in Him*,[58] in a subtle spiritual (*ma'nawi*) journey....

[Ibn 'Arabi goes on (III, 343.24-344.4) to recall the fundamental metaphysical underpinnings of these distinctions in the peculiar nature of the inner correspondence between man and the world (i.e., "not-God"), since both are created—in the words of a famous hadith—"according to the form" of God. Ordinarily, however, people think of themselves as simply "parts" of the world, as "things" within it, and it is only at the end of this purifying journey that the saints can realize man's true dignity and spiritual function as the "Perfect Man" (*al-insan al-kamil*) whose Heart fully mirrors the divine Reality (*al-Haqq*), thereby accomplishing that perfection for which the world itself was created.[59]]

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section IV-I and in his description (from the *K. al-Isra'*) of a similar culminating experience of "unveiling" translated in our article cited at n. 13 above.

[56]*hijab al-sitr*: the "veil" (*sitr*) in this case seems to refer not to a further particular obstacle, but rather to all the forms of attachment and implicit idolatry (*shirk*) "dissolved" in the course of the traveler's ascension, which together blocked him from the realizing his inner relation to God (the "divine Mystery," *sirr*, mentioned in the preceding note). For further discussion of these central concepts in Ibn 'Arabi's thought, see Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 561-662 ("*sitr*") and 313-318 ("*hijab*").

[57]*huwa la huwa*: literally, "He (and) not-He"—a formula whose meaning is clarified in the following lines (summarized here).

For Ibn 'Arabi, the term "servant" (*'abd*) frequently has the special technical meaning—closely corresponding to its usage in certain Qur'anic passages—of those rare individuals among the saints (and prophets) who have fully realized their inner relation to their Creator, to the Reality encompassing all the divine Names, and who are therefore not unconsciously subject to the "lordship" of any other creatures. See especially the references to his decisive discovery of his own true nature as "pure servant" (*'abd mahd*) at the culmination of his own spiritual ascension, in section IV-I (n. 198) below, and the detailed discussion and further references in Hakim, *Mu'jam*, pp. 765-778.

[58]or "in him" (i.e., in the servant). The ambiguity is again probably intentional: as Ibn 'Arabi goes on to explain, this voyage is "in God" (i.e., consciously, not simply "ontologically"), but it is also "in the servant" insofar as he can only know the divine Names in their manifestation within himself, in his own states and experience. The description of this second stage of the spiritual journey of the saints resumes at III, 344.4.

[59]The classic summary of this inner "correspondence" of man, God and creation in Ibn 'Arabi (and including many of the hadith and Qur'anic verses he commonly cites to illustrate it), is to be found in the opening chapter (on Adam) of the *Fusus al-Hikam* (I, 48-58; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of wisdom*, pp. 50-59); readers without Arabic should refer to the French version of T. Burckhardt, *La Sagesse des*

So when the servant has become aware of what we have just explained, so that he knows that he is not (created) according to the form of the world, but only according to the form of God (*al-Haqq*), then God *makes him journey* through His Names, *in order to cause him to see His Signs* (Qur'an 17:1) within him.[60] Thus (the servant) comes to know that He is what is designated by every divine Name—whether or not that Name is one of those described as "beautiful."[61] It is through those Names that God appears in His servants, and it is through Them that the servant takes on the different "colorings" of his states: for They are Names in God, but "colorings" (of the soul) in us.[62]

Prophètes (Paris, 1955), because of its helpful annotation; it is probably still the most understandable translation of this extremely complex section.

[60]or "within *H*im": the pronoun here—in an essential ambiguity to be found throughout Ibn 'Arabi's writings—could equally be read as referring to God (*al-Haqq*) as well as to the "servant," given the profound connection (although not simple identity) between the two that becomes apparent at this advanced stage of spiritual realization (see notes 55, 58-59). "God," throughout this paragraph, translates *al-Haqq* ("the Truth"), i.e., the ultimate or absolute divine Reality encompassing—and at the same time transcending—all the particular "Names" through which It becomes known and manifest.

The mention of man's being created "according to the form" (*'ala sura*) or "in the image" of God is an allusion to the well-known hadith (with evident Biblical parallels): "God created Adam in His image..." (The hadith is recorded by Bukhari, Muslim and Ahmad b. Hanbal; see also W. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word*, pp. 151-152.)

[61]An allusion to the famous Qur'anic verse 7:180: "*For God's are the most beautiful Names, so call Him by them; and leave those who go astray with regard to His Names....*" Here Ibn 'Arabi evidently refers to the natural human tendency to become attached to the Names of divine Beauty (*jamal*) while failing to come to terms with the manifestations of what the Sufis traditionally called the Names of divine "Majesty" or "Severity" (*jalal*).

At the very end of this chapter (III, 354.15-16), Ibn 'Arabi mentions that this insight into the ultimate Unity of the divine Reality "named" (*ahadiyat al-musamma*) by each of the divine Names constitutes one of the many kinds of knowledge he realized in the culminating stage of his own spiritual ascension. There (as also, e.g., in the *Fusus*, chapters 4 and 21) he acknowledges the earlier development of this thesis in a work by the famous Andalusian Sufi Ibn Qasi (d. 546/1151), *Khal' al-Na'layn* (cf. the recent Cairo, 2011 edtion edited by Mazīdī). For Ibn 'Arabi's own long commentary on that work, see *RG* no. 681 (II, pp. 463-464). The inner spiritual "verification" of that reality is one of the key features of the culminating realization described in section IV-I and in the corresponding passage from the *K. al-Isra'* translated and commented in our *JAOS* article cited at n. 13 above.

[62]"Colorings" translates *talwinat*, a traditional Sufi expression for all the constantly changing psychic states and conditions of every individual, equivalent to the incessant inner "transformations" (*taqallubat*) of the soul discussed in the following paragraph (n. 65). As Ibn 'Arabi indicates here, the manifestations of the divine Names ultimately constitute all our experience and reality; hopefully this theological terminology, unfamiliar as it may be for most modern readers, will not obscure the universality of his metaphysical perspective.

And they are precisely the "affairs" with which God is "occupied":[63] so it is in us and through us that He acts, just as we (only) appear in Him and through Him. [...[64]]

Thus when God makes the saint (al-wali) travel through His most beautiful Names to the other Names and (ultimately) all the divine Names, he comes to know the transformations of his states and the states of the whole world.[65] And (he knows) that that transformation is what brings those very Names to be in *us*,[66] just as we know that the transformations of (our) states (manifest) the specific influences (ahkam) of those Names.... So there is no Name that God has applied to Himself that He has not also applied to us: through (His Names) we undergo the transformations in our states, and with them we are transformed (by God)....[67]

Now when (the spiritual traveler) has completed his share of the journey through the Names and has come to know the Signs which the Names of God gave him during that journey, then he returns

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[63]An allusion to the famous Qur'anic verse 55:29: **."..*Every Day He is (occupied) in an affair.*"** Ibn 'Arabi typically takes the term *sha'n* ("affair," "concern," etc.) in this verse to refer to the infinite particular aspects of the divine "Activity" at each instant in time: see, e.g., *Futuhat* II, 77, 82, 218, 499; III, 198, 224; and the further references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 639-642.

[64]The translation here omits a brief poem (III, 344.8-11) illustrating this central theme of Ibn 'Arabi's thought and foreshadowing his own inner realization of this truth in the culminating vision described in section IV-I below.

[65]"Transformations" = *taqallubat*—a meaning which, for Ibn 'Arabi, underlies the Arabic term for the Heart (*qalb*), since these constantly renewed transformations of being ultimately constitute all our experience: see his classic exposition of this realization in the *Fusus*, chapt. 12 (on Shu'ayb and "the Wisdom of the Heart"), and further references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 916-921. His mention here of the "states of the world" is an important reminder that these "transformations" and the divine activity of "ever-renewed creation" encompass *all* the forms of experience and perception—not just what we ordinarily consider "inner" or "spiritual" phenomena—and all the forms of manifest being. For the multiple meanings of the complex term *wali* (translated as "saint" here), see n. 79 below.

[66]This opening phrase could likewise be translated so as to "invert" this relationship (although that meaning is also implied, in any case, in the second half of the sentence): "And that transformation is what is brought about in us by the essence of those Names." In either case, this sentence aptly summarizes the relation of inherent "reciprocity" between God and the creatures (or the Names and their manifestations) which underlies Ibn 'Arabi's frequent and apparently paradoxical statements that God (and the Names) "need man" (in order to be manifest and known), or that the caused thing "causes its Cause."

[67]The translation is uncertain. We have again omitted some further illustrations (III, 344.20-24) of this metaphysical relationship between certain divine Names and their manifestations in our experience.

and "reintegrates" his self with a composition different from that initial composite nature,[68] because of the knowledge he has gained which he did not have when he was "dissolved" (in the ascending phase of that journey).[69] Thus he continues to pass through the different sorts of worlds, taking from each world that (aspect of himself) which he had left there and reintegrating it in his self, and he continues to appear in each successive stage (of being) until he arrives back on earth.

So "he awakens among his people" (like the Prophet), and no one knows what happened to occur to him in his innermost being (*sirr*) until he speaks (of his journey). But then they hear him speaking a language different from the one they are used to recognizing as his; and if one of them says to him "What is this?," he replies that "God made me journey by night and then caused me to see whatever Signs of His He wanted (me to see)." So those who are listening say to him: "You were not gone from us, so you were lying in what you claimed about that."[70]

And the jurist (*faqih*) among them says: "This fellow is laying claim to prophethood (*nubuwwa*), or his intellect has become deranged: so either he is a heretic—in which case he ought to be executed—or else he is insane, in which case we have no business talking with him." Thus "a group of people make fun of him" (Qur'an 49:11), others "draw a lesson from him" (Qur'an 59:2),[71] while

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[68]See n. 53 and the accompanying text above for the meaning of the "self" (*dhat*) in question here and the preliminary process of its "dissolving" (*tahlil*) into the various components of its "composite nature" (*tarkib*) in each level ("world") of being.

For further details on Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of this key category of *al-raji'un*—"those who have returned" to complete the full process of enlightenment by reintegrating all the descending levels of being in their true, divine context and reality—see chapter 45 of the *Futuhat* (I, 250-253), which is also available in the French translation by M. Valsan in "Sur celui qui « revient »" (*Etudes traditionnelles* 307, 1953). See also the detailed references in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints*, chapter 7.

[69]That is, he is now fully aware of the divine Ground and the Names underlying each of those "things" in the world (or in his "self") which he had originally seen as a reality independent of God, and which had been temporarily "veiled" from his attention during the spiritual ascension; or in other words, he has become profoundly aware of *all* things as God's "Signs" (as indicated in Ibn 'Arabi's allusions to the famous Qur'anic verse 41:53, at notes 34 and 72).

[70]This paragraph, opening with a phrase from the *hadith al-isra'* (section II above), alludes to Ibn 'Arabi's reminder earlier in this chapter (III, 342.27-33) of the sceptical, even hostile reaction of many Meccans to the Prophet's insistence on the physical, bodily nature of his nocturnal journey. Those events are vividly recounted in Ibn Ishaq's *Sira*: see pp. 182-184 in *The Life of Muhammad*, tr. A. Guillaume (London/New York, 1955). It is also another allusion to Ibn 'Arabi's understanding (see notes 2 and 35 above) of the "hidden," spiritual character of this voyage of realization for the saints. In the *R. al-Anwar* (*Rasa'il*, p. 17; *Journey*,. p. 59), Ibn 'Arabi explains that the fact that Muhammad—unlike, for example, Moses after his return from Mt. Sinai—showed no outward signs of his Ascension and revelatory encounter with God is an indication of his superior spiritual state of "perfect realization," corresponding to the equivalent "invisibility" of the *afrad* and *malamiya* among the saints "who return," the *raji'un*.

[71]The first phrase is clearly an allusion to the following verse (Qur'an 49:11): "*O you who have true faith, do not (let) a group make fun of a group who may well be better than them*...."; the second

others have faith in what he says, and thus it becomes a subject of dispute in the world. But the *faqih* was unaware of (the true meaning of) His saying: "**We shall show them Our Signs on the horizons and in their souls**..." (Qur'an 41:53),[72] since (God) does not specify one group rather than (any) other.

Therefore whoever God may cause to see something of these Signs in the way we have just mentioned should mention (only) *what* he has seen, but he should not mention the way. For then people will have credence in him and will look into what he says, since they will only deny what he says if he makes a claim about the way (he acquired that knowledge).

Now you should know that (in reality) there is no difference with regard to this journey between ordinary people[73] and the person (distinguished by) this way and this characteristic. That is because (this spiritual journey) is in order to see the (divine) Signs, and the transformations of the states of ordinary people are (likewise) all Signs: they are *in* those Signs, but "*they do not notice*" (Qur'an 23:56; etc.).[74] Hence this sort (of traveler) is only distinguished from the rest of (his fellow) creatures, *those who are veiled* (Qur'an 83:15), by what God has inspired in his innermost being[75] either through his thinking and inquiry with his intellect, or through his preparation, by polishing the mirror of his soul, for the unveiling of these Signs to him by way of inner unveiling and immediate witnessing, direct experience and ecstatic "finding."[76]

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probably refers to the well-known words (from verse 59:2): ."..**so draw a lesson, you who have (true) vision**"—the latter group (*ulu' al-absar*), for Ibn 'Arabi, clearly being the saints or people of true spiritual vision.

[72]The continuation of this famous verse—underlining its universal metaphysical (or eschatological) dimension—is also assumed here: ."..**until it becomes clear to them that He is the Truly Real** (*al-Haqq*)**—or is your Lord not enough, that He is Witness of every thing? Are they still in doubt about meeting their Lord? Is He not surrounding every thing**?" (See also the earlier allusions to this verse in section I above, at notes 34 and 36.)

[73]*al-'alam*: literally, "(the people of) the world"; "(spiritual) journey" here, as throughout this section, translates *isra'*, the term applied in the Qur'an to the Prophet's "nocturnal journey" (see n. 35 above).

[74]The Qur'an applies the same formula to man's usual lack of spiritual awareness in a number of different contexts (especially with regard to the eschatological realities), but this particular verse (Qur'an 23:56) seems to be most relevant here: "**We hurry to them with the good things, but no, they do not notice**!"

[75]"innermost being" = *sirr* (see n. 55 above). "Inspired" here translates the verb *alhama*, a term that is much broader in meaning than the special divine "revelation" (*wahy*) characterizing the prophetic messengers, since here it evidently extends to the results of thinking (*fikr*) and "rational inquiry" (*nazar bi-l-'aql*), as well as the fruits of spiritual practice and mystical experience (the "polishing of the soul") which are Ibn 'Arabi's primary focus here (see following note).

[76]*kashfan shuhudan dhawqan wujudan*: see the extensive references to Ibn 'Arabi's usage of each of these key terms in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 971-972 (*kashf*), 654-667 (*shuhud* and related forms), and 492-495 (*dhawq*), as well as his discussions concerning the necessary role of this "direct

Thus ordinary people (when they object to those who speak of this spiritual voyage) are denying precisely That within Which they are and through Which they subsist. So if (the traveler) did not mention the *way* in which he obtained the inner knowledge of these things, no one would deny or dispute him. For all of the (ordinary) people—and I do not exclude a single one of them—are "making up likenesses for God";[77] they have always agreed and cooperated in that, so not one of them criticizes another for doing it. God says: "***Do not make up likenesses for God***..." (Qur'an 16:74)—yet they remain blind to that Sign.[78]

But as for *the friends of God* (Qur'an 10:64-66),[79] they do not make up likenesses for God. For *God* is the One Who *makes up likenesses for the people* (Qur'an 14:25; 24:35), because of His knowledge of the underlying intentions (of those symbols), since *God knows, but* we *do not know*[80] (see Qur'an 16:74; 3:66; 2:216). Thus the saint (the one truly "close to God") observes the likenesses God has made, and in that immediate witnessing he actually *sees* precisely what connects the likeness and That Which it symbolizes: for the likeness is precisely what is symbolized, with respect to that which

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experience" (*dhawq*) in his encounters with Joseph and Moses in section IV (notes 108 and 145) below.

[77]I.e., instead of grasping the inner reality of *God's* symbols, those that already exist (and which ultimately constitute all reality). "(Ordinary) people" here translates *al-nass*, a Qur'anic expression with much the same meaning here as *al-'alam* (n. 73) in the preceding sentences—i.e., everyone but the accomplished saints, the "Friends of God" discussed in the following paragraph.

The phrase in quotation marks here (and in the various Qur'anic verses discussed below) could also be translated as "making up likenesses (or symbols) *of* God"—and that activity certainly accounts for an important part of Ibn 'Arabi's criticism. However, it gradually emerges from the subsequent discussion that the main focus of his critique here is man's natural (and more universal) tendency not to grasp and assimilate the "likenesses" (or "symbols," *amthal*) contained in the divine revelation (in all its infinite forms and "Signs"), but rather to impose his own limiting conceptions and standards on God and the world.

[78]Or "to (the meaning of) that *verse*": the individual verses of the Qur'an are traditionally referred to as the divine "Signs" (*ayat*) par excellence.

[79]or "those close to God," *awliya' Allah*: the term *wali* (pl. *awliya*) has usually been translated here as "saint," but in this case Ibn 'Arabi is more clearly stressing the root sense of their special closeness or proximity to God—a meaning which is also brought out in the Qur'anic verses concerning these rare individuals "***who have no fear and are not sad***," who have reached "***the ultimate Achievement***" (*al-fawz al-'azim*). (See also the more comprehensive discussion in Chodkiewicz, *Sceau*, chapters I and III.)

[80]Although the phrase ."..***God knows, but you do not know***" completes the Qur'anic verse (16:74) already quoted in the preceding paragraph, its more illuminating use in the other two verses evidently forms the background for this particular allusion: in Qur'an 3:66 it is applied to those who "***dispute concerning that of which they have no knowledge***," and in verse 2:216 it follows the reminder that "***Perhaps you abhor something although it is good for you, and perhaps you love something and it is bad for you***."

connects them, but it is different insofar as it is a likeness. So the saint "does not make up likenesses for God"; instead, he truly *knows* what God symbolized with those likenesses....[81]

[IV. IBN 'ARABI'S PERSONAL MI'RAJ]

[IV-A. The Departure From the Elemental World][82]

So when God wished to "journey with me to cause me to see (some) of His Signs" in His Names among my names[83]—and that was the portion of our inheritance from the (Prophet's) nocturnal journey—He removed me from my place and ascended with me on the Buraq of my contingency.[84] Then He penetrated with me into my (natural) elements....

[At this point Ibn 'Arabi allegorically encounters each of the elements constituting the physical, sublunar world, according to the accepted physical theories of his time—i.e., earth, water, air and fire—and leaves behind with each of them the corresponding part of his bodily nature.][85]

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[81]In the remainder of this section (III, 340.6-25), Ibn 'Arabi first insists on the decisive importance of considering every single detail of expression in the revealed divine "likenesses" or symbols (which he illustrates here with reference to the famous Light-verse of the Qur'an, 24:35). This point, in his opinion, was rarely respected by those interpreters (*mutakallimun*, philosophers, etc.) who relied on their own reasoning (*nazar*) to decipher the meaning of those symbols. He then goes on to stress the decisive differences between such "rationalist" approaches and the methods of the saints, who rely solely on inspired "unveiling" (*kashf*) and direct "witnessing" (*shuhud*) of the divine intentions in those cases (see n. 76 above).

[82]III, 435.26-35.

[83]*fi asma'ihi min asma'i*: a dense formula that summarizes Ibn 'Arabi's complex metaphysical understanding of the divine Names in their relation to each individual's experience, as outlined in the immediately preceding section. This relatively abstract formulation is made more explicit in his discussion of the Heart—of the Knower, but ultimately of each individual—as the true Temple or "House of God," in section IV-H (notes 168-172) below, and finds its ultimate confirmation in the revelatory personal experiences described in section IV-I.

[84]*imkani*, referring to each creature's inner dependency on God (and the particular "lords" constituted by certain divine Names) for its very being and manifestation. In Ibn 'Arabi's description of the culminating revelation of his own universal, "Muhammadan Station" (III, 350 = section IV-I below), he says that God "took away (his) contingency," so that he could "realize the inner realities of all the divine Names."

   "Buraq" is the name of the Prophet's mysterious steed described in the hadith accounts of the *Mi'raj* and *Isra'*: see the translation at n. 39 above and Ibn 'Arabi's longer discussion of the "Buraq" of each of the prophetic Messengers in section II at III, 341.2-4 (passage not translated here), as well as the article "*Burak*" (by R. Paret) in *EI*.

[85]This brief passage (III, 345.27-35) therefore symbolizes all the relevant dimensions both of the individual's natural "predisposition" (*isti'dad*) and of his voluntary spiritual "work" that are actually

So I passed through into the first heaven:[86] nothing remained with me of my bodily nature[87] that I (needed to) depend on or to which I (had to) pay attention.

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necessary to overcome and escape the animal tendencies and attachments ordinarily flowing from his bodily/psychic nature.

The experiential dimensions and practical presuppositions of this task of "purification" or "dissolution" of those attachments (*tahlil*: see above at notes 52 and 67) are brought out much more explicitly in the longer opening passages of the *R. al-Anwar* (see introduction above, notes 16-19). In particular, Ibn 'Arabi describes there (Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, p. 154; T. Harris, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, pp. 36-39) the voyager's necessary passage through the mineral, vegetal and animal realms before he can begin the properly "human" (*insani*) stage of this spiritual journey. The indispensable role of these "lower" dimensions of being in man's complete perfection—through which he surpasses even the angels (who lack this experience of the full range of existence)—is underlined in the vivid and partially autobiographical descriptions at the end of the chapter on Elias (no. 22) in the *Fusus al-Hikam* (I, 186-187; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom*, p. 185).

[86]"Heaven," throughout these sections, translates *sama'*, a term referring both to the various concentric heavenly spheres universally assumed by the astronomical theories of the time (as well as the Qur'an and the hadith accounts of the Ascension) and—more importantly, for Ibn 'Arabi—to the spiritual or noetic realities (i.e., the *ruhaniyat* or *asrar* of the various prophets named in the hadith) symbolically associated with each of those spheres. This meaning is therefore quite different from the "gardens" (*jannat*) and other abodes of "Paradise" (*al-janna*) that together constitute what we ordinarily call "heaven" (as opposed to "hell").

[87]*nash'ati al-badaniya*: *nash'a*, literally "arising" or "appearing (in existence)," is one of Ibn 'Arabi's most common expressions (following the Qur'an 56:62, etc.) for the different "planes" or realms of being. As already mentioned in the Introduction, the purely spiritual (and non-physical) nature of these "passages" (at least for the saints, unlike the special case of the Prophet; see text at notes 46 and 49 above])—which depend only symbolically on the astronomical theories of Ibn 'Arabi's time— is brought out quite explicitly in the other Mi'raj narrative in chapter 167 of the *Futuhat*. There (Anawati, *L'Alchimie*, pp. 57-58), for example, this "departure" from the physical world is explicitly explained as the inner liberation from "domination by the carnal desires" (*hukm al-shahawat*).

[IV-B. Adam and the First Heaven][88]

[As Ibn 'Arabi explains in this section, it was during this encounter with his "father" that he was first given the immediate spiritual awareness of two key themes of his thought: the universality of the divine Mercy which, like the Being that is inseparable from it, "encompasses all things"; and, flowing from this first principle, the temporal, limited nature of the punishments of "Hell" (and the sufferings of the world as a whole), which manifest certain of those Names.[89] The discovery and awareness of these principles presupposes man's ultimate reality as the "Perfect Man" (*insan kamil*), the (potentially) complete reflection of the divine Reality at all Its levels of manifestation—i.e., the very foundation of the Shaykh's metaphysical vision which is developed at much greater length in the famous opening chapter on Adam in the *Fusus*.

At the beginning of this encounter Ibn 'Arabi—like Muhammad before him[90]—suddenly sees his "essential reality" (*'ayn*) among the souls of the blessed on Adam's right, while at the same time he himself remains standing in front of Adam. Then Adam goes on to inform him that the Qur'anic expressions "**the people of the left hand**" and "**the people of the right**" (Qur'an 56:27, 38, 41, 90;

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[88]III, 345.1-20; the sections translated in full here correspond to lines 9-20 (omitting part of lines 14-15). While the *R. al-Anwar* does not refer at all to Adam and his sphere, chapter 167 of the *Futuhat* (= Anawati, *L'Alchimie*, pp. 57-63) primarily deals with the cosmological functions of this sphere in the sub-lunar realm, matters which are also partially accessible to the "rationalist" thinker who accompanies the Prophet's "heir" in that voyage. However Ibn 'Arabi does allude there to fundamental spiritual points which are greatly elaborated in the *K. al-Isra'* and later on in this chapter (367): (1) the fact that "Adam" teaches each person *only* those divine Names (and the spiritual knowledge flowing from them) that can be accepted by that individual's particular constitution or predisposition; and (2) the fundamental importance of the "particular divine aspect" (*al-wajh al-khass*: see n. 55 above), the divine "mystery" (*sirr*) uniting each creature directly to God, which Ibn 'Arabi calls the "Elixir of the true Knowers" (*Iksir al-'Arifin*), the secret of their inner knowledge of God (and of its particular limits for each individual).

Ibn 'Arabi's important account of his revelatory experience at this stage in the *K. al-Isra'* (*Rasa'il*, pp. 12-14)—which closely corresponds to the culminating section (IV-I) of this chapter 367 in th *Futuhat*—is translated and commented in our article cited at n. 13 above.

[89]Both of these points are listed among the different kinds of knowledge which Ibn 'Arabi "saw" during the culminating "revelation" described at the end of this chapter; see the translation of those particular points at the end of section IV-I below. (See also the related discussions of these issues and further references in our translated selections from chapters 73, 302, 351 and 369 in the eschatological section of this anthology.)

[90]See the corresponding passage of the *hadith al-isra'* in section II (at notes 39-40) above; according to the original hadith (only partially translated here), Muhammad first sees all the descendants of Adam divided among the blessed (literally, "the happy": *su'ada'*) at his right hand and the "wretched" or "suffering ones" (*ashqiya'*) on his left.

etc.) refer in reality to *Adam*'s hands, since *all* of mankind are in God's "Right Hand"—"the one which destines (them) to happiness"—"because both of my Lord's Hands are Right and blessed."[91]]

."..Therefore I and and my children are (all) in the Right Hand of the Truly Real (*al-Haqq*), while everything in the world other than us is in the other divine Hand."

I said: "Then we shall not be made to suffer (in Hell)?"

And (Adam) replied: "If (God's) Anger were to continue (forever), then the suffering (of the damned) would continue. But it is felicity that continues forever, although the dwellings are different, because God places in each abode (of Paradise and Gehenna) that which comprises the enjoyment of the people of that abode, which is why both abodes must necessarily be 'filled up' (see Qur'an 11:119; etc.).[92] For the (divine) Anger has already come to an end with the 'Greater Reviewing':[93]

[91]This phrase is quoted from a longer "divine saying", presupposed throughout this section, which Ibn 'Arabi included in his personal collection of *hadith qudsi*, the *Mishkat al-Anwar* (no. 24, where it is attributed to Tirmidhi; *Divine Sayings*, pp. 42-43). There God—having created Adam and sent him to greet the angels—shows Adam His two closed Hands, saying: "Choose whichever you will," and Adam replies: "I choose the Right Hand of My Lord, [though] both Hands of my Lord are right and blessed." "Thereupon God opened it, and there were Adam and his progeny."

[92]Ibn 'Arabi alludes here to his controversial conception, developed at length in the *Fusus* (e.g., at the end of ch. 7 on Ismail) and in the eschatological sections of the *Futuhat*, that it is precisely the exclusive choice of certain limited "enjoyments" (whether bodily or imaginal), varying according to each person's predispositions and inner tendencies, that—by veiling him from the full awareness of God—ultimately constitutes each particular "dwelling" (*maskan*) among the many levels of Hell. Thus it is only with the lifting of that veil of (spiritual) ignorance that the person becomes fully aware that what he considered "happiness" at the same time *is* both his suffering and his (potentially purifying) punishment. But Ibn 'Arabi also suggests (*Fusus* I, 94; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom*, p. 110) that even for the "people of Gehenna who remain there eternally" (i.e., who are not ultimately redeemed through the intercession of their prophets), their "torment" (*'adhab*) will ultimately be made "sweet" (*'idhab*). For the development of similar conceptions in the *Futuhat*, see, e.g., I, 656; III, 673; IV, 248, 408; and further references in the eschatological section of this anthology.

[93]*al-'ard al-akbar*: the "Reviewing" or "Presentation" (*'ard*) of souls and their actions mentioned in the Qur'an (11:18; 18:48; etc.) and elaborated in certain hadith was popularly understood as one of the "events" occurring when all souls are gathered together on the "Day" of Resurrection; see Ibn 'Arabi's brief summary of this particular stage of the Resurrection—formulated in relatively exoteric, popular terms—in chapter 64 of the *Futuhat* (I, 307-317), on the "stages of the Resurrection" (= *OY* ed. IV, p. 466).

Here—following Ibn 'Arabi's usual distinction between the "greater" (universal) and "lesser" (individual) Resurrection [see, e.g., ch. 369 (III, 388-390) and Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 945-946]—the "Greater Reviewing" evidently refers to the total, comprehensive process of all human actions and spiritual destinies (or at least those within one cosmic cycle) as viewed from the all-encompassing, metahistorical divine standpoint. That is why it can be perceived here, by the universal "Adam" who stands beyond time, as "already finished." The "lesser Reviewing" would then apparently be the same reality as perceived from the

(God) ordered that (His) limits be established;[94] so they were established, and when they were established (His) Anger disappeared. (This is) because the sending down of the (divine) Message (*tanzil al-risala*) actually *is* precisely the establishment (and application) of (God's) limits for *those with whom He is angry* (Qur'an 1:7), and nothing remains (after that) but (His) Good Will and *Mercy which encompasses every thing* (Qur'an 7:156). So when these 'limits' (and the punishments flowing from them) have come to an end, then the (divine) authority[95] comes back to the universal Mercy with regard to everything."[96]

Thus my father Adam granted me the benefit of this knowledge when I was unaware of it, and that was divine good tidings for me in the life of this world, in anticipation (of its full realization in the hereafter). Therefore the Resurrection comes to an end with time,[97] as God said: "[**The angels and**

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standpoint of an individual soul.   The same distinction between the "lesser" (i.e., microcosmic) and "greater" (macrocosmic) "Hour," "Visit," "Gathering," etc. is developed in many of the eschatological readings (from chapters 73, 302, 351, etc.) in this anthology; see especially our general Introduction to those selections.

[94]or "that (His) sanctions be applied" (*iqamat al-hudud*): the Qur'anic conception of the divine *hudud* has two related senses—both equally important here—that cannot be adequately conveyed by a single English expression: they are both the divine "laws" or "limits" *and* the "sanctions" or "penalties" (primarily corporeal in this world, but in another form in the next) prescribed for their infringement. Although the two senses are apparently separated—for us—by the passage of time and other contingencies, they are in reality inseparable and indeed "simultaneous" from the comprehensive, divine perspective represented by Adam here.

[95]*hukm*: with regard to the divine Names, this term usually refers to their power or authority to become manifest in the various realms of being, and thus, by extension, to all their specific "influences" or "manifestations." (It is therefore translated as "influence" in the rest of this section.)

[96]We have left this entire paragraph in quotes—even though much of it is clearly Ibn 'Arabi's own paraphrase, using his typical technical vocabulary—because the Arabic text does not clearly indicate where the direct quotation of Adam's words might end.

[97]Or simply "in time" (*bi-l-zaman*): *Zaman*—in its ordinary, popular usage (see the following note for references to Ibn 'Arabi's more complex personal understanding)—usually refers specifically to the "physical time" marked out by the motions of the cosmos and the heavenly spheres. Judging from the context here—which apparently refers to the "Greater Resurrection" (*al-qiyamat al-kubra*) encompassing all the souls of the universe—he may be alluding to a sort of cyclical reversion of the whole universe to its Source, thereby marking a cosmic "end of time."

However, if the reference here is understood as applying to the "Lesser Resurrection" of each individual soul (see references at n. 93), then the final phrase could be translated as "*in* time," with the period of fifty thousand years being that allotted for the perfection and purification (including punishment) of each *particular* soul. See the further discussion of these problems in our Introduction and notes to the eschatological selections in this anthology.

the Spirit ascend to Him in a Day whose extent is] ***of fifty thousand years***"[98] (Qur'an 70:4), and this is the period of the establishment (and application) of the (divine) limits.

[Ibn 'Arabi goes on to explain that "after this period"—however it is to be understood—only the divine Names "the Merciful" (which encompasses all the "Most Beautiful Names") and "the Compassionate" will have authority and influence (*hukm*) in the world, although the intrinsic, logically necessary "opposition" of the other Names necessarily will remain.]

...Hence the creatures are entirely submerged in (God's) Mercy, and the authority of the (other divine) Names (only) continues in their intrinsic opposition, but *not in us*. So you should know that, for it is a rare and subtle knowledge that (most people) do not realize. Instead, ordinary people are blind to it: there is no one among them who, if you were to ask him "Are you content to have applied to yourself (the influence) of those Names that give you pain?," would not reply "No!" and have the influence of that painful Name applied to someone else in his stead.[99] But such a person is among the most ignorant of people concerning the creatures—and he is even more ignorant of the Truly Real!

So this (experience of) immediate witnessing informed (us) concerning the continuation of the authority (*hukm*) of the Names (i.e., other than those of Mercy) with regard to those Names (in themselves), but not in us. For those Names are *relations* whose realities are intrinsically opposed, so that they (can) never become united (in a way that would erase their inherent relational distinctions).[100] But God extends His Mercy to (all) His servants wherever they are, since Being in its entirety *is* Mercy.[101]

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[98]For some representative aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's complex understanding of "time" (*zaman*), see ch. 12 on the cycles of esoteric and exoteric time, I, 143-147 (*OY* ed., II, 342-345); ch. 59 on the time of the cosmos, I, 290-292 (*OY* ed., IV, 330-340); ch. 390 on the inner meaning of time, III, 546-550; and the further references in Hakim, *Mu'jam*, pp. 1253-1254 (entry for "Day," *yawm*).

[99]The "ignorance" involved in this almost universal attitude—an "ignorance" which, Ibn 'Arabi repeatedly stresses, is profoundly rooted in us and can only be overcome by an inner transformation involving both divine Grace and the spiritual efforts of the individual—is grounded in the implicit assumption that God (or the divine "Mercy," Being, etc.) is manifest only in certain specific phenomena or forms of experience.

[100]For a brief but clear explanation of Ibn 'Arabi's central metaphysical conception of the divine Names as "relations" (*nisab*) whose reality only becomes manifest through the being of the created "individual entities" (*a'yan*), see ch. 222 (II, 516-518). See also the many further references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 591-618 (on the divine "Names") and 506-513 (on the related concepts of each Name as "lord," *rabb* and *marbub*).

[101]This theme of the universality of the divine "Mercy" as the source and ground of all Being—and therefore on a very different level from the other divine Names—is developed in more detail (along with most of the other topics of this section) in chapter 21 of the *Fusus* (concerning Zachariah), and throughout the *Futuhat*: see the extensive references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 521-528.

[IV-C. Jesus and Yahya (John the Baptist) in the Second Heaven][102]

[Ibn 'Arabi next encounters Jesus and his cousin Yahya (= John the Baptist) in the third heaven—the two figures being linked here by their association in the Qur'an with "Life," both "animal" and spiritual. The Shaykh first asks Jesus about his life-giving powers, and is told that they ultimately come from Gabriel (as the Universal Spirit, *al-ruh al-kull*): "No one who revives the dead revives them except to the extent of what he has inherited from me;[103] so such a person does not occupy my station in regard to that (life-giving power), just as I do not have the station of the one (i.e., Gabriel) who granted me (the power of) reviving the dead."

Ibn 'Arabi then turns to Yahya/John, who clarifies a long series of questions involving the references to him (and his relations with Jesus) in the Qur'an and hadith.[104] Finally, after a brief excursus on

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[102]III, 346.20-347.20 (summarized here). See also the references to discussions of Jesus in the *Futuhat* (including his key role in Ibn 'Arabi's own entry into the spiritual path) at n. 42 above.

In the hadith concerning the Mi'raj (section II above), Muhammad encounters Yahya only in the *fifth* heaven, along with Aaron; that is where he also reappears later in this chapter (at the beginning of section IV-F). (He explains his special ability to travel through the intervening spheres in an untranslated passage at the end of this section.) Jesus and John are likewise mentioned together in this second heaven in chapter 167 of the *Futuhat*. However, there is no further discussion of John in that section (= Anawati, *L'Alchimie*, pp. 63-72), which focuses instead on the miracles of Jesus and the life-giving powers of the divine Spirit more generally.

The corresponding section of the *K. al-Isra'* (pp. 15-18) does not mention Yahya/John at all, but focuses instead on Jesus' role as the "Seal of (universal) Sainthood" and his descent with the Mahdi at the end of time (see explanations in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, chapter 7 and index s.v.), as those are explained to the "voyager" by Mercury (*al-Katib*). That section also evokes (at p. 18) Ibn 'Arabi's own exceptional preparedness for the "Station of Perfection" (*maqam al-kamal*).

[103]An allusion to Ibn 'Arabi's typical conception of the knowledge and powers of the saints as being "inherited" from the spiritual reality of one or more of the prophets (who are all encompassed by the "Muhammadan Reality"): see the extensive references in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, chapters 4 and 5, and Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 1191-1202. The association between Jesus (and the second heaven) and the power of Life—in the sense both of spiritual knowledge and of physical or "animal" (*hayawani*) animation—is equally fundamental in the corresponding passages of chapter 167 and, in extremely allusive form, in the *K. al-Isra'* and the *R. al-Anwar*. A more complete discussion of these questions, bringing out more clearly the primary importance, for Ibn 'Arabi, of the revivifying spiritual *knowledge* brought by the prophets, is to be found in the long chapter on Jesus (no. 15) in the *Fusus* (I, pp. 138-150; R.W.J Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom*, pp. 174-186) together with chapter 20, on Yahya/John the Baptist.

[104]The first of these is a famous *hadith qudsi* (found in Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Maja, Darimi, and Ahmad b. Hanbal; see the analysis and translation in W. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word*, pp. 202-203) concerning the "sacrifice of death," in the form of a spotted ram, on the Day of Resurrection. The Qur'anic verses explained here include 19:7, referring to the inner significance of

the nature of spiritual procreation and marriage in Paradise,[105] Yahya explains why it is that he moves back and forth between the heaven of Jesus and the sphere of Aaron (where Muhammad met him, and where Ibn 'Arabi will encounter him later [section IV-F]) and sometimes dwells with Joseph and Idris as well.

Most of the themes (such as the interrelations of life, spiritual knowledge, and the divine inspiration of the prophets) mentioned only allusively in this section are treated in greater detail in the chapters of the *Fusus* on Jesus[106] and Yahya.]

[IV-D. Joseph and the Third Heaven][107]

[This encounter takes the form of a monologue in which Joseph explains to Ibn 'Arabi the true intentions of one of the Prophet's references to him, as well as the meaning of certain verses in the Sura of Joseph (ch. 12) in the Qur'an. These discussions are the occasion for the following spiritual advice:]

This is a lesson for you that your soul does not follow the same course in something where it has no direct experience (*dhawq*) as the person who undergoes that experience.[108] So do not say "If I were in the place of that person when such-and-such was said to him and he said such-and-such, I would not have said that." No, by God, if what happened to him happened to you, you would say what he said, because the stronger state (of direct experience) controls the weaker one (i.e., of whatever you might imagine).[109]

Yahya's name (= "he lives," in Arabic), ."..**We did not give the name to anyone before him**"; 19:12-15, on the special divine blessings granted him; and 3:39, concerning his spiritual purity or "chastity" (*hasur*: the subject of an excursus on the unique condition of Mary) and the special condition of "righteousness" (*salah*) he shares with Jesus and other prophets.

[105]A subject to which Ibn 'Arabi alludes on a number of other occasions (e.g., in ch. 390, III, 548, where he remarks that "God showed us a likeness of this" in the cases of Mary and Jesus, or Adam and Eve).

[106]Chapter 15 (I, pp. 138-150; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom*, pp. 174-186): this chapter is almost exactly the same length as the concluding one on Muhammad, and the two are considerably longer than any other chapters of the *Fusus*. See also the related chapters of the *Futuhat* cited at n. 42 above.

[107]III, 347.20-348.11 (only lines 347.29-31 are fully translated here).

[108]This insistence on the indispensable role of personal "direct experience" (*dhawq*) in a fully adequate appreciation of spiritual matters is also one of leitmotifs of Ibn 'Arabi's encounter with Moses (IV-G below).

[109]This particular section lacks the references to the metaphysical principles of beauty, harmony and artistic inspiration (traditionally associated with both Joseph and Venus, the planet of this sphere) found in chapter 167 of the *Futuhat* (= Anawati, *L'Alchimie*, pp. 72-76), and it does not deal at all with the profound questions of the nature of "Imagination" (both cosmic and human) and the Joseph's special powers of spiritual interpretation (*ta'wil*) that are the focus of the famous chapter 9

[IV-E. Idris and the Fourth Heaven][110]

[Upon his arrival in the fourth and central, pivotal heaven, that of the Sun (and the symbolic "Heart" of the cosmos), Ibn 'Arabi is immediately greeted by Idris, who calls him "the Muhammadan inheritor" (*al-warith al-Muhammadi*)—an allusion to the Shaykh's conception of his own unique role as the "Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood."[111] Ibn 'Arabi then asks him a series of brief questions which relate to the traditional accounts concerning Idris (in one or another of his manifestations) or to his special spiritual function as the perennial "Pole" (*qutb*) and summit of the spiritual hierarchy.[112]]

...I said to him: "It has reached me concerning you that you are a proponent of miracles."[113]

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of the *Fusus*. The corresponding section of the *K. al-Isra'* (pp. 18-21) also includes a brief dialogue with the allegorical figure of Venus (*al-zahra'*).

[110]III, 348.11-349.2; the sections translated below correspond to 348.14-21 and 24-35, with minor omissions.

In Islamic tradition, especially in the popular "tales of the prophets" (*qisas al-anbiya'*), the figure of the prophet Idris, who is mentioned only briefly in the Qur'an (19:57-58 and 21:85-86), is closely associated (and often simply identified) with a number of prophetic or quasi-prophetic figures who are generally distinguished by the traits of supernatural longevity (or at least frequent historical "reappearances" in different forms). These different "facets" of Idris include: Enoch and Elias (the Qur'anic *Ilyas*), each of whom is the subject of a chapter in the *Fusus* (see notes 114-115 below); the threefold persona of "Hermes," father of many esoteric arts and sciences according to Hellenistic traditions that were widely integrated in Islamic culture; and even the mysterious initiatic figure of al-Khadir. (For the historical background and sources concerning each of these personages, see the respective articles in *EI*, vol. III and IV.)

[111]In the corresponding encounter with Idris in the *Kitab al-Isra'* (*Rasa'il*, p. 21), Ibn 'Arabi is likewise greeted as "Master of the Saints" (*sayyid al-awliya'*).

[112]For Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of Idris' position as the heavenly "Pole" (*qutb*) and summit of the perennial spiritual hierarchy—whose two "Imams" at that eternal level are Jesus and Ilyas—see the references to the *Futuhat* and other works and the explanations (including the relation of these figures to their successive terrestrial "deputies") in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints*, chapter 6, and in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 909-915 and 101-114. The *R. al-Anwar*, at this point in the mystical ascension (see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, pp. 201-213; T. Harris, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, p. 43 at bottom), adds that all the preceding spheres belonged to the realm of the "Imam of the Left Hand," while "this is the place of the Heart," where "you will discover the degrees of the Pole."

[113]*al-kharq*: i.e., more strictly speaking, of any phenomena that appear to "break" the "accustomed order" (*'ada*) of events in the world. The term is more general than the probative miracles (*mu'jizat*) performed for the prophetic messengers, and likewise distinct from the "wonders" or "blessings" (*karamat*) that are among the charismatic powers attributable to the spiritual force or *himma* of certain saints. (See the additional references to these distinctions in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 961-971.)

Then he said: "Were it not for miracles, I would not have been '*raised up to a lofty place*' (Qur'an 19:57)."[114]

So I said to him: "Where is your (spiritual) rank in relation to your place (at the center of the universe)?"

And he said: "The outer is a sign of the inner."[115]

I said: "I have heard it said that you only asked *tawhid*[116] of your people, and nothing else (i.e., no separate revealed Law)."

He said: "And they did not (even) do (that). Now I was a prophet (*nabi*: see Qur'an 19:56) calling them to the *word* (i.e., the outward profession) of *tawhid*, not to *tawhid* (itself)—for no one has ever denied *tawhid*!"[117]

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[114]Alluding to the Qur'anic description of Idris' miraculous preservation from death (and its traditional elaborations, mentioned in the preceding notes): "**And mention Idris in the Book: he was a man of truth** [*siddiq*], **a prophet** [*nabi*], **and We raised him up to a lofty place**" (Qur'an 19:56-57). See also Ibn 'Arabi's considerably more detailed discussions of these verses in chapters 4 and 22 of the *Fusus* (I, 75-80 and 181-187; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom*, pp. 82-89 and 230-234).

[115]The meaning of this exchange, and of the outward, cosmic symbolism of Idris' supreme spiritual rank and function, is brought out in much greater detail in the long chapter 4 of the *Fusus al-Hikam* concerning "Enoch" (who is there explicitly identified with Idris). Chapter 22 of the *Fusus* likewise concerns "Elias who is Idris..." (opening sentence). There Ibn 'Arabi explains that Idris "who was a prophet before Noah," was first **raised to a lofty place** (Qur'an 19:57), but was then sent down again to earth—in the form of the prophet Elias—to experience fully the divine "intimacy" with even the lowest (animal, mineral and vegetal) degrees of creation. The contrast between these two chapters of the *Fusus* suggests that "Enoch" is associated in particular with the divine transcendence (*tanzih*) and "Elias" with the equally essential aspect of divine immanence (*tashbih*)—symbolizing the two indispensable aspects of Idris' *comprehensive* perfection in his spiritual function as Pole and his reality as "Heart" of the Perfect Man.

[116]This term is ordinarily understood to refer to the outward "profession of divine Unity" ("there is no god but God...") contained in the *shahada* (= the "word of *tawhid*" in the following sentence), but Idris understands it here in the far more profound sense of the *reality* of divine Unity—at once both transcendent and immanent—which is at the heart of Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the "Unity of Being" (see additional references in the following note).

In the larger body of Islamic tradition the prophet Idris (like the figure of "Hermes" with whom he was often identified: see note 109 above) was known not for bringing a particular revealed divine Law (*shari'a*), but rather for his institution of the whole range of rational or "philosophic" arts and sciences (by no means simply the "hermetic" ones). Thus Ibn 'Arabi goes on to address him (in a sentence not translated here) as "founder of the (arts and sciences) of wisdom" (*wadi' al-hikam*).

[117]i.e, the *reality* of *tawhid* which—since it constitutes the very nature of Being and the primordial core of man's nature—is necessarily expressed in all the planes of manifestation and the

I said: "This is strange!"

...(Then) I said: "But the differences (of opinion) concerning the Truly Real and the things said concerning Him[118] have become quite numerous."

He said: "It (can) only be like that, since the matter is (perceived differently) according to the constitution (of each individual).[119]

I said: "But I thought[120] that all of you prophets, the whole group of you, did not differ concerning Him?"

So he replied: "That is because we did not say (what we taught concerning God) on the basis of reasoning (*nazar*); we only said it on the basis of a common direct relationship (with God).[121] So

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corresponding degrees of spiritual realization. Ibn 'Arabi often refers (e.g., at I, 405) to the Qur'anic statement "***Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but him***..." (Qur'an 17:23), taken as an expression of this universal metaphysical *reality* (as well as a command). See likewise his discussion of the underlying meaning of the traditional formula of *tawhid* in the profession of faith (= the "word" or "saying," *kalima*, of *tawhid* in this sentence), in chapter 67 of the *Futuhat* (I, 325-329), and especially his subtle treatment of the 36 different Qur'anic expressions of *tawhid*—in both their ontological and "subjective" spiritual dimensions—in chapter 198, *fasl* 9 (II, 405-420); French tr. by C.-A. Gilis, *Le Coran et la Fonction d'Hermes* (Paris, 1984). Further references can be found in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 1172-1180.

[118]or "It": "Truly Real" = *al-Haqq*, which could also be translated here simply as "the Truth" or "God"—since in this context the "ontological" and "theological" perspectives are virtually inseparable for Ibn 'Arabi. Similarly, "things said" (*maqalat*) could also be translated here as (theological) "schools" or (religious) "denominations."

[119]"Constitution" (*mizaj*: strictly speaking, the mixture of physical "temperaments" distinguishing each person) must be understood very broadly here to include all the factors—spiritual, social, psychic, etc. as well as physical—ultimately helping determine the distinctive outlook and understanding of each individual with regard to every aspect of reality (not just "theological" matters). Idris returns to elaborate this point in the latter half of this section.

[120]Or "I saw" (*ra'aytu*), if this is taken as an allusion to Ibn 'Arabi's visionary revelation of the unity of the prophets and their teachings within the "Reality of Muhammad" or the "*Qur'an*," which he describes in section IV-I below (and in the key passage from the *K. al-Isra'* translated in our article cited at n. 13 above.)

[121]"direct relationship" translates *'ill*, a term that can refer either to a blood-relationship or to a pact or covenant (as in the Qur'an 9:8-10). In either case, the term here refers to the relation of immediate divine inspiration—in itself implying both "kinship" and covenant—that, for Ibn 'Arabi, distinguishes the spiritual state of the prophets and saints, as opposed to the fallible and often quite divergent results of man's ordinary "reasoning" or "inquiry" (*nazar*).

whoever *knows* the realities knows that (the fact that) all of the prophets agree in saying the same thing about God is equivalent to those who follow reasoning (all) saying the same thing.[122]

I said: "And is the matter (i.e., the reality of things) in itself really as it was said to you (by God)?" For the signs (followed by) the intellects (of those who rely exclusively on their reasoning) indicate the impossibility of (certain) things you (prophets) brought concerning that."

Then he said: "The matter is as we (prophets) were told—and (at the same time) it is as whatever is said by whoever says (his own inner belief) concerning Him, since 'God is in accordance with the saying of everyone who speaks (of Him).'[123] So that is why we only called the common people to the word (i.e., the verbal profession) of *tawhid*, not to (the reality of) *tawhid*."

...I said: "Once, in a visionary experience (*waqi'a*) I had, I saw an individual circumambulating (the Kaaba), who told me that he was among my ancestors and gave me his name.[124] Then I asked him about the time of his death, and he told me it was 40,000 years (earlier). So I proceeded to ask him about Adam, because of what had been established in our chronology concerning his period

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[122]I.e., such unanimous agreement—unlike the usual and expected state of disagreement among the "people of *nazar*" or individual reasoning (see preceding note)—points to the truth of their conclusion on that particular point. See the excellent summary discussion of the various kinds of inspired knowledge attained by the prophets and saints "beyond the stage of the intellect" (*wara' tawr al-'aql*) in ch. 73, question 118 (II, 114.14-28). There Ibn 'Arabi distinguishes between those realities that are rationally "impossible" (see following paragraph here)—but whose truth is nonetheless revealed by a "visionary incident" (*waqi'a*)—and the far more extensive domain of knowledge "which cannot be (verbally) expressed" or spoken about, which is the realm of the "sciences of direct experience" (*'ulum al-adhwaq*).

[123]This last phrase is a paraphrase of a well-known *hadith qudsi* (cited a number of times, with minor variations, by Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, Ahmad b. Hanbal, etc.; see Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word*, pp. 127-130), of which Ibn 'Arabi quotes two versions in his *Mishkat al-Anwar* (no. 13 and 27; *Divine Sayings,* FIND REFERENCE ~~Niche, pp. 36-37, 56-57~~): "I am in accordance with what My servant supposes concerning Me, and I am present with him when He remembers (root *dh-k-r*) Me...." For the broader metaphysical underpinnings of this saying in Ibn 'Arabi's thought, see the references scattered throughout the *Fusus al-Hikam*, including his discussion of this hadith in the closing lines of that work (I, 226; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom,* pp. 283-284) and his development of the key notion of the "god created in beliefs," in the chapters on Shu'ayb (I, 119-124; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom*, pp. 148-153), on Elias/Idris (I, 182-186; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of wisdom*, pp. 230-234), on Zachariah (I, 178; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom*, pp. 224-225), and Aaron (I, 194-196; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom*, pp. 246-248).

[124]This encounter is described in greater detail in chapter 390 of the *Futuhat* (devoted to the inner meaning of "time," *al-zaman*), in a passage (III, 549.8-14) which clearly brings out the "visionary," dreamlike character of this particular experience: "Now God caused me to see, in the way that the sleeper sees (in his dreams)—while I was going around the Kaaba...." There this mysterious "ancestor" also reminds Ibn 'Arabi of a hadith of the Prophet stating that "God created 100,000 Adams."

(namely, that it was much more recent). Then he said to me: 'Which Adam are you asking about? About the most recent Adam?'"

(Idris) said: "He told the truth. I am a prophet of God (cf. Qur'an 19:56), and I do not know any period at the close of which the universe as a whole stops. However, (I do know) that He never ceases creating (the universe) in its entirety; that (the whole of reality) never ceases to be 'nearer' and 'further';[125] and that the '*appointed times*'[126] apply to the (particular) created things—through the completion of (their) periods (of existence)—and not to the (process of) creation (as a whole), since creation is continually renewed 'with the breaths' (at every instant).[127] Thus we know (only) what He has caused us to know—***And they do not comprehend anything of His Knowledge except for what He wishes*** (Qur'an 2:255)."

So I said to him: "Then what remains until the appearance of the 'Hour'?"[128]

And he replied: "***Their reckoning has drawn near to people, but they are in (a state of) heedlessness, turning away***" (Qur'an 21:1)[129].

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[125]i.e., *dunya* ("this world") and *akhira* (the "next world"): their etymology alludes both to the full ontological range of levels of Self-manifestation and to the reality—as Idris mentions explicitly later in this discussion—that their "closeness" (or the contrary) is relative to the perspective of each observer, since all are equally present with God.

[126]*ajal*: this term is used many times in the Qur'an—often in close association with "the Hour" (see note 128 below)—to refer to the ultimate fate of men in general (e.g., in verses 6:2, 60; etc.), of "every community" (*umma*, a term which for Ibn 'Arabi encompasses every type of created being: at Qur'an 7:34; 10:49; etc.), or the motion of the sun and the moon (at Qur'an 31:29; etc.), etc.

[127]*ma'a al-anfas*: this is one of Ibn 'Arabi's most common expressions for the ever-renewed creation of the whole universe at every instant (*khalq jadid/tajaddud al-khalq*), a metaphysical reality which is only directly visible to the true Knowers and accomplished saints, as he explains in a famous section of the chapter on Shu'ayb in the *Fusus al-Hikam* (I, 124-126; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom*, pp. 153-155). For some representative discussions of this recurrent theme in the *Futuhat*, see II, 46, 208, 372, 384, 432, 471, 500, 554, 639, 653; III, 127; and further references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 429-433.

[128]There are some 48 Qur'anic references to the "Hour" (*al-sa'a*) and the many questions surrounding it (e.g., at 33:63; 79:42), as well as a vast body of hadith, especially concerning Its "conditions" or "signs" (*shurut*, a term mentioned in Ibn 'Arabi's following question here). Ibn 'Arabi frequently discusses these matters along lines already followed by many earlier Sufis, so the apparent naivete of his questioning here is almost certainly a literary device. See especially our translation of his discussion in response to Tirmidhi's question (72) concerning the "Hour" in chapter 73 (II, 82), in the eschatological part of this anthology.

[129]"People" here translates *al-nass*, a Qur'anic term which Ibn 'Arabi generally understands (e.g., at n. 77 in section III above) as referring more particularly to the condition of "most people" or "ordinary people" (i.e., *al-'amma*)as opposed to the enlightened state of the saints ("people of God," "true men," "true servants," etc.). On this specific point, see the translation of his remarks

I said: "Then inform me about one of the conditions of Its 'drawing near'."

And he replied: "The existence of Adam is among the conditions for the Hour."

I said: "Then was there another abode before this world (*al-dunya*), other than it?"

He replied: "The abode of Being is one: the abode does not become 'nearer' (*dunya*) except through you,[130] and the 'other world' (*al-akhira*) is not distinguished from it except through you! But with regard to bodies (i.e., as opposed to the man's inherent spiritual finality and progressive movement of 'return' to his Source), the matter[131] is only engendered states (*akwan*), transformations and coming and going (of endless material forms); it has not ceased, and it never will."

I said: "What is *there*?"[132]

He replied: "What we know, and what we do not know."

I said: "Then where is error in relation to what is right?"[133]

He said: "Error is a relative matter, while what is right is the (unchanging) principle. So whoever truly knows God and the world knows that what is right is the ever-present Principle, which never

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concerning the saints' visionary awareness of the *contemporary* presence of the "Hour," in chapter 73 (I, 81-82) in the eschatological part of this anthology.

[130](Cf. the related treatment of *dunya* and *akhira* at n. 125 above.) "You" throughout this sentence is given in the *plural*, since Idris is referring to all of mankind (see "Adam" in Idris' previous explanation), and ultimately to the "Perfect Man": see the famous opening chapter on Adam (and the Perfect Man) in the *Fusus al-Hikam*, as well as the extensive references to "Adam" (in this broader metaphysical sense) in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 53-60.

Idris' essential message in this phrase, that man "carries this world (*al-dunya*) with him into the next," is among the many kinds of knowledge Ibn 'Arabi says he "saw" in his culminating revelation; that reference is translated at the end of section IV-I below.

[131]or possibly the (divine) "Command" (*al-amr*)—in which case Ibn 'Arabi (through Idris) would be referring to the universal "existentiating Command" manifested in the ever-renewed creation of all beings: see the discussion of the technical meanings of this Qur'anic term in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 93-101.

[132]*ma thamma*: i.e., in the manifest world or the world of bodies subject to these perpetual transformations? (The exact reference is unclear.)

[133]The two Qur'anic expressions translated here as "what is right" (*sawab*) and "error" (*khat'a*) originally refer respectively to hitting one's target or "getting it right" and to "missing" it: thus the usage of both terms here implies a focus on the *subject*, the person who is judging rightly or wrongly—not simply on an abstract logical question of the relations of truth and falsehood. In addition, *khat'a* (in its Qur'anic context) has strong overtones of *moral* error—i.e., "sin" or "trespass" (against the divine limits: see n. 94)—so that the "ethical" (or religious) and "ontological" dimensions of Ibn 'Arabi's argument here are, as so often, intentionally intermingled.

ceases (to be), and he knows that error (occurs) through the opposition of the two points of view.[134] But since the opposition (of the two perspectives) is inevitable, then error is also inevitable. So whoever maintains (the real existence of) error (also) maintains (the prior existence and reality of) what is right; and whoever maintains the (ultimate) non-existence of error *speaks what is right* (Qur'an 78:38)[135] and posits error (as deriving) from what is right." [...[136]]

[IV-F. Aaron and the Fifth Heaven][137]

Next I alighted to stay with Aaron, and (there) I found Yahya, who had already reached him before me. So I said to (Yahya): "I didn't see you on my path: is there some other path there?"

And he replied: "Each person has a path, that no one else but he travels."

I said: "Then where are they, these (different) paths?"

Then he answered: "They come to be through the traveling itself."

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[134]i.e., of God (or the Truth and True Reality, *al-Haqq*) and of each individual creature. As Idris goes on to remind us, in reality there can only *be* what really *is* (*al-wujud*), the True Reality (*al-Haqq*): in relation to that ontological Principle (*asl*), "error" is necessarily "relative" and "accidental" (*idafi*)— i.e., a necessarily subjective and partial perspective which is therefore close to "non-existence" (*'adam*).

[135]The larger context of this verse, however, suggests the extreme rarity of this awareness, as *well* as the "divine perspective" it assumes: "**On the Day when the Spirit and the angels stand in rows, they do not speak, except for whoever the Merciful permits, and he speaks what is right—that is the True Day** (*al-yawm al-haqq*)...."

[136]In the final lines of this section, Idris reiterates some of the more familiar principles of Ibn 'Arabi's thought: that the world is created from the divine attribute of "Bounty" (*jud*); that the world and man all "return" to that divine Mercy which "encompasses all things" and gives them being; and that the knower (i.e., the Perfect Man) is even "more prodigious" (*a'zam*) than whatever in the world may be known—a point that was already stressed in section III above (at n. 59).

[137]III, 349.2-15 (the few minor omissions in this translation are indicated in the accompanying notes).

     It is noteworthy that the topics discussed here are not mentioned at all in Ibn 'Arabi's parallel versions of the mystical Ascension. The brief corresponding sections of the Mi'raj narratives in both the *K. al-Isra'* (pp. 23-24) and the *R. al-Anwar* (see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, p. 162; T. Harris, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, p. 44) allude mainly to the "martial" qualities of anger, discord, etc. traditionally associated with Mars, the planet and "spiritual entity" (*ruhaniya*) of this sphere.

     The account of this stage in chapter 167 of the *Futuhat* (= S. Ruspoli, *L'Alchimie*, pp. 78-79) is mainly devoted to Ibn 'Arabi's controversial interpretation of the "faith of Pharaoh" and the universality of the divine Mercy, topics which are discussed in even more detail in the chapters on Aaron and Moses in the *Fusus al-Hikam* (I, 191-213; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom*, pp. 241-266).

[After Aaron then greets Ibn 'Arabi as "the perfectly accomplished heir (of the Prophet),"[138] he goes on to explain how he became both a prophet (*nabi*) and also a lawgiving Messenger (*rasul*) participating in the revelation (*wahy*) appropriate to that rank, at the request of his brother Moses.]

...I said: "O Aaron, some people among the true Knowers have claimed that the existence (of the external world) disappeared with regard to them, so that they see nothing but God, and so that nothing of the world remains with them that might distract them, in comparison with God. Nor is there any doubt that they (really) are in that (spiritual) rank,[139] as opposed to those like you. Now God has informed us that you said to your brother (Moses) when he was angry (with you for having allowed the Israelites to worship the golden calf): '...*so do not cause (our) enemies to gloat over me*!' (Qur'an 7:151).[140] Thus you posited their having a certain power (over you in the external world), and this condition is different from the condition of those true Knowers (who experience the 'disappearance' of the external world)."

Then he replied: "They spoke sincerely (about their experience). However, they did not have any more than what was given them by their immediate experience (*dhawq*). But look and see—did what disappeared from them (in that state actually) disappear from the world?"

"No," I answered.

He said: "Then they were lacking in the knowledge of the way things are, to the extent of what they missed, since the world was non-existent for them. So they were lacking the True Reality (*al-Haqq*) to the extent of that (aspect) of the world which was veiled from them. Because the whole world is precisely the Self-manifestation (*tajalli*) of the Truly Real, for whoever really knows the Truly Real. **So where are you going? It is only a reminder to the worlds** (Qur'an 81:26-27) of the way things are!"

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[138]*al-warith al-mukammal*—i.e., the saint who has fully combined the prophetic "inheritances" of *all* the Messengers, which are integrally contained in the "Muhammadan Reality"—still another allusion to Ibn 'Arabi's unique status as the "Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood." (See the similar greeting by Idris at the beginning of section IV-E, n. 111 above). For the central notion of the saints as "heirs" of the different prophets (and all ultimately as heirs of the "Muhammadan Reality"), see the references given in n. 49 above.

[139]I.e., Ibn 'Arabi's question (and implicit criticism) concerns the relative *evaluation* of that spiritual state, not the reality and importance of the experience itself. See his remarks in the following section (IV-G) on the necessity of *fana'* at a certain point on the path, in regard to Moses' initiatic "death" (*sa'aqa*) on Mt. Sinai, and his use of a similar Arabic term (*afna*) in describing a decisive phase in his own spiritual development in the key passage from the *K. al-Isra'* (pp. 13-14) translated in our article cited at n. 13 above. More generally, the contrast between the lower, "immature" state of those "Knowers" (*'arifun*) who deny the reality of this world, and the station of the *warithun* (the true "heirs" of the prophets) who are always aware of God's theophanic Presence throughout this world, is a recurrent subject in the *K. al-Isra'*.

[140]See the longer discussion of the inner meaning of this incident, from a very different standpoint (i.e., Moses' and Aaron's differing awareness of the divine Mercy) at the beginning of the chapter on Aaron (no. 24) in the *Fusus* (I, 191 ff.; *Bezels*, pp. 243 ff.).

Perfection is nothing but its (or 'His')[141] existence,

So whoever misses it is not the perfect one....[142]

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[141]*kawnuhu*: the term *kawn* usually refers to the engendered, manifest state of being (translated as "existence" here), so the most obvious reference, given the preceding context, is to the external "world" or whole manifest "universe" (*al-'alam*). But as so frequently in Ibn 'Arabi, the pronouns in this verse could also be taken, without any ultimate contradiction, to refer either to God (*al-haqq*, the Truly Real) or even to the human "observer"—i.e., man in his ultimate reality as the "Perfect Man," which may well be what is indicated by "the perfect one" (*al-kamil*) at the end.

[142]The concluding, untranslated lines allude to the well-known dangers and illusions involved in taking the ecstatic experience of "extinction" (*fana'*) of the self in contemplation of God as the ultimate goal and highest stage of the spiritual path, at least in this world. This caution, which is probably connected with the title of this chapter (see notes 27 and 39 above), is amplified and repeated in the following encounter with Moses (section IV-G), and it is also an important theme in the passage from the *K. al-Isra'* translated in our article cited at n. 13 above. Although the subject of Aaron's remark is a constantly repeated theme in Ibn 'Arabi's writing, it should be stressed that those dangers and the ultimate superiority of the saints' subsequent "enlightened abiding" (*baqa'*) in the world, as exemplified above all in the life of Muhammad, were likewise stressed almost unanimously in earlier Sufi literature and practice.

  The intensity and centrality of Ibn 'Arabi's insistence on the realization of the nature and importance of this "world" as an essential aspect of human perfection (*kamal*)—and indeed as the essential grounds of man's superiority to the angels and purely spiritual beings—can best be measured by comparing his writings to the familiar currents of "monistic" mysticism, such as the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi's Andalusian contemporary, Ibn Sab'in. See, among others, the careful comparison of these two perspectives—which have their parallels in many other mystical traditions—in the translation and study of the *Epitre sur l'Unicite Absolue* (*R. al-Ahadiya*) of Awhad al-Din Balyani (a 13th-century Persian Sufi in the school of Ibn Sab'in) by M. Chodkiewicz (Paris, 1982).

[IV-G. Moses and the Sixth Heaven][143]

[Ibn 'Arabi begins his discussion with Moses by thanking him for his having insisted that Muhammad—during the final, descending stage of his Mi'raj—return to ask God to reduce the number of daily prayers prescribed for his community.[144] Moses replies that "this is a benefit of knowledge (reached through) direct experience (*dhawq*),[145] for there is a (spiritual) condition that can only be perceived through immediate contact."

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[143]III, 349.16-350.5 (translated in full with exception of summarized passages at lines 16-20 and 23-25). The corresponding section in chapter 167 (S. Ruspoli, *L'Alchimie*, pp. 89-97) also deals with "theophanic" nature of the world, but from a very different standpoint. In keeping with the more abstract, cosmological focus of that chapter, Ibn 'Arabi uses the Qur'anic account of the transformations of Moses' staff (Qur'an 20:17-21) to illustrate some of the basic principles of his ontology, especially the relation between the unchanging noetic "realities" (*haqa'iq*) or "individual entities" (*a'yan*) and the constant transformations of the phenomenal world. In other words, it points to the objective "knowledge" underlying the focus on Moses' immediate *experience* of theophany in this chapter.

The traveler's encounter with Moses in the *K. al-Isra'* (*Rasa'il*, pp. 25-28), on the other hand, is devoted to entirely different subjects: Moses first stresses the differences between the *'arif* (the "mystic" who publicly parades his spiritual discoveries, and the *warith* (the Prophetic "heir" or true "Muhammadan," *al-muhammadi*), who "conceals his secrets" and who "sees (God's) Essence in his essence, His Attributes in his (own) attributes, and His Names in his (own) acts"—i.e., whose inner Ascension corresponds to the particular type of "nocturnal" spiritual voyage (*isra'*) Ibn 'Arabi described in section III above, that which is outwardly indistinguishable from the life of "ordinary people." In the *K. al-Isra'*, Moses goes on to summarize for the "voyager" the remaining stages to be encountered in his journey, with particular emphasis on the importance of the "descent," the "*return*" to life in this world, for the completion and perfection of that journey.

[144]This story is included in the long *hadith al-isra'* (from Muslim: see n. 38 above) given by Ibn 'Arabi at the beginning of this chapter (III, 342.20-27, an untranslated part of section II); it also appears, with minor variations, in many of the other canonical hadith concerning the Mi'raj. According to this particular version, the prescription of "*fifty* prayers in each day and night" was "part of all that was divinely revealed" (by *wahy*) to the Prophet at the very summit of his Ascension, in his direct encounter with God. During Muhammad's descent back to earth, Moses—relying on his own immediate experience (*dhawq*) with his Community in this same matter—twice persuades the Prophet to return to God and plead for a lessening of this burden, so that the required number is reduced to ten and then five. On the second occasion the Lord says to Muhammad: "They are five and they are fifty: **with Me, the Word is not changed**!" (alluding to the Qur'an at 50:69).

[145]Moses goes on to conclude this section by again stressing the decisive role of *dhawq*, the inner "tasting" of spiritual states, in the realizations of the prophets and saints. See Joseph's similar insistence on the indispensable, irreducible character of direct personal experience (as opposed to what can be gained by mental reflection or purely imaginative participation), at n. 108 above. "Immediate contact" (*mubashara*: literally "hands-on" experience) at the end of this sentence has

Ibn 'Arabi then mentions that it was Moses' "striving for the sake of others"—which first led him to the burning bush—that eventually brought him "all the Good."[146] Moses responds that "Man's striving for the sake of others is only a striving for his self, in the truth of things"—i.e., when he discovers who he really is—and that the thankfulness which flows from this (on the part of all concerned) is one of the highest forms of "remembering" and praising God.]

...After that I said to him: "'Surely God has chosen you over the people with His Message and His Word.'[147] But you requested the vision (of God),[148] while the Messenger of God said that 'not one of you will see His Lord until he dies'?"[149]

So he said: "And it was just like that: when I asked Him for the vision (of God), He answered me, so that '*I fell down stunned*' (Qur'an 7:143). Then I saw Him in my '(state of) being stunned'."[150]

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essentially the same meaning as *dhawq*, since both refer to insights realizable only through a unique "spiritual state" (*hal*).

[146]This interpretation of the Qur'anic verses (Qur'an 28:29 ff.)—according to which Moses discovered the burning bush (and his theophany there) only "accidentally," while seeking fire to warm his family—is amplified in chapter 366 (III, 336.16-25), where Ibn 'Arabi takes this incident as a symbol of the rare virtue of disinterested service which characterizes "all the just leaders (Imams)." There he also explains that this was exactly how Khadir first discovered the Source of eternal Life, while seeking water for his fellow soldiers.

[147]Paraphrasing the following Qur'anic verse: "***God said: 'O Moses, surely I have chosen you over the people with My Message and My Word*...'**" (Qur'an 7:144).

[148]Referring to the Qur'anic verse 7:143, parts of which are quoted or paraphrased throughout the rest of this section: "***And when Moses came to Our appointed time and His Lord spoke to him, he said: 'My Lord, make me see, that I may look at You.' He said: 'You will not see Me, but look at the mountain: if it stays firmly in its place, then you will see Me.' So when His Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He made it crushed flat, and Moses fell down stunned. Then when he awakened he said: 'I have returned to you, and I am the first of the men of true faith.'**'"

[149]A paraphrase of a well-known hadith recorded by both **Muslim (*K. al-fitan*, no. 95) and Tirmidhi (*fitan*, no. 56);** several of the canonical hadith collections contain specific sections concerning the "vision of God" (*ru'yat Allah*) in the next life. For Ibn 'Arabi's broader understanding of this question, both in the eschatological context and as prefigured in the divine vision of the prophets and saints—which follows from their initiatic "death" to this world and concomitant "resurrection" in the awareness of their eternal spiritual self—see, among others, the selections from chapter 302 (III, 12-13), ch. 351 (III, 223), ch. 369 (III, 388-399), and ch. 73, questions 62, 67, 71 (II, 82, 84, 86) translated in the eschatological section of this anthology.

[150]Or "my (initiatic) 'death' (*sa'aqati*)": in other Qur'anic verses referring to the Resurrection (see following note), the same root is used virtually as an equivalent of "death." Here, however, Ibn 'Arabi is evidently using this term—which in its root sense means literally being "thunderstruck," "struck dead by lightning" or "rendered senseless" by a loud noise—in a more technical sense, referring to the spiritual state of "extinction of the ego (*fana'*) in the Self-manifestation (*tajalli*) of

I said: "While (you were) dead?"

He replied: "While (I was) dead."

[...[151]] He said: ."..So I did not see God until I had died. It was then that I '*awakened*', so that I knew *Who* I saw. And it was because of that that I said '*I have returned to you*' (Qur'an 7:143), since I did not return[152] to anyone but Him."

Then I said to him: "You are among the group of 'those who know God,'[153] so what did you consider the vision of God (to be) when you asked Him for it?"

And he said: "(I considered it to be) necessary because of rational necessity."[154]

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the divine Lordship." This definition is from his *K. Istilahat al-Sufiya* (item no. 131); p. 45 in the English translation by R. T. Harris, "Translation of Sufi Terminology: Ibn 'Arabi's *al-Istilâh al-Sûfiyyah*" (*Journal of the Muhiyddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* III, 1984); see also the more detailed discussion of his technical usage of this term in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 695-696.

[151]In the untranslated lines (III, 349.23-25), Ibn 'Arabi alludes to a saying of the Prophet expressing uncertainty as to whether Moses' mystical "death" or "stunning" (*sa'aqa*: explained in preceding note) exempted him from the similar fate which is promised more generally at the "blowing of the Trumpet" on the the Day of Resurrection: ."..**then those who are in the heavens and on the earth are thunderstruck** [*sa'iqa*]**, except for whoever God wishes**..." (Qur'an 39:68); "**So leave them until they meet their Day, in which they will be thunderstruck** [*yus'aqun*]" (Qur'an 52:45). Moses replies that he was indeed rewarded with the anticipatory experience of that "death" (and the concomitant "resurrection") on Mt. Sinai. That event, for Ibn 'Arabi, clearly represents a more general stage and type of theophanic experience: Moses is cited as a symbol of this sort of spiritual realization throughout the Shaykh's many works.

[152]The verb here (*raja'a*) is different from that in the immediately preceding Qur'anic verse (*taba*: usually translated as "to repent," but with the root sense of "turning back" [to God]); the equation of these two terms—with its implicit stress on the metaphysical ground of all "repentance"—is to be found throughout Ibn 'Arabi's writings. See, for example, the similar equivalence of these two expressions in Ibn 'Arabi's accounts of the beginnings of his own "conversion" to the spiritual path ("at the hand of Jesus") at n. 42 above.

[153]Or "those who know *through* God" (*al-'ulama' bi-llah*), i.e., on the basis of what God teaches them (and not by their own reflection, *nazar*), as Moses goes on to explain below. For Ibn 'Arabi, this expression usually refers to the very highest group of true spiritual "knowers"—i.e., the prophets and the saints, who alone are knowers of "God" (i.e., of "*Allah*," the comprehensive divine reality), and not simply of the "Lord" (*rabb*) manifested by one or more of the particular divine Names.

[154]*wujub 'aqli*: i.e., "necessary" according to his own knowledge and the conclusions of the intellect (*'aql*) concerning the nature of the world—because, as he goes on to explain below, *all* "vision" is really vision of God—, but without the crucial additional element of direct, first-hand experience (*dhawq*) essential to this realization. This whole exchange therefore clarifies Ibn 'Arabi's earlier

I said: "But then what was it that distinguished you from others?"

He said: "I was seeing Him (all along), and yet I didn't used to *know* that it was Him! But when my 'dwelling'[155] was changed and I saw Him, then I knew *Who* I saw. Therefore when I 'awoke' I was no longer veiled, and my vision (of God) went on accompanying me throughout all eternity. So this is the difference between us[156] and *those who are veiled* (Qur'an 83:15) from their knowledge (of God) by what they see.[157] Yet when they die they see the Truly Real,[158] since the 'dwelling' (of divine

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assertion (section II, at n. 44 above) that Muhammad, at the culminating stage of his Ascension, "*saw* what he had *known* and nothing else; the form of his belief did not change."

[155]*Mawtin*, a term that could be translated more literally as "home," "homeland" or even, in its Qur'anic context (Qur'an 9:25) as "(spiritual) battlefield": in Ibn 'Arabi's technical usage, it refers to the various "planes of being" in which man dwells and makes his home, all of which are present for the Perfect Man. In an important passage of the *R. al-Anwar* (T. Harris, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, pp. 27 and 72-77 [= commentary of 'Abd al-Karim Jili, mainly quoting the *Futuhat*]; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, pp. 149-150), the Shaykh explains that although these *mawatin* are virtually infinite, "they are all derived from six": (1) the primordial state of man's covenant (*mithaq*) with God (Qur'an 7:172); (2) "the (physical) world we are now in"; (3) the *barzakh* or "intermediate" spiritual world "through which we travel after the lesser *and* greater deaths"; (4) "the Resurrection on the earth of Awakening" (Qur'an 79:14); (5) "the Garden and the Fire (of Hell)"; (6) and the "Dune of Vision (of God)," which is evidently the "dwelling" that became present for Moses on Sinai. See our translation of many passages from the *Futuhat* dealing with the divine "Vision" in the eschatological section of this anthology.

[156]Moses' exceptional use of the first person *plural* here and in some of the following sentences— since he otherwise uses the singular in discussing his own personal experiences—seems to refer to *all* the "Knowers of (or through) God" (*al-'ulama' bi-Allah*) mentioned at n. 153 above and the text at n. 161 below.

[157]The full Qur'anic verse apparently alluded to here (Qur'an 83:15) is as follows: "***But no, surely they are veiled from their Lord on that Day***!" The allusion could also extend to the numerous hadith concerning the "raising of veils" and "vision of God," including, among others, certain *hadith qudsi* recorded in Ibn 'Arabi's *Mishkat al-Anwar*, such as no. 18 (from the *Sahih* of Muslim) and no. 66 (*Divine Sayings*, p. 37 and p. 70).

The metaphysical concept of "veil," for Ibn 'Arabi, almost always reflects an inherent ambiguity between the two simultaneous aspects of "concealment" and "revelation" (since the "veil" is in reality a theophany or manifestation of the divine): for him, the difference between the two aspects ultimately resides in the *viewer*, not in the "phenomenon" or form itself. In this regard it is noteworthy that among the spiritual realizations flowing from Ibn 'Arabi's culminating revelation enumerated at the end of this chapter is his seeing "that God is what is worshipped in every object of worship, from behind the veil of (each particular) form" (III, 303.7-7; translated at the end of section IV-I below). See also at n. 123 above the references (from the *Fusus al-Hikam*) to the related question of "the god created in beliefs," and further passages cited in Hakim, *Al-Muʻjam al-sūfī*, pp. 313-318 ("*hijab*").

Vision)[159] distinguishes Him for them. Therefore if they were returned (to this world as I was), they would say the same thing as we did.”

I said: “Then if death were the 'dwelling' of the vision of God, every dead person would see him—but God has described them (at Qur'an 83:15) as being '***veiled***' from seeing Him!?”

He said: “Yes, those are '***the ones who are veiled***' from the knowledge that what (they see) *is* God.[160] But what if you yourself had to meet a person with whom you were not personally acquainted, whom you were looking for (simply) by name and because you needed him? You could meet him and exchange greetings with him, along with the whole group of those you encountered, without discovering his identity: then you would have seen him and yet not have seen him, so you would continue looking for him while he was right where you could see him! Hence one cannot rely on anything but knowledge. That is why we (Knowers of God) have said that Knowledge is His very Essence, since if Knowledge were not His very Essence, what was relied on (i.e., our knowledge) would be other than God—for nothing can be relied on but knowledge.”

I said: “Now God indicated the mountain to you (at Qur'an 7:143) and mentioned about Himself that '***He manifested Himself to the Mountain***' (Qur'an 7:143). [So how do these theophanies differ?]”

Then he replied: “Nothing resists His Self-manifestation; therefore the particular condition (*hal*) necessarily changes [according to the 'locus' of each theophany]. Hence for the mountain being

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[158]*al-haqq*, which could equally be translated as “the Truth” or simply “God.” This phrase is close in form to the celebrated Sufi saying, sometimes considered a hadith of the Prophet and sometimes attributed to the Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib: “People are sleeping; when they die, they wake up.” Like the rest of this section, it also clearly recalls the famous Prophetic injunction to “Die before you die!”.

[159]See note 155 above on the meaning of *mawtin*. Here Ibn 'Arabi is almost certainly referring to the “dwelling” in Paradise of the “Dune of Vision (of God)” (*kathib al-ru'ya*) mentioned in a famous *hadith qudsi*, which he discusses at length in chapter 65 (II, 317-322) and elsewhere in the *Futuhat*. (See our translations of many of those passages concerning the “Day of the Visit” in the eschatological section of this anthology.)

[160]Ibn 'Arabi's favorite scriptural reference to this reality—which for him is also clearly applicable to man's capacity (or incapacity) for “theophanic vision” already in this world—is a famous hadith concerning the testing of mankind with regard to their forms of belief (*ma'budat*) on the Day of the Gathering, often known as the “hadith of the transformations.” According to this account, God will present Himself to this (Muslim) community “in a form other than what they know, and will say to them: 'I am your Lord'”; but the “hypocrites” among them will fail to recognize Him until He appears in the form they already knew (according to their beliefs in this world).

The most pertinent section of this hadith is recorded in the *Mishkat al-Anwar* (no. 26; *Niche*, pp. 55-57), where Ibn 'Arabi gives the *isnad* from the *Sahih* of Muslim. The full hadith, which deals with the Prophet's answers to several questions concerning the “vision of God,” is also recorded twice by Bukhari; see further references in Graham, *Word*, pp. 133-134. For some of Ibn 'Arabi's representative discussions of this hadith in the *Futuhat*, see I, 112, 305, 328, 331, 353, 377; II, 40, 81, 277, 298, 311, 333, 495, 508, 590, 610; III, 25, 44, 48, 73, 101, 289, 301, 315, 485, 536; and IV, 245. (It is also presupposed in most of the sections of the *Fusus al-Hikam* concerning the “god created in beliefs” cited in n. 123 above.)

'*crushed flat*' was like Moses' being '*stunned*': God says '**Moses**' (Qur'an 7:144), and (He) Who crushed it stunned me."

I said to him: "God has taken charge of teaching me, so I (only) know about Him to the extent of what He bestows on me."

Then he replied: "That is just how He acts with the Knowers of God, so take (your spiritual knowledge) from Him, not from the world.[161] And indeed you will never take (such knowledge) except to the extent of your predisposition (*isti'dad*).[162] So do not let yourself be veiled from Him by the likes of us (prophets)! For you will never come to know about Him by means of us anything but what we know about Him through His Self-manifestation.[163] Thus we too only give you (knowledge) about Him to the extent of your predisposition. Hence there is no difference [between learning from us and directly from God], so attach yourself to Him![164] For He only sent us to call you all to *Him*, not to call you to us. (His Message) is *a Word (that is) the same between us and you: that we should worship none but God, and that we should not associate anything with Him, and that some of us should not take others as lords instead of God* (Qur'an 3:64)."

I said: "That is how it came in the *Qur'an*!"

He said: "And that is how He is."

I said: "With what did you hear 'God's Speech'?"[165]

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[161]*al-kawn*: the term can also refer by extension to "the people of this world" (which appears to be the main reference here), although Ibn 'Arabi may also be referring more broadly to his familiar critiques of exclusive reliance on limited human "reasoning" (*nazar*) about the manifest world. For the "Knowers of (or 'through') God," see notes 153 and 156 above.

[162]I.e., what Ibn 'Arabi has just claimed (concerning the "divine control" over his own spiritual progress) is ultimately true for everyone—without in any way removing the need for each individual's best efforts. What Moses goes on to explain about the different capacities of each person for understanding and assimilating the teachings of the prophets and Messengers is only one illustration of this crucial insight.

[163]The phrase "by means of us" in this sentence is an allusion to Ibn 'Arabi's assumption that the greatest part of the knowledge of the saints is gained "indirectly," through their spiritual participation in the manifold "heritages" of divine Knowledge received directly by each of the prophets and Messengers. See his careful explanation of this mediating relationship of the prophets and saints in chapter 14 of the *Futuhat* (I, 149-152; *OY* ed., II, 357-362) and the many additional references in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, chapters 4 and 5.

[164]Here Ibn 'Arabi intentionally uses a verb (*intasaba*) usually employed to describe someone's "joining" or "belonging to" a particular religious (or legal, political, etc.) school, party or sect. The root sense of the verb—also quite appropriate here—refers to a person's kinship relation of ancestral allegiance and descent, his *nasab*. Thus the final phrase could also be translated as "join Him" or "take your lineage (directly) from Him."

[165]Alluding to Qur'an 4:164—."..**and God spoke to Moses with Speech**." For Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the possible apprehension of the divine revelation (*wahy*) through "hearing" and

He said: "With my hearing."

I said: "And what is your 'hearing'?"

He said: "*He* (is)."[166]

I said: "Then by what were you distinguished (from other men)?"

He said: "By an immediate personal experience (*dhawq*) in that regard, which can only be known by the person who actually experiences it."

I said: "So those who possess such immediate experiences are like that?"

"Yes," he said, "and (their) experiences are according to (their spiritual) ranks."

[IV-H. The Seventh Heaven: Abraham and the Temple of the Heart][167]

[Most of Ibn 'Arabi's encounter with Abraham—as earlier with Joseph and John the Baptist—is devoted to questions about certain Qur'anic passages concerning him. Here, for example, Abraham explains that his apparently polytheistic remarks reported at Qur'an 6:74-80 were actually only meant to test the faith of his people, given their limited understanding.

What is of more universal importance for the spiritual journey, however, is Ibn 'Arabi's identification of the celestial Kaaba, the "House" of Abraham that marks the cosmological transition between the material world and the "paradisiac" realm of the highest spheres, as none other than the Heart of

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any of the other senses, see the beginning of chapter 14 (I, 149 ff.; *OY*. ed., III, pp. 357 ff.), as well as the discussion of the various modalities of prophetic inspiration in chapter 366, III, 332. (See also the related hadith discussed in the following note.)

[166]This whole passage is an allusion to the famous *hadith al-nawafil* (the "supererogatory acts" of devotion), which is perhaps the "divine saying" most frequently cited both by Ibn 'Arabi and by Sufi writers more generally: it is recorded in the canonical collection of Bukhari (*Riqaq*, 38) and included in Ibn 'Arabi's own collection of *hadith qudsi*, the *Mishkat al-Anwar* (no. 91; *Divine Sayings*, p. 88). (See also the full text and translation and further references in Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word*, pp. 173-174.)

The relevant section (and that most often alluded to by Sufi authors) is as follows: "...And My servant continues to draw near to Me through the supererogatory works (of devotion) until I love him. Then when I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks. And if he asks Me (for something), I surely give (it) to him; and if he seeks My aid, surely I help him...." For some of Ibn 'Arabi's discussions of this hadith in the *Futuhat*, which usually bring out his understanding of it as alluding to the individual realization of an underlying universal condition, see I, 203, 406; II, 65, 124, 126, 298, 326, 381, 487, 502, 513, 559, 563, 614; III, 63, 67, 143, 189, 298; and IV, 20, 24, 30, 312, 321, 449.

[167]III, 350.5-20 (only lines 18-20 are translated in full here).

the voyager. For the Heart—as he makes clear in the much longer discussions at this point in his *K. al-Isra'* and in chapter 167 of the *Futuhat*[168]—is ultimately the "site" of the whole journey.]

...Then I saw the *Inhabited House* (Qur'an 52:4),[169] and suddenly there was my Heart—and there were the angels who "enter It every day"![170] The Truly Real manifests Himself to (the Heart), which

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[168]In the corresponding part of chapter 167 (S. Ruspoli, *L'Alchimie*, pp. 97-107), Abraham advises the "follower" (of Muhammad) to "make your heart like this House, by being present with God (*al-Haqq*) at every moment." Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the nature of the Heart as a mirror of the Truly Real in all of its states is emphasized in that chapter by his use of the famous Sufi parable—almost certainly borrowed here (but without acknowledgement) from Ghazali's *Mizan al-'Amal*, and most famous in the form of the tale of the "Greek and Chinese artists" at the beginning of Rumi's *Masnavi*—of the royal "contest" between a marvelous artist (whose painting is the world) and a sage whose polished "mirror" (the soul of true Knower) reflects both that painting and the "artists" and "king" (i.e., the metaphysical world and each individual's "particular relation" to God) as well.

The lengthy corresponding section of the *K. al-Isra'* (pp. 28-34) is far too rich and complex to be summarized here. There, after evoking the highest stages of the nocturnal journey of Muhammad and the true Knowers (pp. 29-30), Ibn 'Arabi makes the entry into this celestial "House" dependent on attainment of the highest spiritual station, the "Station of Yathrib" (see Qur'an 32:13 and *Futuhat*, III, 177, 216, 500, etc.) or the "Station of no Station," in which the Heart is perfectly open to every form of theophany, in a state of selfless "bewilderment" (*hayra*). [See chapter 50 on the "men of *hayra*" (I, 270-272) and the further extensive references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 1245 ("Yathribi") and 357-363 (*hayra*).]

Since for Ibn 'Arabi this is precisely the "Muhammadan Station" (discussed here in section IV-I below), the rest of this passage in the *K. al-Isra'* (pp. 30-31) alternates between the voyager's own moving poetic descriptions of that decisive spiritual realization—whose attainment is assumed throughout that work—and Abraham's praises of Muhammad and reminders of the many forms of superiority of those who have been granted that supreme attainment. These comparisons of other prophets or saints with Muhammad (for example at p. 33) could also highlight the essential contrast between the conditions of those who must "work" their way gradually toward spiritual perfection, drawn by divine love (*mahabba*) and the much rarer state of those who—like Ibn 'Arabi himself—benefit from the unique grace of divine "preference" (*ithar*), who are suddenly "pulled" (*majdhub*) by God into the highest stages of realization.

[169]*al-Bayt al-Ma'mur*: the "inhabitants" of this mysterious celestial site—often identified with the "Furthest Place of Worship" (*al-masjid al-aqsa*) mentioned in the Qur'an as the culmination of the Prophet's nocturnal voyage (Qur'an 17:1), although the indications in the hadith themselves are very limited—are apparently the angels mentioned in the various hadith (see following note). Its location "with Abraham," mentioned in several hadith outlining the *Mi'raj* (including the *hadith al-isra'* from Muslim cited here by Ibn 'Arabi, at III, 341.29-34), seems connected with his role as builder of the Kaaba, the earthly Temple (*al-bayt*). For Ibn 'Arabi's identification—following earlier Sufis—of this heavenly "House" (and several others mentioned in the Qur'an) with the Heart (of the Knower, and ultimately of the Perfect Man), see ch. 6 of *Futuhat* (I, 120) and the further references in Hakim, *Al-*

(alone) encompasses Him,[171] in "seventy thousand veils of light and darkness."[172] Thus He manifests Himself to the Heart of His servant through those (veils)—for "if He were" to manifest

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Mu'jam al-sūfī, pp. 222-228. The hadith on this subject (see **Wensinck, *Concordance*, IV, pp. 353-354 [[THIS IS A REFERENCES TO THE FIRST EDITION – ONLY 2nd AVAILABLE NOW –I SUGGEST KEEPING IT AS IS IN THE FOOTNOTE BUT JUST REMOVING THE PAGE NUMBERS)** are for the most part the same ones concerning the Mi'raj in general discussed at n. 38 above.

[170]The hadith of Anas b. Malik (Muslim, *Iman*, 259/= *bab al-isra'*, 1) followed by Ibn 'Arabi in section II (n. 38) at the beginning of this chapter (III, 341.29-34) states that: "70,000 angels enter It each day, and they do not return there"; the other hadith concerning this subject in Muslim (*Iman*, 264) differs only slightly, while the corresponding hadith in Bukhari (*bad' al-khalq*, 6, also from Anas, with slightly different *isnad*), has Gabriel add that the 70,000 angels "*pray* there every day" and that "*when* they leave they do not return."

Here—where the meaning of this House as the "Heart" is his primary concern—Ibn 'Arabi clearly implies a connection between these "70,000 angels" and the "70,000 veils" mentioned in another famous hadith (see following notes), where both numbers can be seen as symbols of the infinite, *never-repeated* divine theophanies, whether they are considered in the world or in their "reflections" in the Heart of the Perfect Man. In his earlier discussion of the Mi'raj hadith (III, 341; an untranslated part of section II), however, he interprets the saying cosmologically: the angels' "entry is through the door of the rising of the stars, and (their) departure is through the door of the setting of the stars." (This latter interpretation is also apparently assumed in his remarks at this point in chapter 167 of the *Futuhat*.)

[171](As usual, *al-Haqq* could also be translated as "the Truth," "It," etc.) This translation assumes the inner connection between God and the Heart (*qalb*) that is expressed for Ibn 'Arabi in the famous *hadith qudsi*—in this case, one not recorded in the canonical collections—to which he alludes throughout his writings: "My earth and My heaven do not encompass Me, but the heart of My servant, the man of true faith, does encompass Me"; see his citation of this saying in a key opening passage of this chapter, at n. 37 above. Concerning Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the "Heart" more generally, see the key chapter on the "Wisdom of the Heart" (Shu'ayb) in the *Fusus al-Hikam* (I, 119-126; R.W.J. Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom*, pp. 147-155) and the extensive references in Hakim, *Mu'jam*, pp.916-921.

For the Shaykh, following a number of Qur'anic indications, the phrase "My servant"—i.e., the "servant" (*'abd*) of the divine "I"—is understood as a reference to the very highest spiritual state, in which the saint perfectly mirrors the divine Will: see n. 198 below on Ibn 'Arabi's own self-realization as a "pure servant" and Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 773-776.

[172]The rest of this paragraph partially cites a celebrated hadith, and is one of the main subjects of Ghazali's famous *Mishkat al-Anwar*; see the excellent French translation by R. Deladriere, *Le Tabernacle des Lumieres* (Paris, 1981), and the English translation by D. Buchman, *The Niche of Lights* (Provo, Utah, 1998). The hadith is usually given according to the version recorded in Ibn Maja, I, 44: "God has seventy [or 700, or 70,000] veils of light and darkness: if He were to remove them, the radiant splendors of His Face would burn up whoever was reached by His Gaze." (Muslim, *iman*, 291 cites a similar hadith which mentions simply a "veil of Light," without any specific number.) Ibn

Himself without them, "the radiant splendors of His Face would burn up" the creaturely part[173] of that servant.

[IV-I. The "Lotus of the Limit" and the Culminating Revelation][174]

So when I had left (the Temple), I came to *the Lotus-Tree of the Limit* (Qur'an 53:14),[175] and I halted amongst its lowest and its loftiest branches.[176] Now "it was enveloped" (Qur'an 53:16) in the lights

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'Arabi interprets this hadith in greater detail in chapter 426 (IV, 38-39), focusing on the question of how "light" can be a "veil"; ch. 73, question 115 (II,110), on the meaning of "God's Face"; and in his *K. al-Tajalliyat* (ed. O. Yahya, Beirut, 1967), VI, 728. Other discussions, usually mentioning the different versions of this hadith, can be found in the *Futuhat* at II, 80, 460, 488, 542, 554; III, 212, 216, 289; and IV, 72.

Here, by choosing to mention the number 70,000—although the canonical hadith, as just noted, include several possible numbers (or none at all)—, Ibn 'Arabi clearly implies an intimate connection with the "angels" of the "Inhabited House" mentioned at the beginning of this section (see preceding notes), so that both the 70,000 "veils" and "angels" are understood as symbolizing the infinite range of theophanies (*tajalliyat*). For Ibn 'Arabi's typical understanding of the divine "veils" as an expression for those theophanies (in this and many other contexts), see the references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 313-318.

[173]literally, "the world of creation" (*'alam al-khalq*): i.e., the realm of existence constituted by those "veils" or the divine Self-manifestation in all created being—as opposed to the primordial, "internal" Self-Manifestation or noetic differentiation of the Names and Realities within the divine Essence, the *fayd al-aqdas* and the "world of the Command," *'alam al-'amr* (which is the site of the final, purely noetic stages of the Ascension described in chapter 167).

[174]III, 350.20-32 (translated in full). As explained in the Introduction, this brief section summarizes an experience (or series of realizations) that is elaborated at much greater length in the other Mi'raj narratives. (See especially the key passage from the *K. al-Isra'*, pp. 13-14, translated in our article cited at n. 13 above.)

Although Ibn 'Arabi's recounting of the Prophet's Ascension early in the chapter (section II, at III, 341.3-342.20) goes on at this point to mention a number of additional details and "stages" drawn from a variety of hadith, his association here in the autobiographical portion of this chapter between the "Lotus of the Limit" (see following note) and the final, culminating revelation—expressed in several hadith by the formula: "God inspired [*awha*] in me what He inspired" (alluding to the Qur'anic verse 53:10)—exactly corresponds to the first hadith on the *isra'* given by Muslim (*Iman*, 259) and coincides with the other hadith elaborating on the symbolic allusions to Muhammad's vision in that sura (*al-Najm*, whose opening verses are usually considered to recount the culminating stages of the Prophet's Ascension). (The further details given in other hadith and not utilized here are, however, integrated and greatly elaborated in Ibn 'Arabi's other treatments of the Mi'raj theme.)

[175]This *sidrat al-muntaha* (where Muhammad "*saw Him in another descent*") is part of a longer Qur'anic description (53:2-18) of two extraordinary occasions of revelation (*wahy*)—in the form of

of (good) actions, and in the shelter of its branches were singing the birds of the spirits of those who perform (those) actions,[177] since it is in the form of Man.[178] As for the four rivers (flowing from its

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direct *vision* (Qur'an 53:10-13 and 17-18) by the "heart" (*fu'ad*: Qur'an 53:11) which are integrated into the hadith of the *mi'raj/isra'* quoted earlier (in section II, see notes 8 and 38), but whose details are also the subject of many separate hadith. (See for example, the separate section on the *sidra* in Muslim, *iman*, 280 ff.) While some of these hadith attempt to explain this vision as being of Gabriel's true angelic form (as opposed to his usual manifestation in human guise), Ibn 'Arabi's understanding here and in the *K. al-Isra'* clearly relies on those hadith which stress that (1) this vision was in the Prophet's *Heart* (*qalb* or *fu'ad* [see Qur'an 53:11], as in the hadith of Ibn 'Abbas at Muslim, *iman*, 285-286) and (2) that it was of the "*Lord*," (3) in a form of "*Light*" (or "veils of Light": see the famous hadith just cited at n. 172), as at Muslim, *iman*, 292-295. This latter hadith, in which Muhammad is asked how he saw his Lord (at verse 53) and responds that he saw God "as Light," is discussed in more detail in chapter 426 (IV, 38-39).

In his earlier elaboration of the hadith descriptions of the "*sidra*" at this point (341.33-343.8) Ibn 'Arabi, in addition to stressing the ineffable Light surrounding it ("no one among God's creatures would be able to describe its beauty," says one hadith [Muslim, *iman*, 259]) and discussing the particular points described here (see following notes), also adds a cosmological explanation of the word "limit," paraphrasing a hadith (Muslim, *iman*, 280): "It is the end of what descends to it from above and the end of what ascends to it from below." (In chapter 167, the Lotus-tree is therefore presented as the threshold of the lowest gardens of Paradise.)

[176]The branches and fruit of this cosmic tree are described in several of the hadith of the *mi'raj* drawn on in Ibn 'Arabi's earlier account (section II: see preceding note). Given that he interprets this tree below as the "form of Man" (i.e., the Perfect Man)—and therefore a symbolic "Tree of the World"—its "lowest (*dunya*) and highest branches" would refer to the totality of existence, encompassing every realm of being. See n. 178 below and the translations of Ibn 'Arabi's own cosmological treatise, the "Tree of Existence" (*Shajarat al-Kawn*) mentioned in n. 11 above; the same cosmological symbolism is developed in more detail in his *R. al-Ittihad al-Kawni*, tr. by D. Gril as *Le Livre de l'Arbre et des Quatre Oiseaux* (Paris, 1984).

[177]*arwah al-'amilun*: this feature (referring to all men's actions, not just to their good deeds or to the souls in Paradise) is also implied in certain hadith and mentioned explicitly in Ibn 'Arabi's synthesis of those materials in section II above (see references in preceding notes); it may be connected with the mention in the same Qur'anic passage (53:15), that "**with It is the Garden of Refuge**" (i.e., one of the Gardens of Paradise), or it could be interpreted as referring to the intermediate world (*barzakh*, which is also a *muntaha* or "limit" between the sensible and spiritual realms) more generally. In cosmological terms—e.g., in his discussion in chapter 167 of the *Futuhat*—Ibn 'Arabi takes this "limit" to constitute the boundary between Paradise (located in the sphere above it) and Gehenna (constituted by all the lower spheres of the material world).

[178]*'ala nash'at al-insan*: i.e., comprising all the same planes of being (*nash'a*) contained within the Perfect Man, both spiritual and bodily or material. The metaphysical and spiritual equivalencies that this implies, especially the essential correspondence between the Perfect Man and the Reality of Muhammad, are elaborated in Ibn 'Arabi's own *Shajarat al-Kawn* ("The Tree of Existence"; Yahya,

roots, as described in the hadith),[179] they are the four kinds of divine knowledge "granted as a gift" (to man), which we mentioned in a part (*juz'*) we called "the levels of the forms of knowledge given freely (by God)."[180]

Next I saw before me the "cushions of the Litters" (Qur'an 55:77) of the (true) Knowers.[181] Then I "was enveloped by the (divine) lights" until all of me became Light, and a robe of honor was bestowed upon me[182] the likes of which I had never seen.

RG, no. 666), also available in the English and French translations by A. Jeffery and M. Gloton, *L'Arbre du Monde* (Paris: 1982); see also the additional cosmological references cited at n. 21.

[179]Earlier in this chapter (Section II; III, 341.35-342.5) Ibn 'Arabi mentions the following hadith description (taken from Muslim, *iman*, 264, where these rivers precede the "Inhabited House"; there is a parallel version, in same order as here, in Bukhari, *bad' al-khalq*, 6): "He saw four rivers flowing forth from its roots, two outward rivers and two inner (spiritual) ones (*batinan*)...," and Gabriel points out that "the two inner ones are in the Garden (of Paradise), while the two external ones are the Nile and Euphrates." Ibn 'Arabi then goes on to explain that the two "outer" ones also become rivers of Paradise after the Resurrection, thereby constituting the *four* rivers (of milk, honey, water and wine) promised to the blessed in parts of the Qur'an and hadith. (For Ibn 'Arabi's interpretations of those and related symbols, primarily as different kinds or modalities of spiritual wisdom, see Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 1071-1077).

In the corresponding section of chapter 167 (*Alchimie*, pp. 109-111), however, he interprets these symbols more freely as referring to a single great River (understood as the *Qur'an*, in the universal sense of the Reality of Muhammad and the *Umm al-Kitab*)—i.e., the River of Life—and three smaller rivers (= the Torah, Psalms and Gospels) emerging from It, along with the smaller streams of the other revealed Books (*suhuf*) mentioned in the Qur'an.

[180]*maratib 'ulum al-wahb*: this is the title of a separate extant treatise (also known under many other names) described in the *R.G.*, no. 423 (II, pp. 366-367). According to Osman Yahya (in the same entry), the end of this treatise mentions that it is also included in the *Futuhat*, and its contents correspond to the following sections: I, 157-172 (chapters 16-21), III, 501-505 (ch. 380), and IV, 37-38 (ch. 425).

[181]*muttaka'at rafarif al-'arifin*: the obscure Qur'anic term *rafraf*, used at Qur'an 55:77 to describe the "green couches" (or "meadows") of the dwellers of Paradise, was used by Ibn 'Arabi (in his summary of the Prophet's Mi'raj in section II, at III, 432.7) to symbolize the angelic "vehicle" employed by Muhammad for the highest stages of his Ascension, after—as described in several other hadith—he was forced to leave Gabriel and Buraq at the "Lotus-Tree of the Limit." There he also adds that "it is like a litter or sedan-chair among us." Its use in reference to the Mi'raj no doubt comes from a hadith explaining Muhammad's vision of "*one of the greatest Signs of his Lord*" (Qur'an 53:13), stating that "he saw a green *rafraf* that had covered the horizon" (Bukhari, *tafsir surat al-najm*, from 'Abdallah ibn 'Abbas).

The *K. al-Isra'*, which contains a long poetic section on "*al-rafarif al-'ul*a" (*Rasa'il*, pp. 45-49, immediately preceding the culminating "intimate dialogues" with God) gives a much clearer idea of the meaning of this symbol for Ibn 'Arabi. There their role in the passage beyond the "Lotus of the Limit" is connected with the voyager's realization of "the

So I said: "O my God, the Signs (*ayat*) are scattered!" But then 'He sent down upon me'[183] at this moment (His) Saying: "***Say: 'we have faith in God and in what He sent down upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes (of Israel), and in what was brought to Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord; we do not separate any one among them, and we are surrendered to Him***!'" (Qur'an 3:84). Thus He gave me *all* the Signs in this Sign,[184] clarified the matter (i.e., of the eternal Reality of the "*Qur'an*") for me,[185] and made this Sign for me the key to

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secret of divine theophany in his heart" (p. 48): on them "he passed through 300 divine Presences (*hadarat*)" (p. 53), until he reached the station "where 'how' and 'where' disappear, and the secrets...(of the Union of God and the traveler) become clear" (p. 49).

   In the *Shajarat al-Kawn* (n. 11 above), the *rafraf*—which is treated there as the fifth in a series of seven mounts used by the Prophet—is more clearly described as a sort of flying carpet "of green light, blocking up everything from East to West" (a description reflecting the above-mentioned hadith), and Ibn 'Arabi associates it with the divine Compassion (*raf'a*). (See Jeffery tr., pp. 152-153; Gloton tr., pp. 100 and 173 [citing another, more detailed hadith also attributed to Ibn 'Abbas].)

[182]The beginning of this sentence echoes the description of the Prophet's revelation and vision of God as "Light" at the Lotus-tree of the Limit, in the Qur'anic verses 53:16-18 and in the hadith discussed just above (n. 175)—except that here Ibn 'Arabi himself has *become* that Tree "which is according to the state of Man" (n. 178). The "robe of honor" (*khil'a*) here recalls the ceremony of Sufi "initiation" (the bestowal of the *khirqa*), except that here this royal garment symbolizes the spiritual station of the Prophet himself, the *maqam muhammadi* Ibn 'Arabi attains below (at n. 186).

[183]This is a Qur'anic expression (*anzala 'ala*) usually referring to the "descent" of divine Revelation to the prophetic Messengers (*rusul*). For other passages where Ibn 'Arabi applies it to divine inspirations received by the *awliya'*, see the *Futuhat* II, 506; III, 94, 181; IV, 178. Judging from the context, the "dispersion" or "diversity" of the divine "Signs" mentioned here seems to refer in particular to their division among the various prophets and messengers (and their revealed Books, etc.)—or even to the very multiplicity of the theophanies (God's "Signs in the souls and on the horizons," at Qur'an 41:53) that ordinarily distract us from a full awareness of the divine Unity. See also the similar allusions to the (ultimately illusory) "multiplicity" of the prophets and their teachings at the beginning of the key passage from the *K. al-Isra'* translated in our article cited at n. 13 above.

[184]Or 'verse', *'aya*: since what was revealed to Ibn 'Arabi in this experience was no less than the inner meaning of the true eternal *Qur'an*—which is also the "Reality of Muhammad"— encompassing all knowledge (including the spiritual sources/realities of all the revealed Books), the phrase could also be read as "all the *verses* in that one verse." Much of the latter part of the *K. al-Isra'* (especially pp. 83-92) is particularly devoted to Ibn 'Arabi's detailed explanations of his new, perfect understanding of the spiritual meaning of many different Qur'anic verses, as that revealed insight is "tested" and verified by Muhammad and several other major prophets.

[185]*qarraba 'alayya al-amr*: this translation (taking *amr* in its most general sense) assumes Ibn 'Arabi is referring to his experience of the full eternal reality of the *Qur'an* (the *umm al-Kitab*) which is detailed in much of the *K. al-Isra'* (see our Introduction and the article cited at n. 13). However the phrase could also be construed as referring to his special "proximity" to the (divine) "Command" (*al-'amr*) or simply to God—since this experience has many of the features of what Ibn 'Arabi

all knowledge. Henceforth I knew that I *am* the totality of those (prophets) who were mentioned to me (in this verse).

 Through this (inspiration) I received the good tidings that I had (been granted) the "Muhammadan station,"[186] that I was among the heirs of Muhammad's comprehensiveness. For he was the last (prophet) to be sent as a messenger, the last to have (the direct Revelation) *descend upon him* (Qur'an 97:4):[187] God "gave him the all-comprehensive Words,"[188] and he was specially favored by

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describes elsewhere in the *Futuhat* as the "Station of Proximity" (*maqam al-qurba*) characterizing the highest group of saints, the "solitary ones" (*afrad*): see Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 936-938, Ibn 'Arabi's *K. al-Qurba* (*Rasa'il*, I, no. 6), *Futuhat*, chapter 161 (II, 260-262) and further detailed references in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints* (index s.v.).

[186]literally, that I was "Muhammad-like in (my spiritual) station" (*Muhammadi al-maqam*), i.e., marked by Muhammad's primordial spiritual condition of "all-comprehensiveness" (*jam'iya*), encompassing the eternal Realities of all the prophets (the *majmu'*, "totality") mentioned in the preceding sentence. The similar experience of the unity of all the prophets (and their spiritual knowledge and revelations) in Muhammad (and in Ibn 'Arabi himself) is summarized in the passage from the *K. al-Isra'*, pp. 12-14, translated in our article cited at n. 13, and is of course carefully elaborated throughout the *Fusus al-Hikam*.

For details on Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the *maqam muhammadi*, see Hakim, *Mu'jam*, pp. 1191-1201 and especially Chodkiewicz, *Sceau*, chapters IV (on the "Muhammadan Reality"), V (on the concept of the saints as "heirs" of certain prophets) and IX, discussing the many passages of the *Futuhat* and other works concerning Ibn 'Arabi's self-conception as the "Seal of Muhammadan Prophecy." See also the references on the "Station of Proximity" in the previous note: as indicated in the Introduction, n. 13, the two stations are certainly very close, and the explicit distinction between them—which depends on Ibn 'Arabi's own role as "Seal"—seems to have developed only gradually in the Shaykh's thought.

[187]The verb form here alludes to the celebrated verses (at sura 97) describing the descent of "***the angels and the Spirit***" that marked the beginning of Muhammad's revelation; it is thus an apparent reference to the type of *direct* divine inspiration (*wahy*) uniquely limited to the line of divine lawgiving messengers (*rusul/mursalun*). For Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the spiritual insight of the saints as "mediated" or "inherited" through one or more of the earlier messengers, see chapter 14 of the *Futuhat* (I, 149-152/O.Y. ed., III, 357-362), plus detailed references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 1191-1201 and Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, ch. 5 and 9.

[188]*Jawami' al-kilam*: the famous hadith paraphrased in this sentence (see Bukhari, *ta'bir*, 11; Muslim, *masajid*, 5-8; Tirmidhi, *siyar*, 5; etc.) is cited repeatedly by Ibn 'Arabi to summarize the totality of spiritual knowledge or divine "forms of wisdom" (*hikam*) making up the "Muhammadan Reality": that conception is illustrated at length in his treatment of the other prophets (in relation to Muhammad) in the *Fusus al-Hikam*, and is likewise assumed in his description of a similar revelatory experience in the *K. al-Isra'*, translated in our article cited at n. 13 above. (See the related discussions at II, 72, 88; III, 142; and further references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 269-276, entry on "*jam'*.") The rest of the hadith (translating here from al-Bukhari) is also important in this context (i.e., regarding the "treasuries" of knowledge enumerated below): "I was sent with the all-

six things with which the messenger of no (other) community[189] was specially favored. Therefore (Muhammad's) Mission is universal, because of the general nature of his six aspects:[190] from whatever direction you come, you will find only the Light of Muhammad[191] overflowing upon you; no one takes (spiritual knowledge) except from It, and no (divine) messenger has informed (man) except for (what he has taken) from It.[192]

Now when that happened to me I exclaimed: "Enough, enough![193] My (bodily) elements are filled up, and my place cannot contain me!," and through that (inspiration) God removed from me my contingent dimension.[194] Thus I attained in this nocturnal journey the inner realities (*ma'ani*) of *all*

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comprehensive Words...and while I was sleeping, I was brought *the keys of the treasuries*... and they were placed in my hand...."

[189]The text here reads literally "of no community (*umma*) among the communities"—a formulation apparently reflecting Ibn 'Arabi's focus here on the universality of Muhammad's spiritual reality (i.e., as ultimately sent to all the religious communities). It is not clear in this context whether this last phrase refers to six attributes which were not *combined* in one earlier messenger—in which case it might refer back to the revelations of the six prophets who were mentioned by name in the verse 3:84 quoted in the preceding paragraph—or rather to six characteristics which were each completely *unique* to Muhammad. The concluding pages of the *K. al-Isra'* (pp.91-92), for example, discuss several unique qualities of Muhammad that were not shared by Moses, Noah, Zachariah and Yahya (John), etc.

[190]Or "directions": this sentence involves a play on the word *jiha*, which can mean both "aspect" (in the sense of trait or characteristic) and "direction"—in which sense the traditional "six directions" (i.e., the 4 cardinal points, plus the vertical axis) implicitly contain all the possible spatial orientations, and thereby again alluding to the universality of the Prophet's Reality and divine mission.

[191]*Nur Muhammad*: for the historical background of this term (including early references in hadith and the Sira literature), see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, pp. 60-67. For Ibn 'Arabi, the term is often roughly equivalent—from other points of view—to the "Muhammadan Reality," universal "Intellect," divine "Pen" or "Spirit," "Mother of the Book," etc.: see the references in Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 347-352, and the long list of his synonyms for the "Perfect Man" at p. 158.

[192]or "Him": the pronouns at the end of this sentence, translated here as "It," could also refer simply to "Muhammad" (although in any case the two terms would be essentially identical in this context).

[193]We have taken the most literal and obvious meaning. However, this phrase (*hasbi*) is also contained in two Qur'anic verses (39:38; 9:129): ."..**Say: 'God is enough for me**' (*hasbi Allah*)...," and both verses go on to stress the importance of "absolute trust" in God (*tawakkul*), the ostensible subject of this chapter (see notes 27 and 39 on the meaning of the title).

[194]*imkani*: i.e., everything (including the spatiality and corporality mentioned in Ibn 'Arabi's exclamation here) which had "separated" him from God (the unique "Necessary," non-contingent Being) and thereby offered the possibility of (relative) sin, opposition or conflict with the divine Commands; or in other words, everything that had been an impediment to his new state (or realization) of "pure servanthood," as an unimpeded expression of the divine Will (n. 198 below).

the Names, and I saw them all returning to One Subject[195] and One Entity:[196] that Subject was what I witnessed,[197] and that Entity was my Being. For my voyage was only in myself and only pointed to myself, and through this I came to know that I was a pure "servant,"[198] without a trace of lordship in me at all.

We may also recall that it was this very "possibility" that made the spiritual journey possible in the first place: see Ibn 'Arabi's mention of his "Buraq of *imkan*" at IV-A, n. 84 above.

[195]and "Object": *Musamma wahid*—the same formula was already mentioned in the schematic discussion of the spiritual journey in section III (at n. 61) above. As indicated there, the "transcendent Unity of the Named (divine Reality)" (*ahadiyat al-musamma*) is mentioned at the end of this section(III, 354.15-16) in the long list of the kinds of knowledge Ibn 'Arabi "saw" within this experience. There, as throughout his works, he mentions the association of this point (i.e., as an explicit thesis or "doctrine") with the famous Andalusian Sufi Ibn al-Qasi and his book *Khal' al-Na'layn*.

[196]or "One *Eye*" (*'ayn wahida*): the pun (involving the subject/object of this "vision" or "witnessing": see following note) is certainly intentional here, and is further enriched by some of the other dimensions of meaning of *'ayn*, which is also Source, Essence, etc.

[197]*Mashhudi*: this phrase and the following one *together* carefully sum up the ineffable paradox of this experiential realization of divine Unicity—the very core of Ibn 'Arabi's work—which led to so much subsequent theological and philosophical controversy in the Islamic world (and wherever attempts have been made to treat this realization conceptually as a logical "system"). The first phrase, taken in separation, states the thesis of *wahdat al-shuhud*, and the second the position of *wahdat al-wujud*—while the combination alone expresses the experience and fundamental reality the Shaykh attempts to convey here (and in the above-mentioned key passage from the *K. al-Isra'* translated in our article cited at n. 13). Note the similar caution in the *K. al-Isra'*, p. 65-66: "So beware and don't imagine that my conjunction (*ittisal*) with (the highest divine Presence) was one of identity of essence (*inniya*)...," etc.

[198]*'abd mahd*: this formulation (or the related one of *'abd khalis*), used fairly frequently by Ibn 'Arabi, refers to those rare Knowers who have become wholly devoted (*mukhlisin*) to the divine "I"—i.e., who are among "*My* servants," *'ibadi* (alluding especially to Qur'an 15:42 and 17:65)—and not to the totality of creatures, who are all "servants of God" in a metaphysical (but still unrealized) sense.

As Ibn 'Arabi explains in chapter 29 (*OY* ed. III, pp. 228-229): "Thus every servant of God pays attention to one [or more] of the creatures who has a right (*haqq*, i.e., a claim) against him, and his servantship (to God) is deficient to the extent of that right, because that creature seeks the (fulfillment) of that right from him and thereby has a power (*sultan*: like Satan at Qur'an 15:42, etc.) over him, so that he cannot be a pure servant, wholly devoted to God." In a revealing autobiographical aside, Ibn 'Arabi adds that "I encountered a great many of this group (i.e., of those "seeking freedom from all engendered things") in the days of my wandering," and that "from the day I attained this station I have not possessed any living thing, indeed not even the clothing I wear.... And the moment I come into possession

Then the treasures of this station were opened up (for me), and among the kinds of knowledge I *saw* there were:...[199]

[The list of some 69 kinds of knowledge associated with this particular station differs from the similar listings in each of the other chapters on the *manazil* in that it contains a number of Ibn 'Arabi's most fundamental metaphysical theses. The following items may be taken as representative.][200]

...I saw in it the knowledge of the Return...and that (man) carries this world with him when he is transferred (to the next world)...

I saw in it the knowledge of the interpenetration and (indissoluble) "circularity" (*dawr*: of God and Man), which is that God (*al-Haqq*) can only *be* in (external) reality (*fi al-fi'l*) through the form of the creature (*al-khalq*), and that the creature can only be there (in reality) through the form of God. So this circularity...is what actually exists (*al-waqi'*) and is the way things are...

...each community (*umma*) has a messenger...and there is nothing among what exists that is not (part of) a certain community.... So the divine message (*risala*) extends to absolutely all communities, both great and small!...

I saw in it the universality of the divine Gift (of Mercy and Pardon)..., (as) He said concerning the prodigal sinners: ."..***do not despair of God's Mercy; surely God forgives the sins altogether, surely He is the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful***." So nothing could be clearer than this explicit divine declaration concerning the return of (all) the servants to (His) Mercy!...

I saw in it the knowledge that it is God who is worshipped in every object of worship, behind the veil of (the particular) form.

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of something I dispose of it at that very instant, either by giving it away or setting it free, if that is possible."

At the beginning of chapter 311 (III, 26-27), Ibn 'Arabi even more openly "boasts" (to use his expression) of this unique realization: "Today I do not know of anyone who has realized the station of servanthood to a greater extent than I—and if there is someone (else), then he is like me. For I have attained the ultimate limit of servanthood, so that I am the pure, absolute servant who does not know (even the slightest) taste of Lordship (*rububiya*)." See also Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, pp. 765-778 (*'abd*, *'ubudiya*, and related concepts).

[199]Ibn 'Arabi strongly emphasizes the direct experiential "*vision*" of the forms of knowledge he realized in this particular revelation by repeating "*I saw in it*..." before each of the 69 kinds of understanding enumerated in this chapter (III, 351-354). (This procedure is apparently unique among the many otherwise similar listings that conclude each of the remaining chapters on the spiritual stations, the "*fasl al-manazil*.")

The "opening of the treasuries" here is an allusion to the famous hadith concerning the special universality of the Prophet's revealed knowledge discussed in n. 188 above.

[200]These "kinds of knowledge" are respectively numbers 12, 15, 22, 25, 28, 45 and 53 in this list. Ibn 'Arabi's descriptions are given here without further annotation, since these principles should be familiar to readers of any of his works and most of them have been discussed in earlier passages of this chapter.

I saw in it the knowledge of the conditions of mankind in the intermediate world (*barzakh*)....

I saw in it the knowledge that this world is a token (*'unwan*) of the other world and a symbolization (*darb mithal*) of it, and that the status (*hukm*) of what is in this world is more complete and more perfect in the other world.

IBN 'ARABI'S ACCOUNT OF HIS FATHER'S DEATH

In chapter 35 of the *Meccan Illuminations*,[143] Ibn 'Arabi gives a fascinating account of his father's death—and at the same time, of his father's spiritual state and role in the Shaykh's own life—which deserves closer attention, especially in light of the growing interest in Ibn 'Arabi's own biography. This long and instructive chapter is entitled in full: "*Concerning the Inner Knowing of the Person Who Has Realized the Waystation of the Breaths, and His/Its Secrets After His Death*." Since it is clear by the end of this chapter (where the anecdote of his father's death is actually retold) that Ibn 'Arabi considers his own father to have become one of these particularly accomplished "knowers," it is helpful to start by quoting the opening poetic lines and introductory prose of this chapter:

> The (true) servant is the person whose state already while living / is like his state after the death of the body and spirit.
>
> The (true) servant is the person who, while still in a state of veiling (by the body) / was already a light, like the sun's illuminating the earth.
>
> For the state of death is not accompanied by any pretense, / just as life has its open pretensions (to "lordship" and divinity) ….

> You must know—May God inspire you with the Holy Spirit!—that this person who has realized the waystation of the Breath, whoever that person may be, that their state after their death is different from the states of the others who die. So we will begin by mentioning the different ways that the people of God take their knowing from God…, and then we will mention their ultimate fate and the effects of what they take (from God) upon their essential realities."

Near the end of this chapter, Ibn 'Arabi goes on to develop a general principle regarding these "People of the Breaths" which has wide-ranging practical consequences with regard to the later "cult of the saints"—in Islam and other world religions—and to the realities underlying the complex influences, guidance and mediation of those sacred mediating figures: "Therefore among their states after death is that they are living with that essential Life—that 'Life of the divine Breath' (*al-hayāt al-nafasiyya*) through which every creature is praising (God)." By way of illustration, he mentions several cases of the way the influences of the exemplary worship and devotion of a saint or prophet continue to be manifest in their places of worship (and at their tombs) long after their death. In one of those illustrations, someone who inadvertently profanes the shrine of Bayazid Bastami finds his clothes "burning" him without any visible fire. In the other case, Ibn 'Arabi recalls how the Prophet, during his celebrated spiritual Ascension, saw Moses praying at his tomb, while at the same time they had their famous conversations in the heavens concerning the proper number of canonical prayers. Then he continues here:

> So among the states of this person (who knows the divine Breaths) after their death are things like these: there is no difference in respect to such a person between their life and their death, for they were already in the form of a dead person during the time of their life in this world, in the state of death. So God made them, in the state of their death, like the person whose state is alive.

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[143] All passages quoted from *Kitāb Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya* (*OY* ed.), vol. III, pp. 333 and 353-355.

A second remarkable sign of those who realize this "Station of the Breaths" is the apparent incorruptibility or agelessness of their physical body:

> And among the attributes of the master of this spiritual station (of the Breaths) after their death is that when someone looks at their face, once they are dead, he will say that person is surely alive—even though the lack of pulse indicates they are dead! So the person who sees them is bewildered….

> Now I saw that (happen) with my father—God have mercy on him!—, so that we almost didn't bury him, we were so unsure, because his face seemed so alive, even though his lack of pulse or breathing indicated he was dead. Some fifteen days before he died, he told me that he was dying and would die on a Thursday, and that is how it was. When the day of his death came—and he was terribly ill—he sat up without any support and said to me: "O my son, today is the journey and the meeting (with God)!"

> So I said to him: "May God grant you a safe journey in this, and may He bless your meeting (with Him)!"

> He rejoiced in that and said to me: "May God bestow good on you from me, o my son! Everything I used to hear you telling me and didn't understand, and which I sometimes even denied: now I am (directly) witnessing it!"

> Then there appeared on his forehead a glowing whiteness, different from his skin color or any scar, shimmering with light. My father felt that, and then that glowing luminescence spread over his face until it covered his whole body. Then I kissed him and said farewell and left him, telling him: "Now I'm going to the main mosque, until they come to announce your death."

> Then he said to me: "Go, and don't let anybody come in to me," and the family and daughters were summoned. Now the announcement of his death came at noon, and I came to him and found him—or so someone seeing him would wonder—(still) between life and death, and that is the state in which we buried him. And he had an extraordinary tomb-shrine (*mashhad*).

> Then Ibn 'Arabi concludes: "For the person who is in this spiritual station, his living and his dying are all the same. [I.e., he has already realized the Prophetic injunction to 'die before you die!'] And everything we have mentioned in this chapter concerning the Knowing of the person in this station is from the Knowing of the (divine) Breaths".

Ibn 'Arabi's Mission of "Spiritual Advice" (*Nasīha*): Selections From

His *Dreams of Good Tidings*

The following dreams are among the eighteen recorded in the Shaykh's short "Epistle of Good Tidings" (*Risālat al-Mubashshirāt*),[144] whose title alludes to a famous hadith where the Prophet

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[144]Translations based on the text of the *Epistle* included in Yusuf al-Nabhani's *Sa'adat al-Darayn fi al-Salat 'ala Sayyid al-Kawnayn* (Beirut, 2007), pp. 472-478 (copy thanks to Prof. Denis Gril). The Epistle is No. 485 in O. Yahya's *Histoire et Classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi*, vol. II, p. 394, where

explains that these "'good tidings...are the dream of the *muslim*, either what that person sees or what is shown to them, which is one of the parts of prophecy.' ...So I decided to mention in this section some of what I have seen in dreams that involves a benefit for others and points out for them the means for reaching the Good, since there is no need to mention what only concerns myself."

- (When I was young), before I had acquired any religious learning, a group of my companions were strongly urging me to study the 'books of opinions' [Ibn 'Arabi's disparaging term for the books of *fiqh* ('Islamic law'), as opposed to the collections of hadith], at a time when I had no knowledge of them or of hadith. Now in a dream I saw myself as though I were standing in a wide open space, with a group of people all around me with weapons in their hands who wanted to kill me; there was no place of refuge to which I could turn. Then I saw a hill just in front of me, and God's Messenger was standing on it. So I took refuge with him, and he put his own armor on me and hugged me with an extraordinary embrace, saying to me: "O my friend, stick with me, so you will be safely in peace!" Then I looked for those enemies, but I didn't see a single one of them on the face of the earth. So from that time on I've busied myself with studying hadith.

- I saw in a dream that I was at the Sacred Shrine in Mecca, and it was as though the Resurrection had already begun. It was as though I was standing immediately in front of my Lord, with my head bowed in silence and fear of His reproaching me because of my negligence (*tafrīt*). But He was saying to me: "O My servant, don't be afraid, for I am not asking you to do anything except to admonish My servants. So admonish My servants, and I will guide the people (*al-nās*) to the straight path." Now when I had seen how rare it was for anyone to enter the Path of God I had become spiritually lazy. And that night I had resolved only to concern myself with my own soul, to forget about all the other people and their condition. But then I had that dream, and the very next morning I sat down among the people and began to explain to them the clear Path and the various evils blocking the Path for each group of them, whether the learned jurists, the 'poor' (*al-fuqarā'*) the Sufis or the common people. So every one of them began to oppose me and to try to destroy me, but God helped me to overcome them and protected me with a blessing and lovingmercy from Him. (The Prophet) said: "Religion is admonishment (or 'straight advice,' *al-nasīha*), for God, for the leaders of the Muslims, and for the common people among them," as is mentioned in Muslim's *Sahīh*.

- I saw (in a dream where) it was as though I was in Mecca with the Messenger of God, in the same dwelling. There was an extraordinary connection between him and me, almost as though I was him and as though he were me. And I saw that he had a little son, such that whenever anyone came to see (the Prophet), he would have that little boy go out with him so that the people might be blessed by him and come to know him. It was as though that little one had a very special standing standing with God. Now we were all sitting there when someone knocked at the door, and the Messenger of God went out to see them, taking the little one along with him. Then he came back to see me and said to me: "God has ordered me to go to Medina and pray the evening prayer there." And I [the Arabic here leaves it unclear whether this is still the Prophet, speaking of the little boy, or Ibn 'Arabi now speaking of the Prophet] never leave him and never take my eye off of him; it is as though I were his very essence, for I am not him, but I am not other than him.

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it is noted that the work is mentioned in both Ibn 'Arabi's *Fihris* (no. 71) and his later *Ijaza* (no. 76). [Subject treated in more detail in chapter 188 of *al-Futūhāt al-Makkīya*, II, 375-380 in Beirut edition.]

Now while he was between Mecca and Medina, suddenly he saw a tremendous good descending from the sky, and he said: "O Gabriel, what is this tremendous good, whose like I have not seen?" Then he said: "It descended from the loftiest paradise upon those keeping the night-vigil [*al-mutahajjidūn*: see Qur'an 17:79]. And how is it that you are among them?!" Then Gabriel began praising these keepers of the night-vigil to God with such praises as I had never heard before, and (the Prophet) was among the loftiest and noblest of them. Then I realized that this was all in regard to me and that his saying "How is it that you are among them?" was addressed in reference to me, and I woke up.

• I entered Seville to see the scrupulous, righteous Shaykh Abu 'Imran b. Musa b. 'Imran al-Martuli,[145] and I informed him about a matter which made him happy and which he took as good tidings. So he said to me: "May God give you good tidings of the Garden (of Paradise), as you have given me good tidings!" Not many days had gone by when I saw in a dream one of our companions, among those who had died, and I said to him: "How are you doing?" So he mentioned something good (regarding his own state), in the course of saying a great deal and telling a long story. Then he said to me: "God has already given me the good news that you are my companion in the Garden!" So I said to him: "This is (all taking place) in a dream. Give me a sign of (the truth of) what you are saying!" Then he replied: "Yes, tomorrow at the noon prayer the Sultan will send someone to look for you in order to imprison you. So watch out for yourself!"

Then I woke up, and there was nothing at all to indicate anything like that (was about to happen). But when I was praying at noon, suddenly the request came from the Sultan. So I said (to myself): "The dream was right!," and I hid out for fifteen days, until that (royal) request was cancelled. Now this is (an example of) the spiritual blessing (*baraka*) of the petitionary prayers (*du'a*) of the righteous (the *salihin*).

• I saw while I was sleeping as though God was calling out to me, saying to me: "O My servant, if you want to be close to Me, honored and enjoying delight with Me, then constantly say '*My Lord, cause me to see, that I might look upon You!*'[146] Repeat that for Me many times."

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[145]See the account of this shaykh in R.W.J. Austin's translations in *Sufis of Andalusia* (London, 1971), pp. 87-91 (including accounts from both *Ruh al-Quds* and *al-Durrat al-Fakhira*); the first account begins with more detail on the same incident alluded to at the beginning of this story.

[146]*Rabbī ārinī anzur ilayk*: this formula of *dhikr* is very close to a famous prayer of the Prophet recorded among the hadith: "O my God, cause us to see things as they really are!" (*allāhumma ārinā al-ashyā' kamā hiya*).

From Ethics and Devotion to Spiritual Realization: Ibn 'Arabi's *Book of the Quintessence, Concerning What Is Indispensable For the Spiritual Seeker*
Subject Outline[147]

1. God's Unicity and Transcendence

2. Faith in the messengers, companions, 'people of this Path' (the Friends of God), and serving the poor

3. Silence, focus on *dhikr*/remembrance of God, and good deeds

4. Right companion on the spiritual Path

5. Sincere intention (*sidq*) in seeking the right guide

6. Right livelihood

7. Eating little

8. Filling the day with prayer

9. Sleep, eat, and dress only as really needed

10. How to read the Qur'an

11. Keeping track of one's carnal self (*muhāsaba*) and shame before God

12. Staying Conscious: being aware of demands of the 'Instant' and eliminating inner distractions

13. Purity (tahāra)

14. Striving for good moral character traits

15. Right attitude toward spiritual 'opponents'

16. Right Behavior (adab) toward animals, dependents and children

17. Avoiding the powerful and worldly, while practicing insān and Sabr

18. Being present with God at every instant

19. Generosity (and avoiding stinginess) [***Incomplete***]

20. Controlling anger and learning how to (not) react to 'negative' encounters

21. Practicing *ihsān*

22. Constantly practicing Dhikr/remembrance of God and asking His forgiveness

23. Repentance and untying the 'knots' of persistence (in opposition to God) [Incomplete]

24. *Taqwā*: Awareness of God and its practical consequences

25. Avoiding self-deception/Iblís [***Incomplete***]

26. Practicing spiritual conscientiousness (*wara'*)

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[147] The following indicative subject outline and the corresponding numbered subdivisions in the translation are entirely the translator's additions, for ease of reference. For ease of reading, this translation also omits the honorific Arabic phrases normally following each mention of God, the Prophet, the Companions, and so on.

27. Practicing 'non-attachment' to this lower world (*zuhd*)

The Book of the Quintessence,
Concerning What Is Indispensable for the Spiritual Seeker[148]

In the Name of God the All-Compassionate the All-Merciful

Praise be to God, Sustainer of the Worlds! And may God bless our master Muhammad and all his
Family and Companions!

You asked, O seeker, about the quintessence of what the seeker must do, so I have answered you in
these pages. And God is the One Who brings fulfillment, there is no *rabb*[149] but He!

Know, O seeker—may God bring you and us to the fulfillment of freely obeying Him, and may He
cause us and you to know what pleases Him!—that (our) closeness to God is only known through His
informing us of that[150]. Now He has already done that—all thanks and praise be to God!—through
His sending the Messengers and sending down the Scriptures and making clear the Paths leading to
the eternal happiness. So once we have faith and hold (all that) to be true, there only remains
putting into practice in their proper place those (prescribed) actions set down by the revelation in
which we have faith and which have become established in the souls of those who have faith.[151]

[1.] Next it is incumbent on you, o seeker, to realize the Unicity (*taw°íd*) of your Creator and His
Transcendence and what is befitting of Him—may He be glorified and exalted!

As for realizing His Unicity, if there were a second god alongside God it would be impossible for any
action to occur from those two gods, because of the difference between their acts of Will, both in
being and actual determination. So the order (of all being) would be destroyed, as in His saying: *If
there were among them (the heavens and earth) gods other than God, both of them would have*

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[148] Printed text (Cairo, 1967), kindly provided by Michel Chodkiewicz. *Murīd* has been translated
here in its broad sense of anyone who is 'seeking' God, but it is important to keep in mind as well its
more technical, 'sociological' sense (in Ibn 'Arabí's time) of the person who is at a relatively early
stage of spiritual 'journeying', normally under the close supervision of a spiritual guide (*shaykh*). Ibn
'Arabí writes in very different ways for different readers, and the language and presuppositions of
this work make it clear that he is writing neither for intellectuals nor for more 'advanced'
companions. It is important to keep these broad qualifications in mind when considering a number
of the points mentioned below. [These cautions will be considerably expanded in the Introduction
to the forthcoming book which includes this translation.]

[149] *Rabb*: the 'personal (individual) God' and the Sustainer and spiritual 'Teacher' of each soul.

[150] Alluding, for example to many Qur'anic verses such as '*He is with you-all wherever you-all are*,' or
'*We are closer to him than his jugular vein*,' etc.—and also possibly to more direct and individualized
forms of God's 'causing us to know' (see following note)

[151] In the original Arabic (as in the English), this sentence includes a very complex—and no doubt
intentional—set of spiritual preconditions: they emphasize *three times* the necessity of one's first
having certainty (*ímān*, in the Qur'anic sense Ibn 'Arabí almost always intends) that the actions in
question are indeed those given as part of the eternal, ongoing process of divine 'revelation' (*shar'*,
again in the special sense that term usually has in Ibn 'Arabí).

been destroyed' (21:22). And don't argue, o my brother, with anyone who associates (other creatures with God), nor do you need to establish any proof of (the divine) Oneness and Unicity. For the associator has already joined you in affirming the existence of the Truly Real, while he is the one who goes beyond you in adding an 'associate (god)': so he is the one who needs to give a proof for what he has added. This is enough for you concerning the realization of (His) Unicity, since time is scarce and the connection (you have with God) is sound—while there is really nothing underlying (the claims of) the (associator) who disagrees with you, thank God.

As for realizing His transcendence (of any likeness to creation), which is urgent for you because of the literalist (*zāhhirī*) anthropomorphists and 'corporealists' in this age, just hold to His saying: *There is no thing like Him/like His Likeness* (42:11), and that is sufficient for you: whatever description (of God) contradicts this verse is to be rejected, and do not add to or go beyond this 'homeland'. This is why it has come down in the tradition (of the Prophet, his saying): *God was, and there was no thing with Him'*—may God be far exalted above what the wrongdoers/darkeners say! So every (scriptural) verse or hadith which makes us imagine a likening (of God to the creatures), whether that expression has come in the language of the Arabs, or in the language of anyone else upon whom God has sent down some revelation or information, you must simply have faith in it to the extent of what *God* has taught and sent down through that—but not like those falsely imagine something (about God) and then ascribe their 'knowledge' of that (imagination) to God. Nothing is beyond *There is no thing like Him/His Likeness*, and there is no one can better affirm His Transcendence, since He Himself has already affirmed His own Transcendence, and that is the most fitting expression of His Transcendence!

[2.] Then after that, o seeker, you should have faith in the Messengers—God's blessings be upon them—and in what they have brought and what they have informed us about Him: that He is far greater and more exalted than anything you have either known or been unaware of!

Next, you should love absolutely *all* the Companions, may God be pleased with them. There is no way at all that they could be charged with any offense or criticized, and no one of them should be raised in excellence above the others, except as his Lord has established that excellence in His Noble Book or through the words of His Prophet—may God's blessings and peace be with him. And you should respect and esteem whoever God and His Messenger have respected and esteemed.

Next, you should accept and acknowledge the people of this Path, with regard to all the stories[152] that are recounted about them, and also with regard to everything you *see* from them which the (ordinary) mind and (worldly) knowledge cannot encompass.

　　In general, you should hold a good opinion of everyone, and your heart should be at peace with them. You should pray specially, in secret, to/for the people of faith.[153] And you should serve

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[152] Of their spiritual qualities and accomplishments, the *karāmāt*: a good illustration of what Ibn 'Arabí has in mind can be found in the translation by R.W.J. Austin in *Sufis of Andalusia*—and to a far greater extent throughout the *Futūhāt*.

[153] As indicated in n. 4 above, in Ibn 'Arabí ordinarily uses the expression *mu'minūn* in its specifically Qur'anic sense, to refer to the elite group of the prophets, saints and spiritually accomplished souls of the 'Friends of God', the *awliyā'*. Thus the *du'ā* prayers mentioned here are probably referring to *asking for their help and intercession*, not simply to blessings on them.

the poor, recognizing their excellence and nobility in that they are content with letting you serve them, and in their bearing patiently with their burdens, troubles and difficulties.[154]

[3.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is keeping silent (*samt*), except for 'mentioning' God (*dhikr Allāh*), reciting the Noble Qur'an, guiding in the right way someone who has gone astray, exhorting to do what is right and forbidding what is wrong, reconciling those who have broken up, and strongly encouraging acts of voluntary charity—indeed every form of good.

[4.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is searching for someone who is in harmony with your essential nature, in accord with what you are aiming for and the way leading there. For so much comes to the person of faith from his brother.[155] And watch out for the company of the person who is fundamentally opposed (to your quest).[156]

[5.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is an actively guiding spiritual master (*shaykh murshid*). (With regard to finding such a guide), pure inner sincerity of intention (*sidq*) is the essential watchword of the spiritual seeker, because if the seeker is truly sincere with God, He will turn every (outward) 'devil' for that person into an angel rightly guiding them to the Good, and He will inspire in that (sincere seeker the awareness of) what is good. For inner sincerity is the Greatest Elixir [157](the 'perfect cure'), which can only be applied to the heart of our essential being (*qalb al-'ayn*).

[6.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is seeking out the (spiritually licit) source of support[158], since the very foundation of this Path is the licit livelihood. The supporting Pillar of this Path rests on that foundation (of right livelihood): do not be a burden to anyone, and do not accept (inappropriately) from anyone. Always earn your own living and be spiritually conscientious[159] about what you acquire, and about what you say, look at, listen to—indeed in all of your actions. Do not be excessive in your clothing or housing, or in what you eat, for what is spiritually appropriate

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[154] The special place of caring for 'the poor' here—and Ibn 'Arabí seems to refer to those who are literally fuqarā'—is no doubt connected with one of his favorite 'divine sayings' (*hadíth qudsī*), the one which begins: '*I was sick, but you didn't visit Me* (...*feed Me*; ... *give Me to drink*...)'

[155] Alluding to the famous hadith: 'the person of faith is the mirror of the person of faith [or of God, as *al-mu'min*].' To avoid cumbersome and inaccurate English paraphrasing, we have kept in this translation the literal gender references of the original Arabic, which should of course always be understood in their intended universal sense.

[156] See further elaboration of this point at section 15 below.

[157] I.e., the 'perfect (spiritual) Cure' or the 'Philosopher's Stone' that turns the lead of experience into the gold of spiritual wisdom.

[158] *Luqma*: literally, sustaining 'morsel' of food, identical to 'our daily bread' in the Lord's Prayer; 'licit' refers to the notion of what is spiritually 'permissible' (*halāl*). Of course translating luqma as 'livelihood' or 'source of support' also falsifies Ibn 'Arabí's original emphasis on what God provides us at every instant, and it is essential not to 'objectify' the English concepts here: what is spiritually 'licit' and appropriate one day (for one person, etc.) may *not* be so on another occasion....

[159] The root is *wara'*, explained further at section 26 below.

(*halāl*) is very little, without allowing for any excess. Know that once human beings have planted (animal) desires in their carnal selves (*nafs*), it is very hard to uproot them after that. There is no need for wealth and abundance in any of this.

[7.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is eating little. For hunger brings about an increase in (spiritual) energy for obeying God, while it takes away (spiritual) laziness.

[8.][160] You should properly cultivate and make fruitful[161] the moments of the night and the day:

As for those hours to which the revelation (*shar'*) has called you, for standing before your Sustainer/Teacher,[162] those are the five moments (of ritual prayer) that are obligatory for you. As for the rest of the moments lying between those (five obligatory prayers), if you have a trade, then strive to work in that time (enough to earn your living) for several days, like the son of (the Abbasid caliph) Harún al-Rashíd—God's Mercy upon him! And do not leave your place of prayer after the pre-dawn prayer until the sun actually rises, nor between the afternoon prayer and sunset, (filling that special period) with remembrance of God (*dhikr*) and humility and submission.[163] Nor should you let pass the period between the noon and afternoon (prayers) and between the evening and final night (prayers) without standing in prayer for twenty (extra) prosternations. Remember to keep the four (supplementary cycles of) prosternations at the beginning of the day, before noon, and before the afternoon (prayer). And make your concluding night prayer (*witr*) another thirteen prosternations, nor should you finish those until you are overcome (by sleep).[164]

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[160] Although we have divided up this and the following two sections (8-10) in our translation, in the original Arabic they are all presented as a single section on 'filling' the day with religious devotions, much like the "rule" of Christian monastic orders.

[161] *Ta'mír* is an interesting expression here: the underlying verb means to 'fill with life' (give long life), build or construct, repair and restore, and to fill up something (so that it will work properly). All those meanings are relevant to Ibn 'Arabí's intention here, where 'time' is considered as a sort of field (or 'building site') that must thoughtfully used for the best possible purposes. 'Moment' (*waqt*) here refers to the Ibn 'Arabí's characteristic understanding of each instant as a distinct 'creation' and (potentially realized) connection between each soul and its Source.

[162] For *rabb*, see n. 3 above; 'before' in English is not nearly as immediate as the literal Arabic (Qur'anic) expression: 'between the two Hands...'.

[163] The Islamic prayer-terminology here—and our very recent collective exclusion from the ongoing rhythms of the wider natural world—may obscure Ibn 'Arabí's actual point concerning the special spiritual intensity and sensitivity of the two periods of twilight surrounding the sunset and sunrise. A single day's observation of what happens around us at those times, at least in a rural area or other natural setting, will suffice to illustrate what he is indicating here.

[164] The supplementary prayers Ibn 'Arabí refers to here are established practices which Islamic tradition attests to as part of the Prophet's own practices (*sunna*), followed by many of his close followers, though they were not imposed as obligations on the wider community. The references to particular numbers or cycles of prosternation (*rak'a*) are a familiar shorthand expression in such a context, and should not be taken as 'quantitative' or formal in their intention. Such personal prayers can be extended indefinitely in length, depending on the passages of the Qur'an recited and the

[9.] And you shouldn't eat except when you really need to, nor should you wear anything but what you need to protect you from the heat and cold, or to cover your nakedness and avoid any discomfort that would keep you from worshipping your Sustainer/Teacher.

[10.] And if you are among those who are literate, then impose on yourself reading a section (*wird*) of the Qur'an from the written text. (While you are) in your place of retreat, pick up the Qur'anic text, placing your left hand under the book, while your right hand follows the letters as you are looking at them, raising your voice enough so you hear yourself while you are reciting the Qur'an.

Ask and inquire (of God), with regard to each Sura, what it is you ought to ask about regarding that. Try to figure out for every verse its special relevance and lesson for you.[165] Meditate and put into practice, for each verse, what is its relevance and connection (to your situation), and what those qualities and attributes[166] are indicating (that you should now learn or do). Reflect on those qualities and attributes you have and on those which you are missing. Then give Him thanks for those which you have and those which you haven't (yet) attained! And when you read a description of (the contrasting attributes of) the hypocrites and those who ungratefully reject (God), then reflect as to whether there is not also something of those attributes in you.

[11.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is that you should observe and take account of your animal self (*muhāsabat al-nafs*) and pay close attention to your inner thoughts and impulses (*khawātir*) at every moment. Then you will feel a shame in your heart that comes directly from God.[167] For if you are ashamed before God, then He will prevent your heart from experiencing any thought or impulse that is contrary to the revelation (*shar'*) or keep you from carrying out an action that is not pleasing to the Real (*al-Haqq*). Indeed we once had a master who would record his actions (during the day) in a notebook, and then when night came he would set them out before him and take an account[168] of his animal self according to what was noted there. And I added to my master's practice by recording my inner thoughts and impulses as well.

[12.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is to constantly be aware of (the correspondence between your) inner thoughts and impulses and the (spiritual demands of) every moment. That is, you should reflect on the moment your are in and consider what it is that the revelation (*shar'*) has said to you that you should do, and then you should do that. So if you are in the moment of a

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actual internal content of the prayer, and that 'extension' through the waking day is of course Ibn 'Arabí's intention here.

[165] Its *i'tibār*: i.e., the essential personal 'lesson' (for you at that particular occasion), and the connection between that verse and your own situation at that instant.

[166] The word *sifāt* ('qualities') here can refer specifically to the divine Attributes (and clearly, in this context, to the 'positive' attributes of 'the Most Beautiful Names') or—since they are the archetypes of all existence—to the broader range of characters, situations and exhortations mentioned in the Qur'an which are their dramatic 'exemplifications'.

[167] I.e., as opposed to all the other (often conflicting and confusing) social, familial and other sources of such feelings.

[168] The (originally Qur'anic) language here refers to taking note of one's good and bad actions (or inclinations, as Ibn 'Arabí pointedly adds) and responding accordingly.

prescribed duty, then you should carry that out—or else regret (your having missed) it and then hurry to make it up. But if you are a time that is 'open',[169] then busy yourself with performing all the different kinds of good which the Real has assigned to you. But if you start to do a prescribed[170] action that bestows closeness (to God), don't tell yourself that you will be alive after that to do another action. Instead, make that your last action in this world, the one in which you will encounter your Sustainer/Teacher. For if you do that, you will be released (or 'finished': *khalast*), and with that release comes (God's) acceptance.

[13.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is that you should always sit down in a state of Purity. So whenever you become impure, purify yourself;[171] and once you have completed your ablutions, pray two (cycles of) prosternations—unless it is one of those three disapproved moments when you are forbidden to do the ritual prayer: at sunrise until exactly at noon, except on Fridays, and after the evening prayer until sundown.

[14.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is striving for the noble virtues of character[172] and actually carrying them out in the specific situations calling for them—and likewise avoiding all the bad traits of character. For know that whoever abandons a noble virtue of character (already) possesses a vice of character through abandoning (that corresponding virtue). And know that the virtues of character are of different kinds, just as there are different sorts of creatures. So it is indispensable for you to know which virtuous trait you should employ (in each specific situation), and which virtue(s) extend to most of the other kinds, in order to bring relief (*rāha*) to the creatures and keep harm away from them.[173] But (all this must also be only) for the Contentment of God!

So know that the (human) creatures are (God's) servants, constrained and compelled in their actions and their destinies by the hand of the what/Who moves them. So the Prophet brought us all relief in respect to this condition, when he said: '*I have been sent to complete the noble virtues of character.*' For in every situation about which the revelation has said that if you want, you can carry it out, and if you want, you can leave it alone (not do it), choose *not* to do it. Or if (the revelation) has said to you that if you want, you can exact a compensating (punishment, fine, etc.), and if you want, you can pardon (the offense), then prefer the side of pardon and forgiveness, and your *reward*

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[169] *Mubāh*: in the technical terminology of *fiqh*, this refers to all actions which are simply religiously 'permissible'; Ibn 'Arabí's own understanding of that term is infinitely more extensive. See the additional explanations in the article cited in n. 1 above.

[170] Or 'revealed': *mashrū'* (see the opening passage from the *Futūhāt* on this key concept).

[171] The terms used here, in the technical terminology of *fiqh*, are those referring to the 'lesser' impurities and the corresponding partial ablutions (*wudū'*).

[172] *Makārim al-akhlāq*: the expression is a pointed reminder of the famous hadith Ibn 'Arabí goes on to cite here, in which the Prophet explained: 'I have been sent to help perfect the *makārim al-akhlāq*.'

[173] Note the numerous illustrations of this difficulty for the specific 'social' virtues which Ibn 'Arabí goes on to discuss here—and the extreme relevance for each of them of his final point here about the essential role of our *intention* (being for *God's* sake).

is with God (42:40). And beware of seeking revenge for yourself[174] against whoever has done evil to you, for God has called all of that '*evil*',[175] even including the evil done by the person exacting their revenge.

But in every situation where the revelation has told you to be angry, then if you fail to be angry, that is not a praiseworthy character trait, because anger for God's sake is among the noble virtues of character, for God.[176] So blessed are those who proceed in that way and keep company with (those divine principles), for they hear God saying:[177] '*Certainly you have an extraordinary character!*' (68:4)

[15.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is to stay away from those who are *opponents* (of God)[178] and those who are not of your (spiritual) kind—but without your believing them to be evil, or even ever having such a thought occur to you! Instead, (what is truly essential is) having your intention (*nīya*) on keeping company with the Truly Real and His people, and preferring Him to them (i.e., His opponents).

[16.] Likewise[179] you should treat these animals with tender sympathy and compassion (*rahma*) for them, because they are among those whom God has caused to be of service (or 'subjugated':

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[174] Or: for your animal, carnal self (*nafs*, in either case).

[175] Referring, among others, to 17:38: '*All of that is evil and detestable with your Lord*.' Even closer to the discussion of the specific topic of revenge (*qisās*) here is the explicit saying at 42:40: '*The recompense of an evil (deed) is an evil like it. But whoever pardons and improves/corrects, their reward is incumbent on God. Verily He does not love the wrongdoers!*'

[176] One of the classic illustrations of this quality is of course the cleansing of the Temple.

[177] This famous verse from an early Sura (68:4) clearly refers directly to the Prophet. From Ibn 'Arabí's perspective, since that 'nature' is the very source of all revelation (the 'Muhammadan Reality'), everyone who attains that state of spiritual perfection has likewise become or realized that same state of being.

[178] Literally 'opposites,' *addād*: the stress of this rare Qur'anic term (only used at 19:82) is on an absolute opposition of ends, not on outward relations or emotional states of mind (for which there are many more common Arabic expressions). Its distinctive spiritual meaning is becomes clear in that context (19:82-83), speaking of those who ungratefully and angrily attack God (*kufr*): *And they have chosen gods other than God so that those (gods) might be a support for them. But no, they will surely deny their worship of them and they will be absolute opponents to them!* The 'kinds' in question here become clear in that context.

[179] In the original text, the rest of this section ('16' here) clearly belongs with the preceding point as part of a long series of illustrations of ethical/spiritual 'testing' situations in which people commonly find themselves.

taskhīr) to you. So don't impose on them (work) that is beyond their capacity,[180] and do not heedlessly ride (or 'load') those of them you ride/load.

And act likewise with regard to whatever slaves your right hand possesses, because they are your brothers and God has only given you possession of their bodies so that He can see how you treat them.[181] For *you* are *His* servant, so whatever way you love for Him to act toward you, then you should act precisely like that with your own male and female servants. Indeed God is requiting you (accordingly). And whatever evil and ugly deeds you would love to have Him avert from you, then act precisely that same way with regard to them. For all (of those creatures) are *God's* family, and you are (a member) of that Family.

If you have a child, then teach them the Qur'an—but not for any purpose in this lower world! And oblige them to observe the appropriate behavior of the revealed Path (*ādāb al-sharī'a*) and the virtuous character traits of true Religion (*dīn*). Induce them to kindness and empathy, and non-attachment (to this world: *zuhd*, section 27 below) from infancy onward, so that they become habituated to those qualities. Don't encourage desires and cravings in their heart, but rather diminish the attractions of the life of this lower world. And (impress upon them) the lack of any share in the next life that is the ultimate outcome for the person who possesses this lower world, and the endless Bounty and Grace in the next life that is the outcome for the person who abandons (attachment to this lower world). But don't do any of that out of stinginess with your money or property!

[17.] Among what is indispensable for the seeker is that you shouldn't even come near the gates of the powers-that-be (*al-sultān*), nor should you keep company with those who are competing for this lower world, since they will take your heart from God. But if something should oblige you to keep their company, then behave toward them with frank good counsel (*nasīha*), and don't try to fool them (by pretending to agree with them). For (in reality) you are interacting with the Real, and whatever you do, they will be made to be of service to you through (their impact on) your wider spiritual situation. Therefore always keep your intention directed toward God (asking that) *He* deliver you from the situation you are in, through the means that are best for you with regard to your true Religion (*dín*).

[18.]Among what is indispensable for the seeker is always to be present with God, in all of your actions and all your states of rest.

[19.]Among what is indispensable for the seeker is always to be giving, whether you have much or little, whether you are in straightened circumstances or at ease. For that is a sign of your heart's solid confidence in what is with God.

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[180] In addition to reflecting the gist of a number of well-known hadith, Ibn 'Arabí's language here explicitly echoes the repeated Qur'anic insistence (e.g., at 2:286) that God does not do this to human beings.

[181] Here Ibn 'Arabí simply echoes and applies a constant Qur'anic teaching about the nature of the essential human situation as God's 'stewards' or 'stand-ins' (*khalífa*) on earth: '...*He will place you-all as His khulafā' on earth so that He will see how you-all act*.'

[20.] You must restrain your anger. For that is a sign of the openness of your heart (*sadr*). Now when you restrain your anger, you please the All-Compassionate (*al-Rahmān*). And (at the same time) you outrage the devil,[182] since you have tamed your animal self and subdued it, so that the devil cannot conquer it. You have also brought delight to the heart of the person from whom you have restrained your anger, by not requiting them in kind for their (offending) action. And that can be a cause of their returning to what the Real (*al-Haqq*) and His just action, and for their recognizing their own unjust and offensive treatment of you. Indeed they may even regret and repent for what happened because of their misconduct.

So you must know the right ways to receive (offense and hostility), and strive to take on that character trait. Then the greatest result and the highest merit, if you restrain your anger against the person who has given rise to that anger, is that God will reward you for your (good) action. And what result is be more perfect than your pardoning your brother and bearing with his harming you, while restraining your anger? And what the Real wants you to do toward (another) servant, He also wants to do precisely that toward you! So struggle and strive (*ijtihād*) to take on these qualities (of Mercifulness and Compassion), since they give rise to love and affection in people's hearts. Thus the Prophet already ordered us to practice mutual affection and to love one another. And this (restraining one's anger) is one of the highest causes that lead to mutual love.

[21.] You must practice *ihsān* (doing what is good and beautiful), for that is a sign of your shame (or 'conscience', *hayā'*) before God, and of the glorification of God in the heart of the person who is *muhsin*. For Gabriel said:[183] 'What is *ihsan*?' And the Prophet—may God's blessings and peace be upon him—replied: '*It is that you should worship/serve God as though you see Him. For even if you don't see Him, He sees you!*' And the Prophet said (in another hadith): '*Shame/conscience is part of true faith, and it is entirely Good.*' So ultimately it is impossible for the person of true faith to do harm (*sharr*).

[22.] You must practice *dhikr* (remembering God) and asking His Forgiveness. For (asking His forgiveness) after you've sinned effaces and removes the sin, while doing so after you've been willingly obedient and have done good (*ihsān*) brings '*light upon light*' and joy upon joy. As for *dhikr*, that unifies the (scattered) heart and purifies your inner thoughts and intentions. But if you should tire (of performing *dhikr*), then turn to reciting the book of God, reciting it deliberately and reflectively, glorifying and exalting God. (Recite the Qur'an) while asking and imploring (God), if it is a verse of imploring; or with awe and humility, if it is a verse (suggesting) fear and a threat and a warning and lesson. As for the Qur'an, the one who recites it never tires of it, because of the (constantly changing) diversity of meanings within it.

[23.] You must strive to loosen the knot of persistence and stubborn insistence[184] in your heart. [...]

[24.] You must remain cautiously conscious of God (*taqwā*), both with regard to your inner life and outwardly. For the meaning of *taqwā* is to take precautions to avoid His punishment. So the person who is afraid of His punishment will hasten to do what pleases God. As God says: *And God warns*

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[182] An allusion to one a hadith Ibn 'Arabí often mentions: '*anger is the touch of Satan* (on the heart).'

[183] In the celebrated hadith about the three dimensions of true Religion (*dín*), where *ihsān* follows true faith (*ímān*) and the basic ritual actions (*islām*) of Religion.

[184] On sinning: *isrār*.

you all to be cautious regarding Himself (3:27). And He said: *And know that God knows what is in all your souls, so be cautious regarding Him* (2:235). Thus (the word) *taqwā* is derived from *wiqāya* ('taking protection'). So be cautiously aware of God regarding God's actions, as (the Prophet, in praying) said: '*I take refuge with You from You!*' Therefore whatever it is that you fear and dread, avoid the way leading to that. For sinful-disobedience (*maʿsīya*) is the way leading to misery and distress, while willing obedience (*tāʿa*) is the way leading to (eternal) happiness.

[25.] You must avoid spiritual self-deception (*ightirār*), which is when your animal self deludes you concerning God's graciousness and forbearance, while you continue to persist in your sinful-disobedience. So Iblís deludes you by saying to you: 'If it weren't for your sinning and your opposition (to God), how could His Grace and Compassion and Forgiveness even appear?' Now that is the ultimate form of (spiritual) ignorance in whoever says such a thing. [...]

[26.] You must practice spiritual conscientiousness (*waraʿ*), which is an intuitive avoiding (of something wrong, illicit, etc.) that comes to you in your heart (*sadr*). The Prophet said: '*Abandon what disturbs you for what does not disturb you.*' So even if you are in need of that (which disturbs you) and you can't find anything to replace it, then leave that (need) to God: He will provide you in exchange with what is better than that. So don't be hasty[185] (in rushing to do what you feel isn't right). For this conscientiousness (*waraʿ*) is the very foundation of true Religion (*asās al-dín*). So as you begin to apply it in practice, your actions will become purified, your conditions (inner and outer) will become successful, your speaking will become perfected, blessings of divine grace (*karamāt*) will rush toward you, and you will be protected and preserved by a divine protection in everything you do, without a doubt. By God, by God, o my brother—(Practice) conscientiousness, conscientiousness!

[27.] And you must practice non-attachment (*zuhd*) regarding this lower world and reducing your desire for it—indeed removing that love for it from your heart completely. But if you can't help seeking (something from it), then restrict yourself to seeking from it your sustenance (acquired) in the (properly licit) way.

Nor should you compete with any of those who are devoted to it, for (this lower world) is spoiled *merchandise* (4:94, etc.) that does not remain. The person desiring this lower world will never attain their goal, since God only gives each person what He has apportioned to them. So the person desiring this lower world will be continually saddened by it, and disgusting in God's sight. Indeed the likeness of the person seeking it is like the person who drinks sea water: the more they drink, the more thirsty they become! It should suffice you to take note of the Prophet's likening (this lower world) to a dead corpse and a dunghill: only dogs gather around those two things.

God said (in a 'divine saying'): '*O child of Adam, if you are content with what I have apportioned to you, then your heart and your body will be at peace; your daily bread will come to you and you will be worthy of (God's) praise. But if you are not content with what I have apportioned to you, your heart and body will both be wearied as you chase after (this world) like wild beasts racing in the desert. By My Glory and Majesty, you will only attain from it what I have assigned to you, and you will deserve blame!*'

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[185] Alluding to the famous Arabic proverb: "hastiness (*al-ʿajala*) comes from Satan."

For God said (2:195): *Spend in the path of God, and do not throw yourselves into ruin with your own hands*—which is their turning back to their possessions by worrying about them—*But do good/beauty, for surely God loves those who are doing what is good-and-beautiful* (*al-muhsinūn*) !

And Praise be to God, Sustainer of the Worlds!
And God's blessings and peace be upon our master Muhammad and on His Family and Companions!

One of the misfortunes that can befall a true genius, perhaps most obviously in fields like music or poetry, is that the fame of their most celebrated masterpieces can easily obscure the extraordinary qualities of "lesser" works which—by any other hand—would surely be renowned in their own right. Certainly that has too often been the case with Ibn ʿArabī's *Fusūs al-Hikam* and his *Futūhāt*. Among the smaller treasures they have sometimes overshadowed is this remarkable book of spiritual aphorisms, the "*Book of Spiritual Advice*" (*Kitāb al-Nasā'ih*),[186] a short treatise whose many extant manuscript copies and profusion of later titles reflect the great practical value placed on it by many subsequent generations of Sufi readers.

Our own experience in working with earlier versions of these practical spiritual works, in the classroom and more intensive workshops, has amply confirmed those distinctive qualities which have accounted for the special place of these texts in earlier Islamic tradition: their richness, profundity, mysterious spiritual effectiveness, and their constantly transformed meanings each time one returns to them, whether alone or—far more effectively—in the kind of serious, intimate and probing discussion (*suhba*, in traditional Sufi language) which better reflects the practical context for which they were originally intended. A few words of caution and background explanation should be helpful in approaching these sayings in the proper spirit.

To begin with, the original title of this book is both significant and revealing. *Nasīha*, the "pointed advice" or "straight talk" in question, actually has resonances here—as in the famous canonical hadith Ibn ʿArabī has in mind whenever he employs that term[187]—of unsolicited, provocative and

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[186] See O. Yahya, *Histoire et Classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn ʿArabī*, vol. II, pp. 408-409 (= *RG*, no. 532); Yahya notes that it is mentioned by this title in the *Futūhāt* and cited as such in both of Ibn ʿArabī's well-known lists of his own work. Apparently later popular titles found in other manuscripts include *al-Nasā'ih al-Qudsīya wa-l-mawā'iz al-ʿirfānīya* ("The Sacred Advices and Spiritual Admonitions"); *R. fī ahwāl taqa' li ahl tarīq Allāh* ("Treatise concerning the States Which Befall the People of the Path of God"); and the mnemonic *R. fī mā lā yu'awwal ʿalayhi*—which is the title given in the (textually problematic) Hyderabad, 1948 edition of Ibn ʿArabī's *Rasā'il* that was originally used in preparing this translation. Page numbers of the Hyderabad version are given below in square brackets [2, etc.].

[187] See also the following key autobiographical passage from Ibn ʿArabī's *R. al-Mubashshirāt*:

> "I saw in a dream that I was at the Sacred Shrine in Mecca, and it was as though the Resurrection had already begun. It was as though I was standing immediately in front of my Lord, with my head bowed in silence and fear of His reproaching me because of my negligence. But He was saying to me: '*O My servant, don't be afraid, for I am not asking you to do anything except to admonish My servants. So admonish My servants, and I will guide the people to the Straight Path.*'

> Now when I had seen how rare it was for anyone to enter the Path of God I had become spiritually lazy. And that night I had resolved only to concern myself with my own soul, to forget about all the other people and their condition. But then I had that dream, and the very next morning I sat down among the people and began to explain to them the clear Path and the various evils blocking the Path for each group of them, whether the learned jurists, the 'poor' (*fuqarā'*), the Sufis, or the

dis-illusioning insight, the sort of pointed, properly timed revelation of unconscious "hypocrisy" and self-delusion which is surely one of the primary functions of true spiritual guides and companions in Sufism or any authentic spiritual tradition. And in fact these short sayings are meant to function as a probing mirror of one's individual spiritual conscience, examining the authenticity and proper integration of each user's spiritual states and stations.

> Secondly, brevity here is a sign of compression, not of a simple or elementary text. In fact, this work clearly presupposes a relatively advanced state of such active engagement with the inner, spiritual life that each significant "moment" of conscience (or of unconsciousness) is subject to its revealing scrutiny. In this respect, it is important to note that we should not normally speak of a "reader" of a text like this. For in the original Arabic these highly compressed sayings—like other collections of *Hikam*, including the famous work of Ibn 'Atā' Allāh—are often made up of only a few short, readily memorable phrases, which would normally remain in the deeper memory rather easily after a single reading, only to be suddenly "illuminated" and recalled precisely at that later moment when their actual spiritual counterpart is actually encountered (or recalled) in one's own experience. It is noteworthy that, in practice, even the much more cumbersome English equivalents given here still manage to have something of that (often initially troubling!) practical efficacy.

More prosaically, on a practical linguistic level, Ibn 'Arabī's language here presupposes an intimate (and concrete, non-theoretical) acquaintance with the elaborate Sufi technical vocabulary and symbolism of the Path. Like the many other famous illustrations of the *hikam* genre—literally, "words of wisdom"—those technical allusions often require an extensive commentary for the uninitiated modern reader.[188]

> Finally, it is necessary to stress that the significance of the recurrent ending to almost every phrase, "...*can't be relied upon* [i.e., *totally* or without further scrutiny]" (*lā yuʻawwal ʻalayhi*), should be taken at first in a strictly "neutral" sense, and *not* primarily as some sort of automatic or absolute negation. That is, each of these sayings normally operates as a tool of necessary spiritual discernment. If a particular saying touches a raw nerve—and one's immediate

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> common people. So every one of them began to oppose me and to try to destroy me, but God helped me to overcome them and protected me with a blessing and lovingmercy from Him. (The Messenger) said: 'Religion (*al-Dīn*) is admonishment (or "straight advice," *al-nasīha*), for God, for the leaders of the Muslims, and for the common people among them,' as is mentioned in Muslim's *Sahīh*."

[188] The most influential Sufi writing of this genre, written down by the Shādhilī shaykh Ibn 'Atā'illāh only a generation after Ibn 'Arabī's death, gave rise to hundreds of commentaries: See the translation by Victor Danner, *Sūfī Aphorisms (kitāb al-hikam)* (Leiden, 1973), which is preferable for serious study of that book; or the more readily available (but significantly abridged) popular version in *The Book of Wisdom* (also translated by Victor Danner) pp. 1-161 (New York, 1978). In a broader sense, central earlier Arabic examples of this genre in Islamic spirituality would include many of the shorter hadith and *hadīth qudsī* (favored throughout the Sufi tradition), the popular latter wisdom-sayings of 'Ali's *Nahj al-Balāgha*, and some of the ecstatic *shatahāt* of al-Hallāj, Bastāmī and other early Sufis. Other readers today may be more familiar with such equivalent spiritual genres as *koan*s and many Gospel sayings and parables. **[Add details on IA's *Book of Istilāhāt*...?]**

reactions are usually the most telling in this regard—then it is simply indicating an area that deserves closer scrutiny. But in many cases, these same sayings may also help to reveal and verify the "real thing." Indeed, one has really begun to appreciate the meaning and function of this deceptively brief text when, after "practicing" and frequenting it for some time, one begins to perceive with assurance the constantly ongoing, normally indispensable role of spiritual "mistakes" and illusions in the lifelong process of spiritual growth, learning and maturation.

The Book of Spiritual Advice

In the Name of God the All-Merciful, the Compassionate

— The state of ecstasy (*wajd*) which occurs as a result of *trying* to achieve ecstasy (*tawājud*) can't be relied upon. And the "finding/experience" (*wujūd*) which comes from that sort of ecstasy can't be relied upon.

— The passing thought (*khātir*) that comes back a second time, or more, can't be relied upon.

— A theophany in the form of a "controlling spirit" can't be relied upon.

— The "fresh inspiration" (*wārid*) that one has been anticipating can't be relied upon.

— Being (spiritually) "informed" of what has its equivalent in the world can't be relied upon.

— The state which leads to your being transparently aware of others within your carnal soul (*nafs*) can't be relied upon….

— The greatest of the accomplished ones do not rely upon a theophany of a spiritual reality (that appears) in a limited form.

— [2] The conversation of the person who experiences an "unveiling" with spiritual beings (*rūhānīyāt*) is false and not to be relied upon *if* there is no beneficial exchange of giving and receiving (of spiritual knowledge, wisdom, etc.).

 — The "unveiling" (experience) of all things recalling/mentioning (*dhikr*) God with the same *dhikr* that you yourself are (performing/experiencing) can't be relied upon.

— The "fresh inspiration" that results from a change in one's physical constitution (illness, etc.) can't be relied upon.

— Every spiritual knowing—whether by way of "unveiling," (divine) "casting" (of an illumination into one's heart), direct encounter, or by allusion to a (spiritual) reality— which is contrary to a solidly witnessed and transmitted Revelation (*sharī'a mutawātira*) can't be relied upon. Except for the unveiling (experience) of a (particular) form (*kashf sūrī*): for that (form itself) is sound. The mistake comes from the (erroneous) interpretation (*ta'wīl*) claimed by the person who is in that experience of unveiling, of the (true) knowing which was actually intended by that form which appeared to them in that unveiling.

— Every spiritual knowing of a reality for which there is no opposing judgement in the Revelation is sound. But in the contrary case (i.e., if there *is* an opposing revealed judgment), then that "knowing" can't be relied upon.

— Hearing (something) from God (*al-Haqq*) regarding things contrary (to Revelation/God's Will)—if the person hearing that knows that what they're being addressed with (by God) is a test—can't be relied upon.

— Viewing the creatures (or people: *al-khalq*) from the viewpoint of (literally: "with the Eye of") God—while being in a state of absolute surrender (to God) (*taslīm*)—can't be relied upon.

— Performing miracles and experiencing an increase of bounties—while one is doing things contrary (to God's Will)—can't be relied upon.

— Movement (i.e., dancing, trances, etc.) while listening to pleasing music—and the lack of movement when *that* sort of "listening" (*samāʿ*) is lacking—can't be relied upon.

— The true spiritual Knower (*al-ʿārif*) doesn't rely on listening to God (*al-Haqq*) through the things (of this world).

— The greatest of the accomplished ones do not rely on remaining in a single state even for two (successive) instants ("breaths")….

— Every work/craft/art (*fann*) that doesn't bring about (spiritual) knowing can't be relied upon.

— Closeness to God in spiritual retreat (*khalwa*) can't be relied upon, nor can feeling lonely and estranged (from God) out in society (*jalwa*).

— The entanglement of the carnal soul (*shugl al-nafs*) with the limited beauty (of things) under the pretense of seeing [3] the Beauty of God (*jamāl al-Haqq*) in things can't be relied upon.

— [Perceiving] the glorification of God (*taʿzīm al-Haqq*) *in (only) certain things* can't be relied upon.

— Regarding the creatures (or: "people," *al-khalq*) and everything other than God from a perspective of *God's* having been unfair/imperfect/lacking (*naqs fī janāb Allāh*) can't be relied upon.

— That 'unveiling' which leads to (maintaining) the superiority of the fully human being (*insān*) over the angels, or the superiority of the angels over the fully human being, in absolutely every respect, can't be relied upon.

— Looking down upon the 'ordinary people' (*ʿawāmm*) in relation to the (spiritual) 'elite', in the sense of comparing this particular individual with that individual—such as (comparing the famous mystic) Hasan al-Basrī with Hasan ibn Hāniʾ (the scandalous poet Abū Nuwās)—can't be relied upon.

— The (states of spiritual) "witnessing" (*mushāhada*) and (direct divine) Speaking only appear together in the (divine) 'Presence of personification' (*hadrat al-tamaththul*); so the greatest of the accomplished ones do not rely upon that (combination of those two sorts of inspiration).

— The theophany (*al-tajalli*) recurring (several times) in a single form can't be relied upon.

— The divine Manifestation (*al-mazhar al-ilāhī*) that is in Itself limited can't be relied upon. For the divine Manifestation is *not* limitable, except in respect to the perspective of the person regarding It. But perceiving the difference between those two is exceedingly difficult!

— (Our) "confidence" (*iʿtimād*) in God—which is totally entrusting oneself (to Him: *tawakkul*)—can't be relied upon *except* in a time of need/distress (*hāja*).

— Being tranquil in (a situation of) need/distress (supposedly) because of the power of (one's) knowing can't be relied upon, as long as it is accompanied by (any trace of) the human-animal condition (*al-bashariyya*), because (such apparent tranquility) is a transient, quickly vanishing state.

— The pretense of seeing God (*al-Haqq*) in the things (of this world)—while (at the same time) ascetically renouncing those things—can't be relied upon. For ascetic renunciation is not part of the distinctive rank and condition of the person who has attained that spiritual station (of seeing God in all things).

— That (delusive mystical) 'knowing' which breaks down the distinction between what is permissible for the morally responsible person (*al-mukallif*) to do, and what is *not* permissible, can't be relied upon.

— Trying to take God (*al-Haqq*) as a sign pointing to the existence of the creatures/creation (*al-khalq*) is unsound and can't be relied upon, because the creatures/creation are not a goal (in themselves), and *there is no aim other than God*.

— That (supposed) "knowing of God" which is devoid of (knowing of) the divine Names (Attributes) can't be relied upon. For it is not (actually) knowing at all.

— The increase in a (subjective emotional) state [4] which doesn't produce (spiritual) knowing can't be relied upon.

— Experiencing/finding God (*wujūd Allāh*) in the heart can't be relied upon. God said: "*What is with you passes away, but what is with God remains* (forever)…." (16:96)

— "Finding"/experiencing God (*wujūd al-Haqq*) during a compelling emergency can't be relied upon, because that (urgent situation) is a (passing emotional) state, and (such subjective) states can't be relied upon. But if one finds God in what is not a state of compelling urgency, then *that* is what one can rely upon. Simply not being in a state of compelling urgency is not (in itself) satisfying, while finding/experiencing God does contain what is (truly) satisfying.

— (Acting) without recourse to the (ordinary natural) "secondary causes" (i.e., solely by appealing to God, the ultimate Cause) is not relied upon by the greatest of the accomplished ones. Indeed (one sign of) their distinctive rank and condition is their stopping at (i.e., not going beyond) the secondary causes. But the spiritual seeker (*al-murīd*) *can't* rely upon stopping with the secondary causes, even if (religious) knowledge (*'ilm*) supports him in depending on them.

— Hunger (and any experiences resulting from it) can't be relied upon.

— The 'fresh inspiration' (*al-wārid*) that results from a disorder of the bodily constitution can't be relied upon, even if it is sound, because its soundness is an accidental and exceedingly rare occurrence.

— Witnessing God's being 'finished with' the creatures (*al-firāgh al-ilāhī*) can't be relied upon, since that is impossible both rationally and as an (actual form of) divine relationship. As for its being rationally impossible, that is because (the relation of God and the creatures) is "that (divine) secret which, if it were revealed, would destroy the (relation of) 'Godhood'." And as for its being impossible as a divine relationship (to the creatures), that (is indicated in) His saying: "*We shall finish with you, both humans and jinn!*" (55:31). For that (saying refers) precisely to the ever-renewed beginning of (God's) "Work" (*shugl*) with regard to all of them, and it can't be any other way.

— Finding/experiencing God as being completely transcendent (*tanzīh al-Haqq*) of the attributes of the creatures can't be relied upon, since it leads to negating and abolishing what (God) has affirmed (in the Qur'an and other revelations. […]

— "Knowing" the aim of action without actually acting can't be relied upon.

— Acting [5] without totally pure devotion (to God) can't be relied upon.

— That "knowing" of God which is the result of thinking can't be relied upon.

— Those theophanies which correspond to their images/likenesses that were already subsisting in the carnal soul (*nafs*) before then can't be relied upon. And likewise (the same caution applies to) whatever may appear during spiritual retreat to those who are performing spiritual retreat. Whatever occurs to you (in your heart) which is contaminated with things not of that same order [i.e., mundane, carnal, psychological, etc., rather than of purely divine inspiration] can't be relied upon, even if it is "true" in actual reality, but still doesn't point the way to that special divine distinction whose fruits are absolute Bliss (*al-saʿāda al-mutlaqa*).

— That "spiritual trust-and-perseverance" (*sabr*) (in the face of affliction) which comes second (i.e., after the initial affliction) can't be relied upon. For that *sabr* which *can* be relied upon is that which occurs at the first onslaught (of the affliction), since it is a sign of (your) being present with God.

— Being satisfied with one's knowing of God can't be relied upon.[189]

— Giving preference to others (*īthār*) is not relied upon by the greatest ones (among the spiritually accomplished knowers), because it is (only) carrying out what one has been entrusted with (by God: as humanity's divine "trust," *amāna*).

— As for everything that is inspired in you by the fiery spirits (i.e., the *jinn*), receive it, but neither agree nor reject it, and say "We have faith in God and what is from God!" But don't rely upon it.

— Don't rely on anything that comes to you and you don't know its (spiritual) source.

— Don't rely on that (sense of) spiritual "constriction" by God that distracts you from God (*al-qabd bi-l-Haqq ʿan al-Haqq*).

— That (sense of) spiritual "expansion" toward God by God (*al-bast bi-l-Haqq ʿalā al-Haqq*)—whether that be (accompanied) by an inappropriate attitude toward Him or by proper *adab*—is not part of the distinctive rank and condition of the (spiritually) great ones. On the contrary, that is the passing state of the infants (on the Path) who have very little awareness, and it can't be relied upon.

— Supposition (*zann*, as opposed to true knowing, *maʿrifa*) can't be relied upon.

— Repenting of (only) certain sins (but not *all*) can't be relied upon.

— Entrusting oneself to God: (*tawakkul*) only in *certain* situations can't be relied upon.

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[189] An allusion to Ibn ʿArabī's central teaching that the distinctive quality of the truly accomplished Knowers of/through God is precisely their *hayra*, or "ever-new knowing," often expressed allusively in the celebrated Prophetic prayer: "O my Lord/Sustainer, increase me in knowing!" (*rabbī zidnī ʿilman*).

— Every state—whether it be one of "unveiling" or of knowledge—which gives you (the misimpression) of being safe from God's cunning ruse (*makar*) can't be relied upon.

— Every "lightning-flash" (of illumination: *bāriqa*) which becomes manifest to the servant—whether it be a (spiritual) "light" or "star" or "radiance" or an unusual change—which doesn't give rise to a spiritual knowing, whatever kind of knowing that might be, at the very instant of its manifestation, [6] and (which occurs) without your remaining in that knowing after the illumination is finished: that can't be relied upon. On the other hand, (the true kind of "flash" of illumination is) like that stone which was revealed to the Companions during the (digging of the) Trench,[190] so that (the Prophet) mentioned the conquest of Syria, and at the next "flash" the conquest of the Yemen. Likewise (as a similar true sudden illumination) was (the Prophet's instantaneous) coming to know "the knowledge of the first and last things" when he experienced the coolness of fingertips in the indentation between his shoulders.

— One can't rely on any action or prohibition (apparently) prescribed by divine prescription (*'amal mashrū'*) when the responsible individual (*mukallaf*) doesn't have present one of the three sorts of obligation/right (*haqq*) required by that matter: these are the right of God in that matter; the right/obligation incumbent on the responsible individual in that matter; or the right (of that situation) in itself. In (that case) the particular *aspect* actually prescribed or forbidden (*al-wajh al-mashrū'*) does not exist.

— Every (religiously prescribed) action and inaction which the person doesn't perform out of obedience (literally: "following" one of the forms of *divine* revelation and guidance) can't be relied upon. (This is true) even when (the action in question) is more onerous than the act of following (the divine prescription). (As the famous early Sufi) Shiblī said regarding this spiritual station: "Every action which isn't performed following a (spiritual) authority (*'an athar*)[191] is only a whim of the carnal soul."

— Every love (*mahabba*) which doesn't cause the lover to prefer the intention of the beloved over his own intention can't be relied upon.

— Every love in which the lover doesn't *take pleasure* in being in conformity (*muwāfaqa*) with the beloved regarding what his carnal self naturally detests can't be relied upon.

— Every (true) love (*hubb*) which doesn't give rise to beautiful and good action (*ihsān*) toward the beloved in the heart of the lover can't be relied upon.

— Every love whose proximate cause/occasion (*sabab*) is known and is among those things which may come to an end can't be relied upon.

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[190] The reference here is to a story included in the traditional accounts of the Prophet's life in Medina, relating the visions of future events which he experienced on an occasion when those digging a defensive trench (which became famous as the name of a subsequent battle) hit a large rock.

[191] It is important to note that the key terms of this formula, and what can be understood by "divine prescription" (*shar'*) are explained in extremely broad and spiritually subtle terms throughout Ibn 'Arabi's *Futūhāt* and other writings.

— Every "state" coming from God (*hāl ilāhī*) which brings about a sensible (physical) change can't be relied upon.

— Every "fresh inspiration" (*wārid*) that causes you to seek a (state of spiritual) elevation can't be relied upon.

— Everything "received" from God that corresponds (to your natural, carnal desires or aversions) can't be relied upon.

— Every love (*hubb*) that doesn't depend upon (God) Himself—which is what they call "being in love with love"—can't be relied [7] upon.

— Every love that doesn't annihilate yourself from (any selfish concern for) yourself and which doesn't change with the changing of (God's ongoing) theophany (*taghayyur al-tajalli*) can't be relied upon.

— Every "state" (*hāl*) that lasts for (even) two instants of time can't be relied upon (as coming from God).

— Every state which, if it does continue, doesn't continue through ever-renewed creation (*al-tawālī*)—and the person in that state witnesses it as such—can't be relied upon.

— Every condition of "stability" (*tamkīn*) which is not in (an underlying) "constant transformation" (*talwīn*) can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "constant transformation" that doesn't give the person in it an increase in knowing of/through God (*'ilm bi-llāh*) can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "presence-with-God" (*hudūr*) that doesn't give rise to transforming love (*hubb*) from God and is not accompanied by reverent awe (*hayba*) in the heart of the person who is so "present" can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "presence-with-God" that doesn't […]can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "absence (from this world with God)" (*ghayba*) where the person in that state doesn't return with the benefit of a (new) knowing of God can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "absence" (from this world) where the person in that state doesn't return with *something*—whether that (discovery) be praiseworthy or blameworthy—was only a state of being asleep, not of "absence"; so it can't be relied upon.

— Every spiritual station which has certain specific conditions (for its realization): if one doesn't experience those conditions in that station, then it can't be relied upon—for that is only deception (by Satan: *talbīs*) and sheer ignorance.

— Every spiritual station whose distinctive rank and status requires being accompanied (by God), but He is not accompanying you—that can't be relied upon.

— Every "repentance" (*tawba*) which is not all-inclusive (i.e., including *all* of one's faults and distractions) is really only the abandonment (of certain misdeeds), so it can't be relied upon—and God doesn't accept it as real repentance.

— Every act of spiritual scrupulousness (*wara'*) which is restricted to certain matters and not to others can't be relied upon.

— Every "retreat" (*khalwa*) alone with God giving rise to a state of intimacy (*uns*) that is then taken away by re-appearing (in the world: *jalwa*) can't be relied upon—I mean that (apparent) "intimacy" can't be relied upon.

— Every Speaking (by God: *kalām*) that doesn't leave in the heart of the listener the intended-meaning (*murād*) of the One Who makes him listen is only a "(form of) words" (*qawl*), not (truly divine) Speaking.   So the listener only heard a "(form of) words" and therefore doesn't rely on what he was hearing—even though the words are true.

— Every act of (spiritual) intention (*irāda*) that has no real effect can't be relied upon.

— Every (apparent) divine "attraction" (*jadhba*) that is accompanied by [8] pleasure, instead of a state of disturbance and agitation while it is being experienced, can't be relied upon.

— Every spiritual "drunkenness" (*sukr*) that doesn't come from spiritually "drinking" (*shurb*)[192] can't be relied upon.

— Every spiritual "tasting" (*dhawq*) that doesn't come from a theophany (*tajalli*) can't be relied upon.

— Every […] (*ramy*) can't be relied upon.

— Every (station of) "enduring (with God)" (*baqā'*) that is followed by a (further) "extinction (of the ego)" (*fanā'*) can't be relied upon.

— Every "extinction" that doesn't give rise to (a station of) "enduring" (with God) can't be relied upon.

— Every (station of) "unification/integration" (*jam'*) in which one doesn't notice along with that the state of (one's self) finding/experiencing that can't be relied upon[193]—for it is (really) sheer ignorance.

— Every (state of) "distinction (from God)" (*farq*) which doesn't distinguish you from Him and doesn't distinguish Him from you *by what you don't know*—but in which you instead are aware of a distinction, but don't know what it's due to—can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "sobriety/clarity" (*sahw*) that is the result of (spiritual) drunkenness (*sukr*) can't be relied upon—for (such) drunkenness is (imagining) that the Truly Real (*al-Haqq*) is not totally clear!

— Every (state of) "clarity" that comes after fogginess can't be relied upon.

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[192] In his *Book of (Sufi) Technical Terms* (*Kitāb Istilāh Al-Sufiyya*), Ibn 'Arabī defines this "drinking" as "the intermediate stages of these theophanies," coming after the initial stage of "tasting" (*dhawq*) and the concluding degree of "fully quenching" (*riyy*) in each spiritual station; cf. p. 6 of of *K. Istilāh* in *Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabī* (volume II of 1968 reprint of Hyderabad edition), and p. 34 of T. Harris's "Translation of Sufi Terminology" (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 1984)

[193] I.e., this culminating state of spiritual integration doesn't eliminate individual consciousness (and the corresponding moral responsibility)—unlike certain states of "drunkenness".

— Every "moment" (of spiritual awareness: *waqt*) that (appears imposed) upon you, or which is neither imposed on you nor belongs to you, can't be relied upon.

— Every "breath" from which there doesn't arise a form you are witnessing can't be relied upon.

— Every "breath" that doesn't result from a close relationship/covenant (*'ill*) can't be relied upon.

— Every "sigh (of regret)" (*tanahhud*) that comes from (the illusion of) "losing something" in the very essence of finding/ecstasy (*'ayn al-wajd*) can't be relied upon.

— Every (spiritual) "state" that causes you to notice the past and future can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "perseverance/patience" (*sabr*) in the face of affliction which prevents you from calling on God to remove that (affliction) can't be relied upon.

— Every "faith" in a revealed judgment/command (*hukm mashrū'*) in which you also find in your carnal soul a preference for its contrary can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of outward) "surrender/submission" (*islām*) in which is not accompanied by (deep inner) faith-and-confidence (*īmān*) can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) *ihsān* in which you view/see yourself "doing good" (*muhsin*)—even if you (felt you) were with your Lord—can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "relying (on God)" (*tawakkul*) in which you don't apply (that) judgment to others just as you do with regard yourself can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "total surrender (to God)" (*taslīm*) into which there enters some fear on your part—even if only at a certain time—can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "entrusting everything (to God alone)" (*tafwīd*) into which there enters [9] can't be relied upon.

— Every special (ascetic) effort (*mujāhada*) which is not ordered by a master can't be relied upon—and likewise with every sort of (supplementary) spiritual discipline (*riyāda*). For (such) disciplines entail harm for the soul, and (such ascetic) efforts entail harm for the body.

— Every "absolute contentment/satisfaction" (*ridā'*) with the divine Decree that brings along with it contentment with (the suffering, etc.) that which has been decreed can't be relied upon!

— Every (state of spiritual) "right behavior/attitude" (*adab*) that results in one's treating (certain) *people* (instead of God) with special deference can't be relied upon.

— Every "miracle" (literally: "breaking of the customary order of nature") that comes from spiritual uprightness (*istiqāma*) or that results in spiritual uprightness is a "mark-of-grace" (*karāma*). But otherwise, it can't be relied upon. In cases of such miraculous phenomena where one isn't sure (whether they are beneficent and divine, or not), then if they result in spiritual uprightness, those are the ones that *can* be relied upon.

— Every thankfulness (*shukr*) which doesn't bring with it an increase (in spiritual blessings) can't be relied upon.

— Every "absolute certainty" (*yaqīn*) which also brings with it change (in one's state) can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "being in accord (with God)" (*tawfīq*) that doesn't bring with it the corresponding appropriate behavior and attitude (*ta'addub*) can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "rigorous spiritual self-observation" (*murā'a*) that doesn't bring with it spiritual discernment (*tamyīz*) can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "strict self-discipline" (*murāqaba*) that doesn't also safeguard the innermost self can't be relied upon.

— Every (act of) "servanthood" (*'ubūdīya*) that is not specified by its (divine) Master can't be relied upon.

— very (state of) "liberation" (*hurrīya*) that frees you from seeking (your true) divine servanthood can't be relied upon.

— All (those sorts of) intention (*irāda*) which can't be relied upon are those depending on non-existence (*'adam*): for bringing about something's non-existence is *God's* (prerogative), not yours—so the existence or non-existence of (such a) thing are indifferent (from the standpoint of our intentions).

— Every moral trait of character (*khulq*) that doesn't come into being by the process of (spiritual) realization/verification (*tahaqquq*), through keeping company with *God's* approach and attitude (*bi-suhbat al-adab al-ilāhī*) can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "serenity" in which the heart is not at peace can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) "spiritual uprightness" (*istiqāma*) that can't be seen in the crookedness/unevenness (of the creatures) can't be relied upon, such as the curvature of the (archer's) bow and all the bodies: all of them are crooked/uneven—and *that* is their "uprightness!"

— Every (spiritual) "beginning" which doesn't bring toward it the Master of the End can't be relied upon.

— Every "end" which is not accompanied by the state of [10] beginning can't be relied upon.

— Every "act of (worldly?) reflection" (*tafakkur*) can't be relied upon.

— Every "purification/liberation" (*ikhlās*) can't be relied upon, for (in that case) there is missing that "from which" (one was purified).

— Every (act/state of) "praising" which is not […?] can't be relied upon.

— Every "affliction/hardship" that is not a spiritual trial/test (*ibtilā'*) can't be relied upon.

— Every confidence/trust (*thiqa*) that doesn't come from "tender love" can't be relied upon.

— Every "nearness (to God)" (*walāya*) that doesn't come from prophethood (*nubuwwa*) can't be relied upon.

— Every "spiritual knowing" (*ma'rifa*) that is not constantly varying in its forms can't be relied upon.

— Every "act/state of pure sincerity" (*sidq*) that can be questioned can't be relied upon.

— Every longing that is quieted by the meeting (with what was longed for) can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) intimacy (*uns*) that is not witnessed both in what is sensible and what is not sensible can't be relied upon.

— Every shame (at wrongdoing) that doesn't include abandoning (that wrongdoing) can't be relied upon.

— Every (state of) zeal/fervor that is not inclusive and evenhanded (in its objects), so that your judgment about yourself in that matter is the same as your judgment of others, can't be relied upon.

— Every (so-called) "zeal/fervor for God's sake" can't be relied upon. For (such pretensions) are sheer ignorance, devoid of any spiritual awareness, and not among the attributes of the spiritually accomplished ones. That (fanaticism) is the complete contrary of (truly) "calling (people) to God," and it includes "bad behavior/attitude" (*sū' al-adab*) toward God, in a way (such fanatics) are unaware of….

— Every "closeness" (to God) which you do not witness precisely in being separated can't be relied upon.

— Every "witnessing" in which the person doing the witnessing is not witnessed can't be relied upon.

— Every state of "expansion/ease" can't be relied upon.

— Every "conversation (with God)" (*muhādatha*)[194] which doesn't include the servant (along with his Lord/*rabb*) can't be relied upon.

— Every "nocturnal conversation" (*musāmara*)[195] in which (the servant) doesn't witness God's descending (to the level of the creatures) can't be relied upon.

— Every "singling out/isolation (of the mystic)" (*tafrīd*) that doesn't take place through the *two* parts of the *pair* (i.e., God and the servant) can't be relied upon.

— Every "separation/cutting away (from created things)" can't be relied upon.

— Every state of "spiritual contraction" (*qabd*)[196] whose cause is unknown can't be relied upon. The same is true of every state of "spiritual expansion" (*bast*) (whose cause is unknown).

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[194] Defined in Ibn 'Arabī's *Technical Terms* as "God's (*al-Haqq*) addressing the true knowers *from the visible world*, as in the tree calling Moses;" cf. p. 9 of of *K. Istilāh* in *Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabī* (volume II of 1968 reprint of Hyderabad edition), and p. 39 of T. Harris's "Translation of Sufi Terminology" (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 1984)

[195] Defined by Ibn 'Arabī (in contrast with *muhādatha*) as "God's addressing the knowers *from the world of secrets and the Unseen*, which the Holy Spirit brings down upon your heart;" cf. p. 10 of of *K. Istilāh* in *Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabī* (volume II of 1968 reprint of Hyderabad edition), and p. 39 of T. Harris's "Translation of Sufi Terminology" (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 1984)

[196] Ibn 'Arabī's definition makes his meaning here clearer: "…The state of fear in the present instant. It is called a subtle feeling coming over the heart that is brought about by an intimation of punishment and blame (for wrongdoing)…." cf. p. 5 of of *K. Istilāh* in *Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabī* (volume II of 1968 reprint of Hyderabad edition), and p. 32 of T. Harris's "Translation of Sufi Terminology" (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 1984)

— Every "unification (with God)" of your innermost self (*sirr*)[197] can't be relied upon.

— Every (supposed state of) "integration/unification" (*jam'*) that becomes separated can't be relied upon.

— Every (spiritual state of) "separation/distinction" (*farq*) that doesn't affirm (the reality) of you and of Him (*al-Haqq*) can't be relied upon.

— [11] Every "intuitive perspicacity" (*firāsa*) that doesn't come (in the words of a famous hadith) from "the light of true faith" can't be relied upon.

— Every "unseen (spiritual reality)" (*ghayb*) which is not witnessed (as to) how it (actually) is can't be relied upon.

— Every intellectual reflection (*nazar*) that indicates to you [….?] can't be relied upon.

— Every breath/spirit (*rūh*) that doesn't take away (another) breath/spirit can't be relied upon.

— Every stability (*qirār*: in a given spiritual state) that doesn't give a sign/evidence (*hukm*) of the attribute of the (divine) Bestowing (*al-wahb*: that gives rise to that particular state) can't be relied upon.

— Heedfulness/careful attention (toward God: *taqwā*) which is not both through and of God is not relied upon by the great ones (of the Path).

— That scrupulousness (*wara'*) which is not inclusive of the inner spiritual states (as well as outward religio-legal actions and prohibitions) can't be relied upon.

— Ascetic renunciation (*zuhd*) can't be relied upon.

— The granting (by God of one's wish) after asking (for it) can't be relied upon.

— "Giving preference to others" (*īthār*) can't be relied upon, neither in regard to God—since that is not appropriate for Him—nor in regard to people, because it is (simply) fulfilling what has been entrusted (to us).

— (Spiritual) journeying (*safar*) which doesn't also lead to obtaining something (*zafar*) can't be relied upon.

— Wakefulness/keeping night-vigil (*sahar*) which doesn't come from the Alive (*al-Hayy*) can't be relied upon.

— Sleeping, if it doesn't bring (dreams of) good-tidings, can't be relied upon.

— Hunger can't be relied upon at all (in any way).

— Every longing other than the longing of (true divine) Love (*al-hubb*) can't be relied upon.

— Every support/encouragement that doesn't come from witnessing God in that (support) can't be relied upon.

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[197] Apparently because that dimension of the human being is most fully aware of its ontological indigence, "servanthood" and distinction from God.

— Being envious with regard to what is good shouldn't be relied upon, lest the (carnal) nature grow accustomed to that.

— Anger in ease (*al-ghayz fī-l-rāha*) can't be relied upon.

— Being "absent" (from this world) in God can't be relied upon.

— Being avid/strongly desirous (*hirs*) can't be relied upon, since it is trying to hurry up (God's) (existentiating) determination of what has been decided (*qadr al-maqdūr*), even if that (eagerness) is for something good—except with regard to (God's) servants, and that (eagerness) is useful.

— Generosity (*futuwwa*) without a balancing limit (*wazn*) can't be relied upon, as in the case of the person who [….]. That is why we said it needs the balance of messengerhood (*mīzān al-risāla*: i.e., of the revelation).

— [12] The practice of Sufism without any moral character (*khulq*) can't be relied upon.

— Spiritual verification/realization (*tahqīq*), if it doesn't give rise to (the awareness) of the inner Unicity of the multiple (*ahadīyat al-kathra*), can't be relied upon.

— Wisdom/practical judgment, if it doesn't give rise to proper ordering/arrangement, can't be relied upon.

— Conversing/keeping company with what is other than God—even if it is regarding God—can't be relied upon.

— Spiritual knowing (*ma'rifa*), if it doesn't take on different forms with each of the breaths/instants, can't be relied upon.

— Intimate friendship (with God: *khilla*), if it isn't like Abraham's, can't be relied upon.

— Loving affection (*mahabba*), if it isn't all-inclusive, can't be relied upon.

— Respectfulness, without actually serving (*khidma*) the other, can't be relied upon. And serving (someone) without (real) respectfulness can't be relied upon.

— Listening (to God: *samā'*), if it is limited (to specific circumstances or aims), can't be relied upon.

— Voyaging (*sulūk*) along the spiritual Path), if it is (only) with Him or in Him or from Him or to Him, can't be relied upon. But if (that voyaging) integrates all of those (modes of journeying), then it is (to be) relied upon.

— The (spiritual) traveler without any provisions shouldn't be followed/imitated.

— The voyager towards a light from the manifest aspect/Face (of God) can't be relied upon and shouldn't be followed/imitated.

— A spiritual "place" (*makān*) which is not also a (solid spiritual) station (*makāna*) can't be relied upon.

— The ecstatic utterances (*shath*: of the "drunken" mystics like al-Hallāj) can't be relied upon.

— The distinctive signs of proximity (to God), when they are joined with acts of opposition (to His commands: *mukhālifāt*), can't be relied upon, even if (those acts of opposition) are veiled/disguised.

— The experience/finding of closeness along with the actual reality of distance (from God), and the experience of distance with the actual reality of closeness are deceptions (of Satan: *talbīs*) and can't be relied upon.

— The good tidings of one's being secure/safe from God's cunning ruse (*makar*) that comes by way of "unveiling" can't be relied upon. For that (sort of informing) is one of those knowings of the (divine) Secret (*ʻulūm al-sirr*) which are the special domain of God.

— The comprehensive knowing of the divine Names, if it comes to a single person through an
      unveiling, can't be relied upon.

— Increases in (one's) realization-of-the-unification (of all things in God: *ziyādāt al-tawhīd*) can't be relied upon, since they are really increases in the *signs* (of *tawhīd*), not increases in *tawhīd*.

— That "realization of unification" (*tawhīd*) which is perceived by intellectual argumentation can't be relied upon.

— Knowing the "divinity" (*al-ilah*) without also affirming "that-for-which-it-is-divine" (*al-ma'lūh*) isn't correct, so it can't be relied upon. That is why the transmitter-of-revelation (*al-shāri'*: i.e., the Prophet) said: "whoever knows [13] their self knows their Lord/Sustainer (*rabb*)."

— (Affirming the ultimate reality of) the (secondary) cause (*ʻilla*) contradicts/precludes (experiencing) the reality-of-unification (with God: *tawhīd*), so it can't be relied upon.

— Finding/experiencing the creatures in God (*al-Haqq*) and (at the same time) finding God in the creatures, along with the endurance of their "essential realities" (*baqāʼ al-aʻyān*), can't be relied upon. The relationship/connection (between the two) can't be relied upon, except for the relation of the servant to his Lord or of the Lord to the servant—and *that* is what can be relied upon.

— Their saying (of certain Sufis): "Sit upon the carpet (with God) and (enjoy) delight/expansion (*inbisāt*)!" can't be relied upon.

— The person who keeps silence with his tongue and speaks through signs: his silence can't be relied upon (i.e., he is not necessarily "listening" to God).

— [?… long paragraph, p. 13]

— Every conversation/companionship of a disciple with his master, during which the disciple is in the end (really) conversing with his (own) carnal self for a while, can't be relied upon.

— The theophany of (the divine state) of "pure Unicity" (*al-ahadiyya*) can't be relied upon, since theophany requires intimacy (*ʻunsīya*).

— The station in which a person speaks according to the inner thoughts (of those around them)— and there is no knowledge of that in the hearts of (the others) who are present—can't be relied upon, because (God) created (that person) to be with Him, not with the creatures. So if God causes that to take place on the tongue of that person (who is reading their thoughts), without the (one whose thoughts are being read) even knowing that that person is accompanying them, then that (i.e., the "ordinary" person) is the man who is carrying out what he was created for. Here there is an appropriate story:

> One of those who had (this) "unveiling" (of another's inner thoughts) said to
> someone praying (next to him) that it had occurred to him (in his inner thoughts)

during his prayer that [14] he traveled to Sivas [in Turkey] and bought and sold (some things) and then hired (some transportation to go) to the country of the Persians. And this person mentioned to him everything that he had been thinking about inwardly during his prayers.

Then a good counselor among his (spiritual) brothers said to him (in friendly admonition): "So we see that he was performing his prayers, while you were in your own thoughts recording him as you walked along (inwardly) with him. So what difference is there (between you two)?! And where is God, Who only created you for Him, not for the people?!"

— Anything that removes you from the influence of the divine Names can't be relied upon.

— Every place of witnessing that doesn't cause you to see the multiplicity (of the creatures) in the Single (divine) Source/Essence can't be relied upon.

— Every theophany that doesn't give you the knowledge of a (divine) reality can't be relied upon.

— Every reality that says "I am a real essence," but you don't find it to have any influence/effect upon you other than your witnessing it, can't be relied upon.

— You shouldn't rely upon any "inner (spiritual reality)" (*bātin*) which doesn't cause you to witness its outward manifestation (*zāhir*).

— Every master of a "breath" (from God) (*nafas*) that doesn't bring with it relief (*tanfīs*) can't be relied upon.

— "light" which doesn't take away a darkness can't be relied upon.

— Every "unveiling" that causes you to see the disappearance of things after their existence can't be relied upon.

— Every spiritual station that doesn't cause you to see God (*al-Haqq*) *creating continuously* can't be relied upon.

— Every truly divine love (*hubb ilāhī*) that is accompanied by constraint/limitation can't be relied upon.

— Every (apparently) "divine informing" (*muttali'*), if it distinguishes for you between what is higher and lower, can't be relied upon.

— You shouldn't rely upon the spiritual stopping-place, if it becomes an obstacle between you and your journeying, for there is no "resting" (*qirār*) there on either part (either with God or the human being).

— Every symbolic expression/explanation (*ta'bīr*) you encounter in the world of natural bodies which doesn't let you know that it is from the side of the (human) speaker (*al-qā'il*), not the (divine) "Maker" (*al-fā'il*), can't be relied upon.

— Every "mixture" (*imtizāj*: of divine Names) which doesn't give you something you didn't have before you found/experienced that can't be relied upon—and it isn't really a "mixture" (in this technical sense).

— The state of *sabr* (perseverance in the face of affliction) in which you don't complain to God can't be relied upon.

— The state of *sabr* in which you don't hear [15] *God's* complaining through His servants to Himself about what they are suffering can't be relied upon.

— Careful spiritual attentiveness (*murāqaba*), if it doesn't go on continually, can't be relied upon.

— Absolute contentment (*ridā*) with *everything* that God has decreed can't be relied upon.

— The state of "servanthood" which is not from directly witnessing the divine Majesty can't be relied upon.

— That purification/perfection of intention (*ikhlās*) which doesn't give wisdom can't be relied upon.

— True inner sincerity/spiritual clarity (*sidq*), if it doesn't come with boldness in action, can't be relied upon.

— The shame of the person who doesn't accept the excuse of someone who is lying can't be relied upon.

— Liberation (*hurrīya*), if it doesn't give nobility/dignity (*karam*), can't be relied upon.

— If remembrance of God (*dhikr*) doesn't lift away the veil (between God and the soul), then it isn't really *dhikr*, so it can't be relied upon.

— Thinking which (claims to) give you knowledge of God's Essence can't be relied upon.

— That generosity (*futuwwa*) in which one doesn't take the place of (stand in for) God can't be relied upon.

— That "total surrender (to God's Will)" (*taslīm*) in which the person stops observing (God's) limits can't be relied upon.

— That "closeness to God" (*walāya*) which allows for being isolated/cut off can't be relied upon.

— That state of "spiritual indigence/neediness" (*faqr*) in which you don't see God as the essence of everything can't be relied upon.

— You shouldn't rely upon that state of "annihilation (of the ego)" (*fanā'*) in which you don't witness your own absolute indigence.

— Freedom of action" (*tasarruf*) which doesn't (actually) include all the virtuous character traits (*makārim al-akhlāq*) can't be relied upon.

— Don't rely upon (pretending you somehow know) the goal (of the Path): (for) if you missed out on (the process of) realization/verification (*tahqīq*) at the beginning of your Path, so that He traveled with you on a Path other than the revealed/prescribed one—in that case you won't recognize the Face/aspect of God (*wajh al-Haqq*) which is in every thing.

— Wisdom/practical judgment (*al-hikma*), if it isn't (actually) ruling/governing (*hākima*), it can't be relied upon.

— Appropriate behavior/attitude (*adab*), if it doesn't integrate knowledge and action, can't be relied upon.

— Conversing/keeping company with (*suhba*) other than God/the Real (*al-Haqq*) [16] can't be relied upon.

— Poverty/indigence (*faqr*), if you try to adorn yourself with it (take pride in it), can't be relied upon, since it is destitution/nakedness (*ʿāriya*). But if you should witness your essential "poverty" (in relation to God), then that is what can be relied upon.

— (Perception of) the unification of all things (in God: *tawhīd*), if you should strip it of the "relations" (*al-nisab*: i.e., the divine Names and their effects in all creation), can't be relied upon.

— (Spiritual) journeying (*safar*), if it doesn't disclose/unveil (*yusfir*) something, can't be relied upon.

— Spiritual knowing (*maʿrifa*), if it goes beyond […?], can't be relied upon.

— True Love (*hubb*), if it gives you the connection with the being (*wujūd*) of the beloved—when the beloved is *not* present—that is the genuine article; but if it doesn't (give you that connection), then it can't be relied upon.

— (If) intimate friendship (*khilla*, as of Abraham) doesn't give rise to *nubuwwa*,[198] you shouldn't rely on it.

— Sanctity/holiness (*hurma*) which isn't accompanied by modesty/reticence can't be relied upon.

— The state of "listening" (for God: *samāʿ*), if it isn't present both when He is 'transmitting' (to one's heart) and when there is no transmitting, can't be relied upon.

— Accomplishing the "supernatural" (*kharq al-ʿāda*: "breaking the customary order [of nature]"), if it doesn't become itself customary, can't be relied upon.

— Every knowing which is not between *tahlīl* and *tahrīm* can't be relied upon. [meaning unclear??]

— Every divine "witnessing" which doesn't give you (an immediate awareness of) the glorification/magnificence of the creation/creatures (*taʿzīm al-khalq*) because of the (divine) glory/magnificence appearing there, can't be relied upon.

— Firm resolution during "direct witnessing (from/of God)" (*shuhūd*) can't be relied upon.

— Firm resolution (to accomplish something) without entrusting everything (to God: *tawakkul*) can't be relied upon.

— Every special spiritual effort (*mujāhada*) that doesn't illuminate a divine path (or: "way to God": *sabīl ilāhī*) can't be relied upon.

— For the (true) spiritual knower, isolation (from God and creatures: *khalwa*) isn't possible, so it can't be relied upon.

— Isolating oneself from people because you are seeking peace/security from them can't be relied upon. What you should be seeking is withdrawing from them because you're seeking their peace/security *from you*!

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[198] There are two possible meanings here: it may be referring to that "general prophethood" (*nubūwwa ʿāmma*) which is shared by the prophets and all the Friends (*awliyāʾ*). Or more likely, the allusion may be to the root meaning of *n-b-w* (as "being far away, removed"), in which case it has the sense already suggested in many other sayings above: "that 'closeness' which doesn't include 'separation' can't be trusted."

— Every (state of) reverential awe (*hayba*) that disappears when you confess/are fully sincere with God (*bi-mubāsitat al-Haqq*) can't be relied upon.

— The state of "mindfulness of God" (*taqwā*), if it doesn't involve one divine Name protecting the mindful person from another divine Name, such that they can witness (the first Name), then it can't be relied upon.

— Scrupulousness (*wara'*) with regard to what is (already) licit can't be relied upon.

— Remaining silent in absolutely all circumstances (*al-samt al-'āmm*) can't be relied upon.

— [17] When (divine) Speaking (*kalām*) doesn't effectively bring about in the soul of the listener either the intention of the Speaker or its contrary, by actively rejecting (that intention), then it can't be relied upon. Because one who is really speaking the truth (*al-mutakallim bi-l-haqq*) necessarily has one of those two opposing responses in the person who is listening.

— Wakefulness at night (*sahar*) without any nocturnal conversation (with God: *samar*) can't be relied upon.

— Sleeping which isn't accompanied by revealed inspiration (*wahy*) can't be relied upon.

— Fearfulness, when it isn't occasioned by […?]], can't be relied upon.

— Requesting (a specific urgent goal: *rajā'*), when it isn't guided by inspired spiritual insight (*basīra*), can't be relied upon.

— Temptation (or "trial": *fitna*), if it doesn't reveal what is rotten/malignant, isn't really a trial, and it can't be relied upon.

— That sorrow (*al-huzn*) which doesn't accompany the fully human being (*insān*) perpetually can't be relied upon.

— Opposition (*mukhālifa*) which doesn't come from direct encounter (or from comparison: *muqābila*) can't be relied upon.

— Helping/assistance (*musā'ida*), if it isn't sometimes for you and sometimes for Him, can't be relied upon.

— Every body (*jasad*) that doesn't give rise to effective spiritual intention (*himma*) can't be relied upon. […?]

— Entrusting oneself (to God: *tawakkul*) in which God is not the (real) Trustee (*wakīl*) can't be relied upon.

— Absolute certainty (*yaqīn*), if it is at all influenced by carnal desire/aversion (*hawā*), can't be relied upon.

— Spiritual) traveling (*sulūk*) which does not take place based on real lived experience (*bi-l-hāl*) can't be relied upon.

— The state (*hāl*) which was sought by the servant can't be relied upon.

— A spiritual station (*maqām*) which continues to have demands on you can't be relied upon, because the "station" (as opposed to the *manzil* or *hāl* leading up to it) is for the person who has completely fulfilled all its obligations/duties.

— A place (*makān*, here in the sense of a passing *hāl*) which hasn't become a fixed station (*makāna*) can't be relied upon.

— Every "ascendant planet" (*tāli'*)[199] whose light doesn't overcome all the other lights found in the heart can't be relied upon.

— Every passing away that doesn't annihilate you from yourself can't be relied upon.

— Every (divine) "breath" from which there is not constituted for its possessor a form which speaks to him and to which he speaks in a state of witnessing can't be relied upon.

— Every innermost self/spiritual mystery (*sirr*) which does not give birth and produce[200] can't be relied upon.

— Every spiritual connection (*wasl*) that doesn't […?] can't be relied upon.

— That separation (of one's self from God: *fasl*) which isn't witnessed in the midst of connection (with Him) can't be relied upon.

— [18] Every special spiritual discipline (*riyāda*) that doesn't overcome a real difficulty can't be relied upon, for (otherwise) that is only wearing down the soul.

— "Adornment (with God's attributes)" (*tahalli*)[201] isn't correct, so it can't be relied upon.

— A theophany that causes you (your ego) to remain can't be relied upon.

— Every cause (*'illa*) whose effect is other than God (*al-Haqq*) can't be relied upon.   For you are the effect of His being, and He is the effect (result) of your knowledge of Him.

— Every disturbance/arousal that causes you to lose what you were aroused from can't be relied upon.

— Every "spiritual witnessing" (*shuhūd*) that you lose/can't find in the future can't be relied upon.

— Every "unveiling" that is not absolutely pure—i.e., that is not mixed with something from the carnal constitution—can't be relied upon, except in the case of someone who knows the Source of the image (*al-musawwir*).

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[199] See *Technical Terms*, where Ibn 'Arabī defines this term (in the plural, *tawāli'*) as "the lights of the realization of Unicity (*tawhīd*) that come over the hearts of the people of realization and extinguish all other lights;" cf. p. 10 of of *K. Istilāh* in *Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabī* (volume II of 1968 reprint of Hyderabad edition), and p. 40 of T. Harris's "Translation of Sufi Terminology" (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 1984)

[200] Or "save", according to another reading.

[201] In the *Technical Terms*, making a similar point, Ibn 'Arabī explains that "for us, this means to be characterized with the qualities of servanthood [not divine qualities]. This is the correct usage, for it is more complete and sound." Cf. p. 17 of of *K. Istilāh* in *Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabī* (volume II of 1968 reprint of Hyderabad edition), and p. 52 of T. Harris's "Translation of Sufi Terminology" (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 1984)

— Every "glimmering" (*lā'ih*, pl. *lawā'ih*)[202] that doesn't raise you up in rank and give you additional knowing of God can't be relied upon.

— "Coloring (by God's attributes)"/transformation through God (*talwīn*), [203] if you don't witness it (being transformed) at every instant, can't be relied upon.

— Zeal/fervor with regard to the (passing) states can't be relied upon—whereas it can be relied on where the spiritual *stations* are concerned.

— Don't rely on the company of whoever accompanies you in spiritual dreaming/visions (*ru'yā*), because that causes you to leave yourself behind (i.e., distracts and hinders you).

— Don't rely on the company of whoever accompanies you in their passing thoughts (*khawātir*), for they will betray/deceive you the more trust you have in them, and they will abandon you the more need you have for them.

— Don't rely on whoever accompanies you in a momentary inspiration (*wārid*), whose moment is among the people of God.

— Whoever accompanies you with his intelligence (*'aql*) or for the sake of *your* essence: *that* is the one you should rely upon.

— Whoever accompanies you because of what they can gain from you can't be relied upon, because they are finished when they have acquired what they wanted from you—and they may even be ungrateful for that kindness when they want to leave, so watch out for them!

— You should rely on whoever accompanies you "in God": and the distinctive sign of such a person is their "right counsel" (*nasīha*: constructive criticism) in your regard, and their acknowledging the truth of the matter whenever it is explained to them how they were wrong—so that there is always a benefit for them or for you.

— [19] Companionship (with someone) lacking actual experience can't be relied upon, because (in that case) you don't know what the ultimate outcome will reveal to you. That takes a comprehensive, broad-based practical intelligence (*'aql wāfir*).

— Having confidence in one's "state" with respect to any particular divine Name can't be relied upon. For there is no state in existence in which *every* divine Name doesn't have some influence

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[202] Ibn 'Arabī explains this technical term as "…the outward aspect, which becomes visible to our innermost being, of being raised from state to state. In our usage, it means something from the Light of the (divine) Essence that doesn't involve the aspects of negation, and which reveals itself when our inner vision isn't limited by our animal nature." Cf. p. 10 of of *K. Istilāh* in *Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabī* (volume II of 1968 reprint of Hyderabad edition), and p. 39 of T. Harris's "Translation of Sufi Terminology" (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 1984)

[203] Ibn 'Arabī defines this as "the servant's transformation from state to state. For most people that represents an incomplete stage (of the Path). For us it is the most perfect of spiritual stations, in which the servant's state is (like) God's state in His saying (55:29): *…Every Day He is in an 'affair'* (*sha'n*)." Cf. p. 10 of of *K. Istilāh* in *Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabī* (volume II of 1968 reprint of Hyderabad edition), and p. 40 of T. Harris's "Translation of Sufi Terminology" (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 1984)

and which does not refer back to that Name, just as God gave each planet a divine ordering effect and role of dominion (with respect to certain earthly matters).

— The spiritual vision which is observed by the person limited by their beliefs concerning the True Reality (al-mu'taqid fī-l-Haqq) at the "lifting of the veil" can't be relied upon.

— "Direct (physical) vision" (al-'iyān al-basarī) can't be relied upon in spiritual witnessing.   But if it is with the "eye of inspired spiritual insight" (al-basīra), that is what *can* be relied upon, and that is what is called "a divine Proof" (burhān).[204] So whoever says that eyewitness vision takes away any need for a proof can't be relied upon.

— Every "state of mindfulness (of God)" (taqwā) which doesn't result in a (divinely guiding) "distinguishing" (furqān) can't be relied upon.

— Every "entrusting-oneself-to-God" (tawakkul) which doesn't give you a "(sense of) divine Sufficiency" (kifāya ilāhīya) can't be relied upon.

— Every "state of mindfulness of God" (taqwā) which doesn't give you a way out of adversities can't be relied upon.

— Every "state of mindfulness of God" (taqwā) which *doesn't* bestow on you (release) in a way you couldn't even imagine, so that you are disappointed (makhdū'), can't be relied upon.

— The "person mindful of God" (al-muttaqī), if their taking precaution is not for *God's* sake—so that God doesn't have any obligation regarding their mindfulness and cautiousness—, then it can't be relied upon.

— If your remembering (God) doesn't result in your listening (samā') to *His remembering/mentioning you* (dhikr al-Haqq laka), then don't rely on it!

— If you stand up for God/for what is right (al-haqq), and it doesn't result in God's standing up for you in matters that totally surprise you, then it can't be relied upon.

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[204] For this mysterious Qur'anic expression, see 4:174; 12:24 (of Joseph); and 23:117.

Part Two: Approaches

Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Political Dimensions of the *Futūhāt*

HOW TO STUDY THE *FUTŪHĀT*: IBN ʿARABĪ'S OWN ADVICE

It is no secret for those who have spent any amount of time with the works of Ibn ʿArabī, even with such rlatively "simple" and straightforward texts as the hagiographical vignettes translated in *Sufis of Andalusia*, that all of his writings are meant to function as a sort of spiritual *mirror*, reflectineg and revealing the inner intentions, assumptions and predilections of each reader with profound--and sometimes embarrassing--clarity. And nowhere is that mirroring (or refractive?) function clearer than in the immense secondary literature attempting to explain or otherwise convey the voluminous teachings of this "Greatest Master" (*al-shaykh al-akbar*), beginning already with the contrasting approaches of his own close disciples and continuing down to our own day.

For if virtually all Sufi writings are meant to be mirrors, Ibn ʿArabī's works are mirrors of a very peculiar and in some ways utterly unique sort. The novel and highly personal manner in which he integrally combined the contrasting approaches of earlier Islamic intellectual traditions that had focused respectively on spiritual disciplines and contemplation, intellectual and scientific inquiry, and the elaboration of scriptural and prophetic teachings--the tripartite scheme of *kashf* ("unveiling"), ʿ*aql* (intellect), *naql* (religious tradition) found in virtually all his later commentators--was never really repeated or adequately imitated by any subsequent Islamic author. Instead his readers and commentators, whether ancient or contemporary, Muslim or non-Muslim have almost inevitably tended to focus their attention on one or two of those perspectives.[205] The typical result--and indeed the underlying method--in such cases has been to separate the "content" from the "form" of the Shaykh's teachings in ways that tend to ignore and indeed render invisible that remarkably effective *spiritual pedagogy* which is in fact the unifying aim and persistent focus of his many rhetorical styles and techniques.

One symptom of that neglect is the lack of any detailed study of the complex Introduction (*muqaddima*) to Ibn ʿArabī's famous "Meccan Illuminations" (*al-Futūhāt al-Makkīya*),in which he has provided some essential keys to his underlying intentions and rhetorical methods throughout that notoriously difficult work. Now that extended translations of major sections from the *Futūhāt* are

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[205]For a historical and philosophic overview of some key figures in that process, both in past Islamic tradition and among more recent Western students of the Shaykh, see our three-part survey of "Ibn ʿArabī and His Interpreters" in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (volumes 106 and 107).

For Ibn ʿArabī's problematic attitude toward philosophy and the "intellectual" sciences, one of the primary subjects of the passages from the Introduction to the *Futūhāt* translated below, see the recent study by Franz Rosenthal, "Ibn ʿArabī Between 'Philosophy' and 'Mysticism'" (*Oriens* 31, 1988), as well as the extensive translations from the *Futūhāt* on this subject in W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany, NY, 1989). [This anthology is referred to in subsequent notes as Chittick, *SPK*.]

The underlying autobiographical reasons for Ibn ʿArabī's consistent focus on the Qur'an and hadīth--grounded in his experience and understanding of his unique role as "Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood"--have recently been greatly clarified in the detailed studies by M. Chodkiewicz and C. Addas (bibliographic references below).

beginning to become available,[206] it may be especially helpful to present these passages in which the Shaykh gives perhaps his most complete discussion and explanation of the many different audiences and types of readers for whom he composed that work. While his reflections here are obviously relevant to understanding all of his writings (including the better-known *Fusūs al-Hikam*)--and indeed to the study of mystical literature and spiritual pedagogy more generally--they are indispensable for anyone wishing to decipher and integrate the phenomenal diversity and sheer volume of earlier Islamic traditions brought together in the *Futūhāt*.

In particular, this Introduction helps to highlight the remarkably *active* approach which Ibn ᶜArabī expects and constantly demands of his truly qualified and spiritually "ambitious" readers, those who begin to interact with his work with the appropriate intentions and preparation (*himma*). (And his writing, as one can readily see, is consciously constructed in such a way that readers without that essential preparation are likely to become quickly discouraged or bored, and hence turn to other, more interesting concerns.) To begin with, the Shaykh's rhetoric intentionally forces his readers to situate themselves--in relation to the text--in at least two ordinarily separate dimensions at the same time: the intellectual, discursive, ostensibly "objective" dimension (what he calls *nazar*) by which the mind can attempt to piece together the many different theoretical disciplines juxtaposed in the *Futūhāt* and then somehow relate them all to the external cosmos and social world; and the inner, experiential, inevitably highly personal spiritual dimension (of *ahwāl* and *asrār*) within which each serious reader must confront and act upon (rather than "understand") the inspirations, exhortations and paradoxes which Ibn ᶜArabī repeatedly brings to their attention. It is easy enough to retreat from that confrontation, whether by closing (or even burning or banning!)[207] the book itself or by "interpreting" it on only the first of those levels. But as Ibn ᶜArabī stresses throughout his Introduction, the tension carefully generated by the constantly varied confrontation of those two dimensions is actually meant to *move* the properly prepared reader through a spiral of higher and higher levels of participation and engagement, from conceptual understanding and analysis to the very different plane of spiritual knowing, returning to those mysterious "Openings" which were the source and aim of this and all his writings.

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[206]See especially the recently published volumes of *Les Illuminations de La Mecque/The Meccan Illuminations: Selected Texts* (Paris, 1988), Chittick, *SPK*, the several additional projected studies or translations announced in both of those anthologies, and the two-volume translation *The Meccan Revelations* (New York, 2002 and 2004).

[207]See the discussion of some of the more notorious efforts to do one or the other of these things to the *Futūhāt* in our monograph cited at the beginning of n. 1 above. The most recent public controversies in Egypt surrounding the new, more accessible scientific edition of the text by O. Yahya are discussed in T.E. Homerin, "Ibn Arabi in the People's Assembly: Religion, Press, and Politics in Sadat's Egypt" (*The Middle East Journal* 40, 1986). As a sign of its ongoing sensitivity, one may note that the new edition is still subject (as of this writing) to a strictly enforced ban on its commercial export outside Egypt.

Limitations of space do not permit a more extensive commentary on the key sections of the Introduction translated here.[208] But those who take the time to re-read and reflect on that text will themselves provide the only commentary that Ibn ᶜArabī would have considered valuable.

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In order to help situate the Introduction and its various subdivisions within the opening sections of the *Futūhāt*, we have provided the following simplified outline:[209]

I.	Opening Address (*khutbat al-kitāb*)[210]	Pages 41-58
II.	Poetic "Letter" to al-Mahdawi[211]	Pages 59-73
III.	Table of Chapter Headings (*fihrist*)	Pages 75-137
IV.	Introduction (*muqaddimat al-kitāb*)[212]	Pages 138-214
	A. (The three levels of knowledge)	138-144

[208]Some important philosophic and practical implications of the Introduction are outlined (with illustrations from many sections of the *Futūhāt*) in our article "Ibn ᶜArabī's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority" (*Studia Islamica* 71, 1990).

[209]Page references, unless otherwise specified, are to vol. I of the new edition of *al-Futūhāt al-Makkīya* by Osman Yahya (Cairo, 1972/1392); the entire Introduction corresponds to vol. I, pp. 31-47 in the older, four-volume Cairo edition. Within the translated sections below, page numbers from the Yahya edition (vol. I) are given in square brackets []. Some minor subdivision markers added in the second, longer version of the Introduction are not indicated in this outline, but are given in the translation below.

[210]Major autobiographical sections of the *khutba* regarding Ibn ᶜArabī's role as "Seal of the Muhammadan Saints" were translated by M. Vālsan as "Avant-Propos" (*Etudes Traditionnelles* 311, 1953) and are reprinted under the title "l'Investiture du cheikh al-Akbar au centre suprême" in the volume *l'Islam et la Fonction de René Guénon* (Paris, 1984), pp. 177-191. A much shorter passage has more recently been translated by L. Shamash and S. Hirtenstein as "An Extract from the Preface to the *Futūhāt*" (*Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn ᶜArabī Society* 4, 1985).

[211]To Ibn ᶜArabī's close friends in Tunisia, who are presented as key members of the spiritual hierarchy. Together with the khutba, this section concludes the first *juz*ᶜ of the manuscripts (portions that were read together with or dictated to Ibn ᶜArabī's disciples, as indicated by the elaborate *samā*ᶜ-certificates recorded in Yahya's edition); the Fihrist makes up the second *juz*ᶜ.

[212]Only pages 138-172 in Ibn ᶜArabī's original version; the last two long sections were added in his second recension. This section makes up the third *juz*ᶜ of the manuscripts.

The following translation of selected passages from Ibn [C]Arabī's Introduction includes almost all of part IV-A in the above outline, much of IV-B and IV-C, and several key sections from the remaining "credos" in the concluding parts of the Introduction.

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[138] *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

We said: From time to time it occurred to me that I should place at the very beginning of this book a chapter concerning (theological) creeds,[214] supported by definitive arguments and salient proofs.

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[213]This was originally the *conclusion* of Ibn [C]Arabī's Introduction in his first version of the *Futūhāt*; the important explanation at p. 173 of the relationships of the three "credos" outlined here to the inner meaning of the rest of the *Futūhāt* was likewise added in his second, longer version of the book. For the partial (and indirect) French translation of this section, see the full references--and important cautions--at n. 47 below.

But then I realized that that would (only) distract the person who is properly prepared and seeking an increase (in spiritual knowledge), who is receptive to the fragrant breaths of (divine) Bounty through the secrets of being. For if the properly prepared person persists in *dhikr* and spiritual retreat, emptying the place (of the heart) of thinking, and sitting like a poor beggar who has nothing, at the doorstep of their Lord--then God will bestow upon them and give them some of that knowledge of Him, of those divine secrets and supernal understandings, which He granted to His servant Khadir.[215] For He said: "*a servant among our servants to whom We have brought Mercy from Us and to whom We have given Knowledge from what is with Us*" (18:65). And He said: "*So be aware of God, and God will teach you*" (2:282); and "*If you are aware of God, He will give you a criterion* (of spiritual discernment: *furqān*)"; and "*He will give you a light by which you will walk*" (57:28).[216]

[139] Someone said to (the famous Sufi) al-Junayd: "How did you attain what you've attained?" "By sitting under that step for thirty years," he replied. And Abū Yazīd (al-Bastāmī) said: "You all took your knowledge like a dead person (receiving it) from another dead person. But we took our knowledge from *the Living One who never dies* (25:58)!"[217] So the person with concentrated spiritual intention (*himma*) during their retreat with God may realize through Him--how exalted are His gifts and how prodigious His grace!--(forms of spiritual) knowledge that are concealed from every theologian (*mutakallim*) on the face of the earth, and indeed from anyone relying on (intellectual) inquiry (*nazar*) and proofs who lacks that spiritual state. For such knowledge is beyond (the grasp of) inquiry with the intellect.

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[214]Or "statements of belief": ^c*aqā'id* (singular ^c*aqīda*) refers to the formal doctrinal tenets promulgated by the various schools of Kalam theology. It is the same term Ibn ^cArabī applies to the three longer "statements of belief" or "credos" that actually conclude this Introduction.

[215]The long-lived prophet and archetype of direct divine inspiration--alluded to in the Quranic account of Moses' initiation in the following passage from the Sura of the Cave (18:65 ff.)--who played an important role in Ibn ^cArabī's own development, as well as in Sufism and popular Islamic spirituality more generally.

[216]In each of the translated passages the pronoun "you" is in the *plural*; the mysterious term *al-furqān* ("criterion", "separation") also appears six other times in the Quran, usually in reference to a mysterious type or source of revelation or spiritual awareness and divine guidance (cf. *sakīna*, *al-hudā*, etc.) granted to several prophets. The multifaceted verb translated here as "to be aware of" God comes from the central Quranic term *taqwā*, which refers both to the spiritual condition of fearful awe and reverence of God and to the inner and outer actions of piety and devotion flowing from that state.

[217]This particular saying attributed to the famous early Iranian Sufi al-Bastāmī is frequently discussed by Ibn ^cArabī, especially in passages where he is disputing with more literalist jurists and theologians the proper ways to understand the spiritual intentions or meanings of hadīth and other scriptural passages. (See, for example, the long discussion at I, 279, translated in Chittick, *SPK*, pp. 248-249.)

For there are three levels of knowledge. Knowledge through the intellect (*ᶜilm al-ᶜaql*) is whatever knowledge you obtain either immediately[218] or as a result of inquiry concerning a "sign,"[219] provided that you discover the probative aspect of that sign. And mistakes with regard to this kind of knowledge (come about) in the realm of that thinking[220] which is linked together and typifies this type of knowledge. That is why they say about (intellectual) inquiry that some of it is sound and some is invalid.

The second (level of) knowledge is the knowledge of "states."[221] The only way to that is through immediate experience: it can't be defined intellectually, and no (conceptual) proof can ever establish that knowing. (It includes things) like knowledge of the sweetness of honey, the bitterness of aloes, the pleasure of intercourse, love, ecstasy, or passionate longing, and other examples of this sort of knowledge. It is impossible for someone to know this kind of knowledge without directly experiencing it and participating in it. So (what are termed) "mistakes" with regard to this kind of knowledge, among those who have immediate experience, are not really such. (For example, in the case of) someone whose organs of taste are overcome by yellow bile, so that they find honey bitter-tasting, what actually touches the organs of taste *is* the yellow bile (and not the honey).

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[218]*Darūratan* ("necessarily"): i.e., anything that is known "of necessity" or self-evidently, in such a way that it cannot possibly be refuted or rejected. Here this term refers to the most basic, intrinsic logical grounds of all reasoning, such as the principle of non-contradiction, etc. But later (at p. 147.4-9) Ibn ᶜArabī also admits that the "knowledge of states"--the "second level" discussed here--is also "necessary" or "immediate" in this broad psychological sense. It should be stressed that the technical terminology for discussing the processes of reasoning here and throughout this Introduction is mostly drawn from the specifically Islamic religious discipline of Kalam (dialectical theology), not from the intellectually more sophisticated Aristotelean philosophy and logic of the time. (See the further illustrations of this point in the article by F. Rosenthal, "Ibn ᶜArabī Between 'Philosophy' and 'Mysticism'")

[219]*Dalīl*: in the language of Kalam, this can refer very broadly to a premise or argument or proof-text, or even to a natural phenomenon or event underlying such an argument--hence the importance of the inquirer's grasping the relevant "aspect" (*wajh*) of the sign in question.

[220]As will become clearer in the course of the following discussion (p. 140), Ibn ᶜArabī's emphasis here is not on the intellective dimension of this sort of knowledge as such, but rather on the discursive mental processes of conceptual "thinking" (*fikr*) and "inquiry" or "investigation" (*nazar*) that can lead to all sorts of error and delusion. In fact, purely "intellective" knowing (*ᶜilm al-ᶜaql*) is one of the two types of "inspired" spiritual knowledge making up the third and highest level outlined below.

[221]*Ahwāl* (singular *hāl*): in the traditional technical language of Sufism this term usually refers to specifically *spiritual* states (corresponding to the third level of "knowledge of mysteries" below). Here, however, Ibn ᶜArabī is using it--and the related expression for "direct personal experience" (*dhawq*, literally "tasting")--in an unusually restricted sense limited only to the most basic levels of external and internal sensation.

[140] The third (level of) knowledge is knowledge of (divine) secrets:[222] this is the knowledge that is beyond the stage of the intellect. It is knowledge of "the inbreathing of the Holy Spirit in the heart,"[223] and it is peculiar to prophets and saints.

This (inspired) knowledge is of two kinds. One kind is perceived by the intellect, just like the first (category of discursive) knowledge, except that the person who knows in this (inspired) way doesn't acquire their knowledge through inquiry. Instead, the level of this knowledge bestows it upon them.

The second kind (of inspired knowledge) is of two sorts. The first sort is connected with the second (level of) knowledge (i.e., of "states"), except that this knower's state is more exalted. And the other sort is knowledge through (spiritual) "informing".[224] Now things known in this way can be either true or false, unless the person being informed has already confirmed the truthfulness of their source and its infallibility with regard to what it is communicating--as with the prophets' being informed by God, such as their being informed about the Garden (of paradise) and what is in it.

Therefore (to illustrate these three sorts of inspired "knowledge of secrets"), the Prophet's saying that a Garden actually exists is knowledge through being informed (by God). His saying with regard to the (Day of) Resurrection that "there is a Pool in it sweeter than honey" is (an example of) knowledge of states, which is knowledge by direct experience; and his saying that "God was, and nothing was with him" and things like that are (illustrations of immediate) intellective knowing (corresponding to discursive knowledge) perceived through inquiry.

So as for this third type (of inspired knowing), which is the "knowledge of secrets", the person who knows it knows *all* knowledge and is completely immersed in it[225]--while the person who has those

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[222]*ᶜilm al-asrār* (singular *sirr*): depending on the context or perspective, the latter term could also be translated as spiritual "mysteries". For example at the end of Ibn ᶜArabī's opening "Letter (to al-Mahdawī)" he describes the purpose of this Introduction as "setting forth the knowledge of the divine secrets/mysteries this book contains" (p. 74.2).

[223]The opening section of a famous hadīth, recorded by Muslim and Ibn Hanbal, in which Muhammad alludes to his experience of divine inspiration: see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge, England, 1984) s.v. *rūᶜ*, and Wensinck, *Concordance*, II, p. 320. "Saint" here translates *al-walī*, the "friend of God"; the term "prophet" (*nabī*) is to be understood--following Ibn ᶜArabī's own usage--as a very broad term extending from the saints through the many pre-Islamic prophets to the much smaller group of lawgiving prophetic "messengers" (*rusul*).

[224]I.e., through *God's* "informing" (*ikhbār*) the prophet or saint, by means of one or another of the various forms of divine communication mentioned in the Qur'an and hadīth and frequently analyzed by Ibn ᶜArabī. The same Arabic phrase could also be read as "through *reports*" (*akhbār*)--i.e., as communicated by God or some other angelic agency, and perhaps eventually by a prophet or saint receiving such inspiration.

[225]Literally, "knows all knowledges (or 'sciences')"; the last part of the phrase can also mean "is completely filled with them" or "completely masters them".

other (two lower levels of) knowledge is not like that. Hence there is no knowledge nobler than this "all-encompassing knowledge"[226] which embraces the entirety of knowable things!

So the only remaining point is that the person reporting (this sort of knowledge) must be considered truthful and infallible[227] by those listening to them. Or rather this is (taken to be) a precondition by the common people.[228]

But as for truly intelligent and sensible people, who follow their own good counsel, they don't reject someone reporting (such inspired knowledge). [141] Instead they say: "In my opinion it is possible that this person may be speaking truthfully or not." And that is how every intelligent person ought to behave whenever someone who's not infallible comes to them with this sort of (inspired spiritual) knowledge, as long as they're speaking truthfully concerning the matter about which they've been informed.... For giving credence to such a person will not harm you, as long as what they are reporting is not rationally impossible... and so long as it doesn't undermine one of the pillars of the Sharia and doesn't contradict one of its essential principles.[229] Therefore if someone brings something (which they've spiritually experienced) that is rationally conceivable and about which the giver of the Sharia was silent, we mustn't at all reject it, but are instead free to choose to accept it....[230]

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[226]This Arabic phrase strongly--and no doubt intentionally--recalls many of the Quranic descriptions of God's Knowledge, reflecting Ibn ᶜArabī's underlying metaphysical insistence on the cosmic "mirroring" reality of the "Perfect Human Being" (*al-insān al-kāmil*).

[227]*Maᶜsūm*: i.e., divinely "preserved" from any possibility of moral or spiritual error and deviation--a rare state that most Sunni theologians would typically restrict to the prophets (although Shiites and some Sufis have often extended it somewhat more broadly).

[228]Or "the (ignorant) masses" (*al-ᶜāmma*), who Ibn ᶜArabī connects with the first, most dogmatic and theological credo he outlines below (pp. 162-172).

[229]It is important to underline here that the Arabic terms Ibn ᶜArabī is using (*rukn* and *asl*) are clearly meant to stress the extremely narrow character of this limitation--restricted to the most fundamental and indisputable dimensions of Islamic *scripture*, as distinct from the historically elaborated systems of intellectual interpretation developed in the later schools of Kalam and *fiqh*. The broader political implications of the practically *alternative* understanding of Islam based on the experience and guidance of the "friends of God" (*awliyā'*) which he begins to suggest here--and develops far more elaborately throughout the *Meccan Illuminations*--are summarized (based on key passages from the *Futūhāt*) in our article "Ibn ᶜArabī's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority."

[230]In the short passage omitted here (p. 141.8-13) Ibn ᶜArabī draws an analogy to the acceptance of the testimony of witnesses considered reliable and responsible in the actual application of Islamic law with regard to people's lives and property. As in those cases, he concludes (quoting verse 43:19), the responsibility for any false or misleading testimony will eventually be taken up between that soul and God.

And I am the most worthy of those who follow their own good counsel with regard to this. For if this person were only informing us about something (already) brought by the infallible (prophet)--only recounting to us what we already had from that (prophet) through another account[231]--then their report wouldn't give us anything beneficial beyond what we already have. But the (saints)[232]--may God be pleased with them--*only* bring secrets and wise points concerning the secrets of the Sharia concerning that which is *beyond* the power of thinking and acquisition (of traditional reports), secrets which are never ever attained in any way *except* [142] through direct witnessing and (divinely given) confirmation and other paths like those. This is the beneficial point in (Muhammad's) saying: "[Among the communities who were before you there were 'those who are spoken to' (by God),[233] although they were not prophets, and] if there are 'those who are spoken to' in my community, Umar is among them"....

For if people did not tend to deny the very existence of this kind of (spiritual) knowledge, there would have been no point to Abū Hurayra's[234] saying: "I have committed to memory two vessels (of teachings) from the Messenger of God: One of them I have widely disseminated; but as for the other, if I had disseminated it this throat of mine would have been cut!"[235]

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[231]*Riwāya*: clearly Ibn ᶜArabī is alluding here to the familiar historical, oral (or written) chains of transmission of hadīth in particular.

[232]Ibn ᶜArabī doesn't explicitly identify the individuals he's referring to here, but in the context it can only be those having the "knowledge of secrets" who--unlike the prophets--are *not* universally known to be truthful and without sin: i.e., the living saints or "Friends of God" (*awliyā' Allāh*). The italicized points in the following sentences reflect strong explicit emphases in Ibn ᶜArabī's own Arabic syntax here.

[233]*Muhaddathūn*: see Ibn ᶜArabī's more detailed phenomenological discussion of this particular type of divine inspiration (involving "hearing" of an inspired message without any vision)--and of many other forms of reception of this "knowledge of secrets" at III, 38-39 (translated in Chittick, *SPK*, pp. 261-263). Bukhārī (*fadā'il al-ashāb*, no. 38) records two versions (both from Abū Hurayra) of this important hadīth, which are apparently conflated in Ibn ᶜArabī's allusion to that hadīth here. Ibn ᶜArabī concludes this paragraph with a vague reference to Abu Bakr's similar willingness to share some of the special spiritual "knowledge of secrets" bestowed on him.

[234]One of the most famous and prolific transmitters of hadīth among the Companions of Muhammad, source of many reports in the canonical Sunni collections of Bukhārī and Muslim, including the hadīth regarding Umar that Ibn ᶜArabī had just cited (at the preceding note).

[235]Ibn ᶜArabī goes on to describe in detail (p. 142.6-143.9) four different occasions (extending from Ceuta, in 589, and Seville in 592, to Mecca in 599) and specific chains of transmission for this same hadith, in each case going back to al-Bukhārī (*K. al-ᶜilm*, no. 42). This unusual repetition seems intended to underline the practical importance of this issue and the preoccupation of his Sufi contemporaries with defending this preeminent practical "complement" to externally transmitted forms of Prophetic tradition.

[143] ...Nor (if people did not often deny such inspired knowledge) would there have been any need for the saying of Ibn 'Abbās, when he said in regard to God's saying "*God it is Who created the seven heavens, and of the earth like them; the (divine) Command descends through them*" (65:12)[236]: "If I were to mention the (Prophet's) interpretation of this verse you would stone me!" Or according to another version: "You would say I was an unbeliever!"...[237]

[144] And (were it not for people's ordinarily denying the existence of such spiritual inspiration), the saying of al-Radī, one of the descendants of Alī ibn Abī Tālib--May God's blessings and peace be upon him[238]--would have been meaningless, when he said:

How many a precious gem of knowledge, if I divulged it--

They'd say to me: "You're with those who worship idols!"

The men of the Muslims would judge killing me licit;
They'd consider the worst of what they do to be good.

Now all of these outstanding and righteous gentlemen, in my own judgement and as is widely known, *did* acknowledge this (inspired spiritual) knowledge and its rank, as well as the position of most people in the world with respect to it and the fact that most of them deny its existence. Therefore it is incumbent on the intelligent, truly knowing person not to reproach them for denying it. For in the story of Moses with Khadir (in the Sura of the Cave) allowance is made for them, and there is an argument for both sides.... And it is precisely with this story that we would argue against those who deny (the existence of this 'knowledge of secrets'), although it does not permit us to quarrel with them.[239] Instead we say, as the 'upright servant' (Khadir) did (to Moses): "*This is a parting between me and you!*" (18:77).

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[236]The problem concerning the meaning of this verse is apparently connected with the following two points: both of the pronouns ("them") referring to the "seven heavens" (and earths) are unexpectedly in the personal (feminine) plural form usually reserved for *animate* beings; and the further connections between those seven heavens and the spiritual "realities" or "abodes" of various prophets (as described, for example, in the various Ascension hadīth) raise a number of critical questions--which were heatedly debated in early Shiite and later Sufi thought--about the forms of earthly manifestation of the spiritual hierarchy of intermediaries between the Absolute and terrestrial humanity.

[237]Ibn ᶜArabī traces his source for this hadith back to the prolific Sufi writer Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, through his celebrated Andalusian disciple, the Maliki Qadi Abū Bakr Ibn ᶜArabī (no direct relative of the mystic himself), who was influential in introducing Ghazālī's writings in Muslim Spain.

[238]It is remarkable that Ibn ᶜArabī here (apparently in all three of Osman Yahya's manuscript sources) uses the longer formula of blessings ordinarily reserved for the Prophet. The Sharīf al-Radī, a Twelver Shiite scholar of the fourth century A.H., is best known for his collection of the sayings and sermons attributed to Alī, the celebrated *Nahj al-Balāgha*.

[239]Since one of the main points of the same Quranic story is precisely the necessity of keeping such spiritual insights from all those who are not yet prepared to benefit from them.

[145] CONTINUATION[240]

And don't let yourself be fooled, you who are inquiring into this type of (inspired) knowledge (of divine "secrets") which is the prophetic knowledge inherited from them,[241] if you should come across one or another of their topics which was also mentioned by a philosopher, Kalam theologian or (rational) inquirer in any other science--so that you say about this speaker, who is the realized Sufi[242], that he is (for example) a philosopher, because the philosopher (also) mentioned that topic and professed and believed it, so that he (must have) transmitted it from them.... [Ibn ᶜArabī-- clearly alluding to his own experiences in this regard--goes on to defend this accomplished Sufi against the accusations of "irreligion" popularly associated with the philosophers, and continues by pointing out that philosophic teachings in the areas of ethical discipline, in particular, closely mirror the prophetic teachings and standpoints of Islamic religious sciences.[243]]

[146.8] Don't you see that if someone brought you (these inspirations) as if they were a dream he'd seen--wouldn't you try to interpret them and figure out what they really mean? So likewise, take whatever this Sufi brings you and let yourself be rightly guided by it for a little while. And open up the place of your (heart) for what he's brought you, so that their inner meanings can become manifest to you. That is better for you than if you had to say on the Day of the Rising: [*When the True Promise draws near*...] *"But we were heedless of this, indeed we were doing wrong!"* (21:97).

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[240]*Wasl* (given as a separate "Section"/*fasl* in the original recension), pp. 145-153; I, pp. 32-34 in the four-volume standard Cairo edition.

[241]Ibn ᶜArabī here is continuing to speak about the inspired "knowledge of divine secrets" discussed in the preceding section. For him, all such inspired knowledge of the saints or friends of God is in fact "inherited" from the spiritual "Realities" of one or more of the prophets: see the detailed explanations of this complex relationship (assumed throughout the celebrated *Fusūs al-Hikam*) in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, and many illustrative passages translated from the *Futūhāt* (English selections by W. Chittick and J. Morris) in Ibn ᶜArabī, *Les Illuminations de La Mecque/The Meccan Illuminations: Selected Texts*, index s.v. *wārith/héritier*.

[242]*al-Sūfī al-muhaqqiq*: Ibn ᶜArabī often uses the latter adjective to distinguish the relatively small set of so-called "Sufis" who have actually accomplished, realized and "verified" the disciplines and teachings of the spiritual path. Here in the Introduction this term is a thinly veiled allusion to Ibn ᶜArabī's own personal contributions regarding this prophetic "knowledge of secrets" throughout the *Futūhāt*.

[243]This passage summarized here (145.7-146.8) is partly translated on p. 12 of the recent article by Franz Rosenthal cited at n. 1 above. Despite Ibn ᶜArabī's disingenuous reference here to similarities in the field of ethics, the most striking correspondences in the *Futūhāt* to positions of contemporary Islamic "*philosophy*" (including the physical science) are almost certainly in the closely related areas of cosmology, physical theory (elements, humours, etc.) and the more cosmological aspects of metaphysics. (Most of those points of contact are at least summarized in the above-mentioned article by F. Rosenthal.) The less controversial correspondences between his "inspired" Sufi knowledge and the "rational" teachings of Kalam are of course far more extensive, reflecting their common sources in Qur'an and hadīth.

Now any knowledge whose meaning can be easily understood once it has been clearly explained, or which is easily accessible, without difficulty, to the quick-witted learner, belongs to (the lowest level of) knowledge (attained by) the inquiring (discursive) intellect, because it falls under its domain and includes what can be grasped independently by someone if they should inquire (about it).

But the "knowledge of secrets" isn't like that. For when the (rational) interpretive faculty takes it up it becomes disagreeable, difficult and trying for the understanding [147] to grasp. And sometimes weak and fanatic minds, those which haven't been successful in properly employing the reality of the intellect God gave them for inquiry and investigation, even spit out that knowledge! So this is why those who possess this (inspired) knowledge most often make it more approachable for (most people's) understanding by using symbolic images and poetic forms of speech.

And as for the "knowledge of states", that is between this knowledge of secrets and knowledge (gained by) intellects. Most of those who have faith in the knowledge of states are people who rely on their own experiences (*ahl al-tajārib*). And the knowledge of states is closer to the knowledge of secrets than it is to the intellective knowledge gained by inquiry....[244]

Therefore you should know that if this (kind of report concerning spiritual knowledge) seems good to you, and you accept it and have faith in it--then rejoice (in your good fortune)! For you are necessarily in a state of immediate "unveiling" (*kashf*) concerning that, even if you aren't aware of it. There's no other way: for the heart is not gladdened except by what it knows for sure to be true. And the intellect can't enter in here, because this knowledge is not within its grasp--unless an infallible (prophet) brings this information, in which case the heart of the intellectual person may be gladdened. But if (this knowledge is brought by) someone not (known to be) infallible, then the *only* one who will take pleasure in what they say is the person relying on immediate (spiritual) experience (*sāhib al-dhawq*).

[The rest of this section, pp. 148-153, is devoted to Ibn ᶜArabī's extremely abbreviated reply to the request to "summarize this path which you claim to be the noble path leading the voyager on it to God", a reply which includes his initial outline of the spiritual states, waystations and stages discussed so profusely throughout later chapters of the *Futūhāt*. He concludes, on p. 153, by referring ahead to his far more extensive discussion in chapter 177 of the seven types of "fundamental knowledge which is peculiar to the people of God".[245]]

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[244]In the few lines omitted here (p. 147.6-9) Ibn ᶜArabī points out that both the "knowledge of states" and the inspired "knowledge of (spiritual) secrets" are indeed "self-evident" or "immediate" (*darūrī*) in a way resembling the logical first principles of rational, discursive knowledge. But he goes on to point out that such inspired knowledge is also entirely *different* in that "it is only self-evident to whoever witnesses it"--and that direct witnessing (*mushāhada*) is limited to the prophets and friends of God.

[245]See vol. II, pp. 297-320 of the older, four-volume edition of the *Futūhāt*. This lengthy chapter on spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifa*), immediately preceding the more frequently studied and translated chapter on Love, deals with many of the basic epistemological questions raised here in the Introduction in much greater detail.

[154] Supplement[246]

Next let's return to the reason for which we forbade the person properly prepared to receive God's Self-manifestation in their heart[247] from inquiring about the truth or falsehood of credal beliefs by means of the science of Kalam (dialectical theology). Part of that (reason) is that the ordinary people (*al-ᶜawwām*) have sound credal beliefs, not differing from any sound-minded person following the Sharia, and are (practicing) Muslims despite their never having studying anything at all from Kalam theology and not knowing anything about the disputing (theological) schools. Indeed God has preserved them in the soundness of their primordial state (*al-fitra*), which is their knowledge of the existence of God, through the instruction of a parent or early teacher following the Sharia. As far as their understanding of God (*al-Haqq*) and His incomparability (*tanzīh*), they are in the state of the understanding and (comprehension of) transcendence that is given in the outer aspect (*zāhir*) of the Clear Qur'an. And they are in a healthy and correct (state) as long as none of them seeks to go off into (their own personal) interpretation: whenever anyone goes off seeking (such) interpretation, they're no longer part of the masses (*al-ᶜāmma*)... For the credal beliefs of the masses are sound because, as [155] we've mentioned, they take them from the outer aspect of the Precious Book in a way that leads to assurance....

So if things are as we've just stated, the properly prepared person should take their credo from the Precious Qur'an.[248] It will be (for them) like the rational premise in a (theological) argument, since It is the Veracious Saying that "*untruth cannot approach from in front or from behind, sent down from the Most-Wise, the Most-Praised*" (41:42). So the properly prepared person, who has confirmed this Source, doesn't need intellectual arguments, since they've realized the Decisive Sign!

...[Ibn ᶜArabī, closely following the influential critical remarks of al-Ghazālī, goes on to explain his own conviction that the only religiously valid purpose for Kalam is "to confirm the knowledge of God

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[246]*Tatimma*, pp. 154-161. This subheading was added in the second recension; it was not in the earliest manuscript version.

[247]The reference here is to Ibn ᶜArabī's opening discussion of the ideal reader (*al-muta'ahhib*: i.e., someone with the right spiritual aptitude practically following the Sufi path) at the very beginning of the Introduction above.

[248]To avoid any possible misunderstanding, it should be emphasized that Ibn ᶜArabī here is *not* saying that the "properly prepared person" should be just like ordinary people. It is precisely their special aptitude that enables them to experience directly the "inner aspect" (*bātin*) of the Qur'an which, for Ibn ᶜArabī at least, is virtually coextensive with the cosmic "Reality of Muhammad".

For the autobiographical underpinnings of this perception, manifested throughout all of Ibn ᶜArabī's works, see the key passages analyzed by C. Addas in Peter Kingsley's translation of her book, *Quest for the Red Sulphur : The Life of ibn 'Arabī* (Cambridge, England, 1993). See also our translation of one of the most important of those passages, from chapter 366 of the *Futūhāt*, in Ibn ᶜArabī, *Les Illuminations de La Mecque/The Meccan Illuminations: Selected Texts*, pp. 134-35. (E.g., "Everything about which we speak, both in my (teaching) sessions and in all my writings, comes only from the presence of the Qur'an and Its treasures....")

in the souls" of the small set of intellectuals who might otherwise be led astray by opposing arguments. He is especially vehement in denying any claims that a particular theological understanding or formulation of religious beliefs might be *necessary* for knowing God. The drastically limited usefulness of the Kalam schools, from that perspective, is underlined in his later remark (at p. 161.8) that "The science of Kalam, despite its dignity, is not needed at all by most people; indeed a single theologian is enough for one country."]

[157.14] So if an individual has faith that the Qur'an is God's Speech, and is absolutely assured of that, let them take their credo from the Qur'an itself, without any (personal) interpretation or bias....[249]

[162] CONTINUATION

INCLUDING WHAT OUGHT TO BE GENERALLY BELIEVED: IT IS THE CREDO OF THE PEOPLE OF (OUTWARD) SUBMISSION ACCEPTED WITHOUT ANY INQUIRING INTO ARGUMENTS OR PROOFS[250]

[The contents of this section, divided according to the two parts of the Islamic testimony of faith (*shahāda*), are largely an extension and amplification of the basic Qur'anic affirmations concerning the nature of God, Creation, Prophecy, and mankind's "Return" already outlined in the preceding section.[251] Much more important for all readers of the *Futūhāt* are the general explanations concerning these different "credos" (ᶜ*aqā'id*) that Ibn ᶜArabī added at the very end of this section in his fuller, revised version of this Introduction.] ...

[173] So that, in abridged and summary form, was the credo of the masses (ᶜ*awāmm*) among the people of outward submission (*islām*) and unthinking compliance (*taqlīd*), and the people of inquiry (i.e., Kalam).

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[249]In the following pages (158-161) Ibn ᶜArabī sketches out his first and simplest Qur'anic credo, beginning with some of the basic divine Names, the existence and functions of prophecy, and affirmations about the aims and sufficiency of the Qur'an itself in helping human beings to reach their ultimate end. The same basic outline is followed, albeit in much greater depth, in each of the succeeding credal statements.

[250]Originally this section (pp. 162-172; I, 36-38 in the older Cairo edition) was the concluding part of Ibn ᶜArabī's Introduction. This subtitle was added in the second recension, when the last two "credos" were also appended.

[251]More than half of this section is included--albeit with highly significant additions and omissions-- at the beginning of a much later Hanbalite (and Qadiri Sufi) polemic work translated by R. Deladrière (and attributed throughout to Ibn ᶜArabī), *La Profession de Foi* (Paris, 1978), pp. 91-101. [See the important cautions concerning the dangerous misattribution of this entire Hanbalite text to Ibn ᶜArabī discussed in our survey of "Ibn ᶜArabī and His Interpreters, Part II: Influences and Interpretations", pp. 741-744.]

Next I shall follow it--God willing--with the credo of "the educated youth",[252] in which I've included an extremely abridged summary of *al-Iqtisād*.[253] In it I've alluded to the sources of the (theological) proofs for this religious community, in rhymed prose to help the student remember it. I've named it "The Treatise Concerning What is Well-Known Among the Beliefs of the People of External Forms (*ahl al-rusūm*)."

Then I shall follow that with the credo of the elite among the people of God, the "verifiers" (*muhaqqiqūn*) among the people of the path of God, the people of (spiritual) unveiling and finding[254].... And that completes the Introduction to this book.

But as for presenting the credo of the quintessence (of the spiritual elite), I have not given it in detail in any one place, because of the profundities it contains. But I have given it scattered throughout the chapters of this book, exhaustively and clearly explained--but in different places, as we've mentioned. So those on whom God has bestowed the understanding of these things will recognize them and distinguish them from other matters. For this is the True Knowing and the Veridical Saying, and there is no goal beyond It. "The blind and the truly seeing are alike" in Its regard:[255] It brings together things most far and most near, and conjoins the most high and most low....

[187] CONTINUATION (*Wasl*)

CONCERNING THE BELIEF OF THE ELITE AMONG THE PEOPLE OF GOD, BETWEEN (DISCURSIVE) INQUIRY AND (SPIRITUAL) UNVEILING

Praise be to God, Who bewilders the intellects (of human seekers) in (what He bestows as) the results of their spiritual aspirations...! Now (our) intellects have a limit at which they stop, insofar as they are (discursively) thinking, *not* insofar as they are receptive (to God's inspiration). So we say

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[252]Or "the singing youth" (?): moreover, the narrator of that strange colloquium (see following note) is placed in the feminine here, but appears in the masculine within the story itself (at 174.3 and 186.13).

[253]Possibly (following the suggestion of O. Yahya) an allusion to al-Ghazālī's well known Kalam catechism, *al-Iqtisād fī al-Iᶜtiqād* ("The Mean With Regard to Belief"). While the discussion does use Kalam language (and carefully avoids the Quranic quotations used in the preceding discussions), it must be admitted that the further possible connections to Ghazālī's work are not entirely obvious. The narrator of this section claims to describe the encounter at the center of the world of "four learned individuals" from the four corners of the globe, and their common search for the knowledge truly worth knowing. It consists of four didactic monologues dealing successively with God; His Attributes; creation and prophecy; and mankind's salvation and eschatology--roughly the same order as in the previous credo..

[254]Or "(true) Being": *ahl al-kashf wa al-wujūd*. All of these are terms Ibn ᶜArabī frequently uses more or less equivalently to refer to those he considered the (relatively) accomplished or realized Sufis. (See the many illustrations from the *Futūhāt* in Chittick, *SPK*, Index s.vv.)

[255]Unless the editor has left out a negation here, Ibn ᶜArabī appears to be playing with the expected Quranic *contrast* of the blind and seeing (cf. 6:50, etc.): in that case these final remarks may be alluding to the particularly metaphysical, universal character of the wisdom in question here.

with regard to something *we* consider 'rationally' impossible that it may not be impossible in relation to God--just as we say with regard to what the intellect considers possible that it may be impossible in relation to God....

[The rest of this long section--Ibn ^CArabī's longest addition to this second version of the Introduction--takes up some 65 different theological topics, which together include virtually all of the questions covered in the remainder of this book. In many of those cases he focuses on or at least alludes to the *contrasts* between what the "intellect" (usually presented here in terms of the conclusions and methods of Asharite Kalam) would consider possible and what might actually be the case according to either the Qur'an or the results of authentic spiritual unveiling. As such, these discussions illustrate both the limitations of intellectual reasoning and the tensions and interplay between the intellect, Scripture, and Ibn ^CArabī's (or other Sufis') spiritual "openings" which are the recurrent structural leitmotif of the rest of the *Futūhāt*: the whole book can well be viewed as an extended commentary on this concluding section. Finally, Ibn ^CArabī's last words in this section and the Introduction as a whole are a pointed reminder of the many challenges raised by this multi-leveled process of writing--and the multiple readings and practical spiritual efforts it demands:]

[213.11] Now this was the credo of the elite among the people of God. But as for the credo of the quintessence of the elite concerning God, that is a matter beyond this one, which we have scattered throughout this book because most intellects, being veiled by their thoughts, fall short of perceiving it due to their lack of spiritual purification (*tajrīd*).

The Introduction to this book is finished.... God speaks the Truth, and He guides on the right Way.

Ibn ‘Arabī's Rhetoric of Realisation: Keys to Reading and "Translating" the *Meccan Illuminations*

> *...Thus there is nothing in the world **but** Translator, if it is translated from divine new-Speaking.*[256] *So understand that!*

PART I: IBN ‘ARABĪ'S AUDIENCES AND INTENTIONS

As the necessarily collective, decades-long task of the gradual integral translation of Ibn ‘Arabī's '*Meccan Illuminations*' (*al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*) begins to take shape, there is an obviously growing need for providing the most basic practical tools—beginning with indispensable preparations, orientations and cautions—which are specifically required for a fruitful reading of that unique and truly monumental work.[257] Those specialised scholars and translators, primarily working in English and French, who have been actively involved over the past two decades in the pioneering exploratory studies of that extraordinary work are all particularly aware of the tremendous obstacles facing any attempt at the integral translation of its longer chapters.[258] Yet all the same, throughout

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[256] From chapter 366, IV 333.11; much of the surrounding central section of chapter 366 is translated in full in volume one of *Ibn 'Arabī: The Meccan Revelations*, section entitled 'At the End of Time.'

  Hadīth ilāhī: translating more freely, we could also read 'from divine Communication.' *Hadīth* here, as whenever Ibn ‘Arabī is referring to the creative *divine* 'Speech' (*kalām* = the corresponding dominant metaphor of the world as divine '*music*' in Hafez and other later Sufi poetic traditions), conveys an additional emphasis on the *constantly 'newly emerging'* (i.e., eternally re-newed, at every instant) nature of the Reality in question—as well as the an even more important 'triadic' relation between the 'Speaker,' what is 'expressed' (i.e., the divine 'Knowledge'), and the 'receptor' (the fully human being, *insān*, and all of creation). Without resorting to neologisms, 'communication' may come closest to conveying all these different dimensions in everyday English.

[257] People have often remarked on the mysterious lack of any extensive 'commentary' tradition on this work in its entirety, as is so richly available for Ibn ‘Arabī's much shorter *'Bezels of Wisdom'* (*Fusūs al-Hikam*).   Some of the *many* reasons for that lack should be much clearer by the end of this essay.

[258] In particular, readers may refer to W. Chittick's helpful and just remarks alluding to many of those obstacles in the introductory sections of the abovementioned *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* [*SPK*] and *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn ‘Arabī's Cosmology* (Albany, 1998) [*SDG*].   This essay is intended to clarify and to make more explicit, for those who are not scholarly specialists in this field, many of the wide-ranging considerations only briefly alluded to or assumed in those summary remarks.

Western scholars have been exploring and 'mining' the *Futūhāt*, for various purposes, since the first partial translations (including some very short chapters) by figures like M. Asin Palacios and M. Vālsan earlier in the past century. To the best of our knowledge, though, the only complete and relatively reliable translation of an entire, representatively longer chapter of that work yet available

the long process of preparing complete translations of a number of key chapters for two planned volumes on Ibn 'Arabī's eschatology and his religious, ethical and political philosophy,[259] we have still been profoundly, and repeatedly, surprised by the many entirely new challenges of this enterprise. More positively, those unexpected difficulties have gradually served to bring out the many distinctive ways in which the *Futūhāt* themselves constitute *a new and unique literary form* with its own specific rhetoric: i.e., its own distinctive articulation of aims, audiences, language and structures—many of them radically different even from the more familiar rhetorical features (at least for most modern-day students of Ibn 'Arabī) of the '*Bezels of Wisdom*' (*Fusūs al-Hikam*). To take another analogy, moving from the study of Ibn 'Arabī's *Fusūs* to the actual reading of the *Futūhāt* is somewhat like the transition from reading the condensed ghazals or quatrains of Rumi, which are most familiar to popular English-language audiences today, to the serious study of his immense *Mathnawī* (*Masnavī*).[260] And in each of those cases, it should not be surprising— especially given everything we know about both authors concerned—to note that the essential keys to unlocking and appreciating their intentions and structures are so often to be found in a fresh and

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is M. Gloton's *Traité d'Amour* (Paris, 1986), a 320-page version of the famous chapter 178 (= only 41 Arabic pages, II 320-361), a text which had already been carefully studied by both Asin and Henry Corbin. (For entirely unexplained reasons, the translator of this pioneering French version nowhere indicates that this is actually a chapter from the *Futūhāt*, and only at the very end (p. 263) quotes Ibn 'Arabī as indicating it is from chapter [actually, the *juz'*] '115' !) Unsurprisingly, the translator's many unacknowledged personal editorial additions required for this transformation of a single chapter into a self-sufficient 'book' tend to obscure or even entirely eliminate some of the most distinctive features of Ibn 'Arabī's own characteristic rhetoric, assumptions, and demands on his readers which are discussed in this essay.

Apart from Gloton's pioneering volume, the most extensive and reliable translations—i.e., with all the adequate explanatory and contextual background needed by non-specialists—of relatively complete sections from longer chapters of the *Futūhāt*, in both English and French, are to be found in the bilingual volume *Les Illuminations de La Mecque/The Meccan Illuminations: Textes choisis/Selected Texts*; in the recent, revised version (with our new Introduction and bibliographic discussion) of the English translations from that volume, *Ibn 'Arabī: The Meccan Revelations*; and especially in William Chittick's monumental cosmological study of the *Futūhāt*, the *SDG*. Other volumes including longer selections from the *Futūhāt* have also appeared in recent years in Russian by A. Knysh; German by Alma Giese in an extensive volume, *Urwolke und Welt: Mystische Texte des Größten Meisters* (Munich, 2002); and Spanish by Victor Palleja de Bustinea.

[259] **Tentatively entitled *Ibn 'Arabī's 'Divine Comedy': Eschatology and Spiritual Realisation in the 'Meccan Illuminations,'* and *Paths to the Real: Freedom, Creativity, Diversity and Tolerance in Ibn 'Arabī's Religious Philosophy.* [[ASK JAMES MORRIS ABOUT THESE REFERENCES]]**

[260] It is noteworthy that traditional students and commentators of both the *Futūhāt* and Rumi's *Mathnawī* have tended to focus on relatively scattered, 'atomistic' readings of very small parts (even single lines) or broad, thematic perspectives. One exception is the far-reaching, pioneering work on the deeper organising structures of chiasmus and parallelism underlying the entire *Masnavī* by S.G. Safavi Simon Weightman, *Rumi's Mystical Design* (Albany, NY, 2009)

more probing, sensitive reading and heightened appreciation of the corresponding rhetorical structures of both the Qur'an and certain hadith.

The purpose of this essay is to highlight some of the most practically important of those new and distinctive features of the *Meccan Illuminations*, from the perspective of readers limited to English (or French), especially those characteristics which flow from the ongoing dilemmas of translation and all the accompanying necessities of explanation and contextualisation. Since the spectrum of possibilities facing any translator of Ibn 'Arabī is so vast,[261] it is especially important that non-specialist readers become sufficiently familiar with the actual range of those basic possibilities that they can begin to *actively* participate, in a necessarily ongoing way, in 're-translating' the approximative English words they are faced with into a more adequate and nuanced form, especially in relation to their own vitally indispensable illustrations and experiences of the spiritual situations and phenomena in question.

As our epigraph indicates, the necessity of this personalised, constantly renewed process of 'active translation' is in fact quite central to the characteristic rhetoric and intentions of Ibn 'Arabī's writing, already in its original Arabic forms. Indeed the challenge of working with different translators, with their necessarily varying approaches and understandings, is in itself an extremely useful and productive spiritual (and intellectual) exercise, as is already familiar to students of similarly dense and complex works such as the Bible, Qur'an, *I Ching*, or Plato's dialogues.

FROM READING TO REALISATION:

The ultimate aim of all of Ibn 'Arabī's writing is to support and intensify each of his readers' necessarily distinctive and uniquely personal process—at once both spiritual and intellectual—of '*realisation*' (to use one of Ibn 'Arabī's favourite expressions, *tahqīq*), or of evolving spiritual intelligence.[262] In short, the most essential elements of that process are each reader's ongoing, inherently cumulative combination of experience (in all its forms and dimensions); 'action' (again in *all* dimensions); observable consequences; and the appropriate active reflection on the interactions between all the preceding elements. What Ibn 'Arabī's writing, particularly in the *Futūhāt*, can add for readers actually involved in the process of realisation is a mysteriously effective set of guidelines,

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[261] We should stress that the larger problems that are the focus of this essay are *not* primarily a matter of the relative qualifications and capacities of each translator, nor do they have to do with the obvious issue (faced by every honest translator) of simply not yet understanding certain passages of the *Futūhāt*. In fact, the more a translator actually comes to know about Ibn 'Arabī and his cultural and historical contexts, and the more possible *audiences* one is genuinely acquainted with, the greater the range of complexities and possibilities involved in any effort of translation.

[262] See our detailed discussions of this central theme in Islamic thought in two recent volumes: *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation*, (Cambridge, 2004), which illustrates this theme in regard to a key chapter from the *Futūhāt*, as well as in the works of several other key Muslim thinkers. And also in *The Reflective Heart: Discovering Spiritual Intelligence in Ibn 'Arabī's 'Meccan Illuminations'* (Louisville, 2005), which concretely details Ibn 'Arabī's development of this process in the *Futūhāt*, in relation to a number of fundamental spiritual themes. See also the many passages from the *Futūhāt* explicitly discussing this theme, translated in *SDG*, index under 'realization,' 'realizers,' etc.

allusions, 'mirrors' and spiritual 'catalysts' and (to use the classical Qur'anic term) '*reminders*'—primarily drawn from the Qur'an, hadith, and the related reflections and inspirations[263] of Ibn 'Arabī and other proven spiritual teachers and interpreters of those sources—which ultimately have a potent transforming effect on all four equally essential elements of their unique personal 'equation' of realisation, even if their most obvious initial impact is often at the level of more strictly intellectual reflection.[264]

While various dimensions of that wider process will be discussed in more detail below, the most obvious feature of the unique literary form and structure[265] of the *Meccan Illuminations* is that Ibn 'Arabī's language and arrangement of 'topics' in that work is carefully designed like a series of 'speed bumps', 'detours', and mental or spiritual 'hooks' designed to constantly slow down,[266] re-route,

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[263] Whose central importance is already broadly emphasised precisely in the spiritual '*openings*' or 'illuminations' that provide the title of this work: see also the discussions of Ibn 'Arabī's title to be found in each of the above-mentioned recent studies of the *Futūhāt* (n. 3).

[264] Given the wide-ranging limitations—and scholarly and other expectations—normally connected with academic books, it should not be surprising that this is the level where most of the major existing studies of the *Futūhāt*, as of Ibn 'Arabī more generally, are still 'publicly' situated—even if their authors, in almost every case, visibly try to suggest the range of ways their readers can or should move beyond those limitations.

[265] We say 'unique' because it is quite remarkable, given the extraordinarily widespread and lasting influences of the *Futūhāt*, even as far as China and Indonesia, that there has apparently not been any serious attempt at imitating—in Arabic prose, at least—all the distinctive rhetorical and literary structures of this work. One does find at least a pale reflection of this style in parts of Jīlī's famous *al-insān al-kāmil*, and the closest partial stylistic imitation that we know of is found throughout the Arabic philosophical writings of the famous later Iranian philosopher, Sadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī. We have pointed out the importance of his characteristic usage of many key rhetorical features of the *Futūhāt* (including those described below in this essay) in our *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, (Princeton, 1981). However, to the best of our knowledge, the profound implications of this 'Akbari' rhetorical style for our understanding of Sadra's thought are not extensively discussed in the traditional oral teaching of his works—they and have certainly not yet been adequately reflected in published discussions of his philosophy.

The attempt to communicate Ibn 'Arabī's intentions in new, creatively adapted forms of *Persian* poetry, and a distinctive genre of mixed prose and poetry, is of course a very different matter. Devoted students of the Shaykh's thought, from 'Erāqī to Jāmī and beyond, carefully transmuted his teachings and deeper intentions into entirely new genres which helped shape the Islamic humanities and the spread and practice of Islam throughout the Eastern Islamic world, in ways we have discussed and outlined in a wide range of (as yet unpublished) conference papers, lectures and translations. A number of those key historical 'points of transmission' of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings, are alluded to in various sections and notes below; **see especially the references cited at n. 52 below.**

[266] Many of those distinctive rhetorical devices are already well illustrated in Ibn 'Arabī's *Bezels of Wisdom*, and thus carefully discussed in the classical and recent literature devoted to that work, such as the relevant chapters of Michael Sells' *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago, 1994). For

disengage, question, and—at least ideally—re-focus and eventually transform our normal habitual, conditioned mental and perceptual processes. All of this with the immediate concrete aim of helping each serious reader to stop, look afresh, actively listen and begin to enter into a deeper, actively effective cooperation with that One teacher, guide, master, and companion who is always 'the Greatest' (*akbar*).[267]

However, the first practical effect of initially encountering this unique literary form, for almost every reader (past and present) is an immediate, usually somewhat unpleasant, impression of frustration, difficulty, confusion, disorder, 'mixing of genres,' intentional puzzlement—possibly resulting, at one extreme, in a kind of angry resentment or boredom whose roots and significance are discussed

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the *Futūhāt*, in addition to the translation volumes already mentioned above, see the magisterial and far-reaching discussions included in M. Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean Without Shore: Ibn 'Arabī, the Book, and the Law* (Albany, NY, 1993).   [For ease of access for English-only readers, references are given in this essay to English translations of this and other works, when they are available; obviously, readers should refer to the original French titles when that is possible; cf. *Un océan sans Rivage : Ibn arabî, le Livre et la Loi* (Paris, 1992)]

In the *Futūhāt*, however, the most distinctive *new* stylistic devices and challenges for careful readers appear on a more 'horizontal' plane, having to do with Ibn 'Arabī's extremely complex arrangement (including the puzzle-like 'scattering,' etc. discussed in Part II below) of a far more complex set of different topics, sciences, telling anecdotes, scriptural allusions, and the like both within his individual chapters and its six larger 'Parts' (*fasl*), and especially *throughout the book as a whole*—in such a way that only a reader who has spent years studying the *whole* work can really claim with some degree of confidence to understand all the roles and meanings of its different constituent 'parts.'

[267] There is a familiar literary genre (and corresponding set of titles), in classical Arabic literature, of works intended to help provide the guidance that would otherwise normally be provided by a specialised doctor, jurist, and so on. (In Arabic: ...*man lā yahduruhu al-faqīh, al-tabīb*, etc.)   At a far more serious and all-encompassing level, one can understand the *Meccan Illuminations* as intended to stand in something like that kind of relation to the proper wholistic understanding of *all three* ontological dimensions of the universal divine 'Book.'   For example, at the level of the proper interpretation and application of the divine 'wise-rulings' (*ahkām*) of Islam, in particular, Ibn 'Arabī quite explicitly states his bold ambitions for the self-sufficiency of this work and his comprehensive approach in a key passage of '*Explanation and Clarification*' (*OY*, V, 162-163; ch. 68) that comes near the very beginning of his lengthy discussion of the obligatory prescribed forms of worship (the *'ibādāt*) in the *Futūhāt*.

More broadly, all of the *Futūhāt* can itself be seen as an equally comprehensive 'response' to al-Ghazālī's famous *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*—just as chapter 73 includes his unique famous response to the riddling 'spiritual questions of al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī—in that it carefully integrates the already vast contents of that earlier Sufi work, while at the same time providing in all necessary detail the *potential comprehensive spiritual and intellectual responses* which al-Ghazālī, quite intentionally, normally leaves to each of his readers to work out for themselves.

below.[268] (The vaguely reminiscent analogies of that initial experience to the famous reactions of an earlier generation of readers to the unfamiliar literary experiments of Pound, Eliot or Joyce are anything but coincidental!)   While the deeper effects, rhythms and intentions of the unique literary form of these spiritual 'Openings' (*Futūhāt*) can only become evident through a great deal of patient and active interaction with Ibn 'Arabī's text, the immediate, unavoidable effect of that encounter—in its own time and over the centuries, as much as for today's 'foreign' readers—is to confront head-on most readers' natural expectations and habits of reading (at least of expository prose) as consisting in the 'horizontal,' consecutive, progressively more advanced, 'quantitative' *accumulation* of a single conceptually coherent form of knowledge and insight.[269] In fact, it seems that Ibn 'Arabī's typical prose here—just as much as his equally distinctive and challenging poetic style—was in the most fundamental ways equally unique, unfamiliar and intentionally 'provocative' and puzzling in his own time as it is today.[270]   The remarkable lack of any later imitators is one very telling indicator of that fact.

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[268] As with the *Fusūs al-Hikam* (which generated dozens of commentaries needed by those already intimately familiar with its languages and cultural premises), it is important for modern readers depending on translations of the *Futūhāt* to know with confidence that their initial impressions of difficulty are *not* just the result of own unavoidable unfamiliarity with so many aspects of Ibn 'Arabī's culture, background, language and the like. In fact, such impressions closely mirror the intended reactions and effects of the actual Arabic text!

The earliest Muslim interpreters and teachers of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas, when working with non-Sufi or non-Arab audiences unfamiliar with his work, often faced many of the same basic problems of communication discussed in this essay. One particularly striking—and instructive—illustration of that process, and of the situation-specific pedagogical creativity it necessarily requires in any age, is to be found in the commentaries of Sayyid Haydar 'Amulī (b. 720/1320), who devoted much of his writing to explaining and justifying the Shaykh's works to what was, in his time, the still largely hostile, or at least highly suspicious, group of learned Imami-Shia religious scholars. See especially the fascinating set of his 28 different mandala-like illustrative diagrams included in the edition (by H. Corbin and O. Yahia) of the already lengthy (almost 600 pages in Arabic) *Introduction* to his immense commentary on the *Fusūs al-Hikam*, entitled *Al-Muqaddimāt min Kitāb Nass Al-Nusūs* (Tehran/Paris, 1974), edited by Haydar Amuli.

[269] It is important to stress that the overall, 'horizontal' dimension of the construction of the *Futūhāt* does involve many 'progressive' and eventually unifying larger structures, whose gradual unveiling and discovery is clearly intended to keep committed readers actively engaged in studying the work (see, for example, the section on 'scattering' below). But fortunately, a full knowledge of those deep-structures is not at all needed to use and benefit from the earlier and individual chapters, or to begin to decipher these 'meanings' which are Ibn 'Arabī's primary aim.

[270] The one major exception to this remark, of course, was the much deeper familiarity of most of Ibn 'Arabī's original Muslim audiences with the unique rhetoric, forms and language of Qur'an, which in itself (as we shall see below) immediately helps readers sharing that familiarity to grasp at least some of the inspirations and intentions of many of the most distinctive features of Ibn 'Arabī's writing.

Fortunately, most of the unfamiliar 'vertical' and qualitative intentions which dictated these forms and the corresponding requirements for a fruitful reading of this work do become evident as soon as we approach it from within the indispensable wider context of 'realisation' we have just mentioned. A few widely familiar literary-spiritual parallels which might prove helpful for some, are the ways in which people normally approach and use texts like the *I Ching*, the Psalms, or the ghazals of Hafez: in such cases, of course, most readers quickly discover how little is to be gained from quantitatively and quickly 'reading through' a large body of such texts intended for very different purposes. In particular, once we appreciate that the aim of the *Futūhāt* is to deepen our spiritual awareness and understanding, and to develop all the wide-ranging dimensions of practical spiritual intelligence, we can better appreciate that reading and studying this work in the spirit in which it was written is *not* that different in essence—if not in scope and depth!—from reading any of the host of widely available 'manuals' for the many familiar forms of traditional bodily-spiritual disciplines (Tai Chi, yoga, and so on). Not surprisingly, most 'readers' should quickly discover that such written instructions are not at all the same as the actual exercises—and eventually, that even the 'exercises,' if attempted in isolation, are not really the same as working with an experienced teacher or guide.

So it helps to approach these far more complex exercises of spiritual intelligence in at least a similarly open and committed spirit, and with a similar appreciation of the appropriate amounts of time, actual practice and ongoing dedication required for any lastingly effective results. Fortunately, at this point it may help to point out one essential 'saving' feature of Ibn 'Arabī's writing: its distinctive 'holographic' quality[271] means that readers can (and often should) begin to approach the *Futūhāt* precisely at those particular points which they themselves find most immediately accessible, interesting and motivating. The universal spiritual principles Ibn 'Arabī has set out to communicate—and the unique language of the Qur'an on which he always relies—are such that the practice and dawning recognition of any 'individual' part quickly engages and reveals the much larger whole that is always involved in the Shaykh's writing and his ultimate intentions.

PRACTICAL STUDY CONTEXTS:

While the remainder of this essay concentrates on various facets of the distinctive rhetorical and literary structures of the *Futūhāt*, it is helpful to begin with some more practical and concrete implications of the embeddedness of that work in the wider human process of 'realisation.' In that regard, one of the most encouraging aspects of the apparently global contemporary interest in the *Fusūs al-Hikam* and other available translations of Ibn 'Arabī's writings that has developed in recent decades is the way in which people often seem to be studying his writings slowly and in small groups. Practically speaking, both of those terms—i.e., 'small' and 'group'—are equally essential.[272]

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[271] I.e., such that the full original 'image' is in reality contained in and can be revealed through any surviving 'part.' This fundamental feature of the *Futūhāt* is particularly well-illustrated through the wide-ranging selection of longer translated passages, from throughout that work, which are brought together in Chittick, *SDG*. Readers of that volume very quickly discover that the range of subjects Ibn 'Arabī actually deals with, in virtually any of the many longer selections included there, typically goes far beyond whatever 'cosmological' points those selections are explicitly intended to illustrate.

[272] Such informal study-groups are in many ways the present-day equivalent of the earlier, less formal, nascent 'Sufi' institutions which gradually spread throughout many parts of the Islamic world, in the centuries following Ibn 'Arabī—in a slow process of institutionalisation of which Ibn 'Arabī himself, when he began to encounter such institutions after leaving the Maghreb, always

Given Ibn 'Arabī's doctrinally central teaching about the uniqueness, complementarity and essential role of the infinite (and endlessly renewed) divine 'Self-manifestations' irreplaceably conveyed through each creature—and most fundamentally, through each earthly human being—it is difficult to see how far anyone can normally advance in developing actual *spiritual* intelligence (i.e., beyond the strictly conceptual, mental forms of understanding) through purely solitary study and reflection on this unique text. Not only does each student-participant immediately provide additional fascinating illustrations and insights into the implications of each portion of the Shaykh's writing. Even more importantly, it is almost impossible, under any conditions, for a solitary person (or a 'closed,' authoritarian group!) to recognise, and then begin to work with, their own most characteristic spiritual and mental 'blind spots' and habitually conditioned qualities, such as those that help to constitute each person's distinctive public 'personality' and character.   Indeed, even if we do *begin* with reading alone, the inevitable implications of our epigraph from the *Futūhāt*—of Ibn 'Arabī's guiding vision of the *whole world* as both 'translator' and ever-renewed divine 'Speaking'— should quickly involve us in far wider perspectives and forms of participation in this cosmic 'divine comedy.'

 Equally as important as group study, though, is the operative adjective '*small'*—and thus, we might add, necessarily 'informal' and non-institutionalised. As indicated by Ibn 'Arabī's own countless personal anecdotes and illustrations throughout this significantly entitled collection of his own spiritual 'openings', everyone's initial awakening to the relevant dimensions of spiritual life and realisation typically begins with what is 'inner': with our dreams, intentions, and the vast phenomenological field of both spiritual and less elevated intuitions summed up in Ibn 'Arabī's extraordinarily elaborate and concretely appropriate technical terminology. This particular book, from first to last, is *only* seriously accessible and lastingly interesting to what he constantly calls his true 'companions'—the 'people actually worthy' (*ahl*) of 'unveiling', 'finding', 'witnessing' and divine 'informing' and the like. Spiritual intelligence or 'realisation', of course, means developing our capacity to 'translate' and 'read' the interactions of all those theophanies or divine *Signs*, both '*in the souls*' and '*on the horizons*' (41:53).[273]   But the genuine intimacy and empathy that are so practically necessary to support that process—some of the richest and rarest blessings of the spiritual path—are extremely difficult to discover, much less to nurture and sustain, for most people, beyond a small group of companions.

The unfolding development and deepening of spiritual intelligence is like nothing so much as an ongoing, moment-to-moment 'whole-life review,' a conscious, constantly active anticipation of that

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remained highly suspicious. As readers can quickly test for themselves, the actual processes of spiritual learning described in his writing (and most densely in the *Futūhāt*) are indeed universal and immediately accessible all over the world, depending only on the right participants. Such groups are most effective if they are small and relatively egalitarian (i.e., enough to enable the honest, intimate sharing by all participants of the central practical elements of realisation), and are most fruitful and illuminating if they include people with a range of different personalities, backgrounds and practical roles in life.

[273] See the summary discussion of this process in the Introduction to *Orientations: Islamic thought in a world civilisation*, cited above, and the detailed thematic illustrations of the process of 'realisation' in the *Futūhāt* included in *The Reflective Heart: Discovering Spiritual Intelligence in Ibn 'Arabī's 'Meccan Illuminations*.'

post-mortem experience which is carefully described in the spiritual classics of every tradition. And obviously the most educationally effective, lastingly influential aspects of that cosmic educative process (of each soul's unending 'private lessons') ordinarily lie precisely in our mistakes and apparent 'failures,' and in the more visible earthly consequences of such failures—i.e., in the initially painful revelation of our actual spiritual tests, intentions, blindnesses, insensitivities, confusions and the like. Precisely the sort of thing, Ibn 'Arabī is well aware, that none but the *malāmiyya*—those rare 'People of (intentional) Blame' whom he situates near the summit of his spiritual hierarchy— would normally share with any but a small and intimate group of true 'realisers.'[274]

THE FOUR 'AUDIENCES' OF THE *MECCAN ILLUMINATIONS*:

 Nothing is more important for understanding the distinctive literary forms and aims of the *Meccan Illuminations* than the discussion of the various essential 'levels' of belief and knowledge which Ibn 'Arabī has himself carefully placed at the very beginning of his Introduction (*muqaddima*) to that work, along with a corresponding series of progressively more challenging 'credos' reflecting those radically different human spiritual aptitudes and conditions.[275] Students of Ibn 'Arabī without Arabic, who have primarily worked with his *Fusūs al-Hikam*, will already be helpfully acquainted with his basic recurring distinction—most fully developed in his twelfth chapter there on '*The Wisdom of the Heart*' (the 'Bezel' of Shu'ayb) and the corresponding commentaries—between those different groups of people whose perceptions of all reality, including God, are primarily dominated and determined by their conditioned, usually unconscious 'beliefs;'[276] by their limited individual

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[274] On the *malāmiyya* and related spiritual figures (such as the 'solitaries,' *al-afrād*) in Ibn 'Arabī, see the profound and illuminating discussions—primarily relating to the *Futūhāt*—included in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*. The importance of these themes is more accessibly dramatised through the corresponding recurrent *malāmī* figure of the '*rend*' in the *Dīvān* of Hafez. The centrality of such 'educational experiences' in the actual process of spiritual realisation also highlights the intrinsic difficulties posed, for the fruitful study of Ibn 'Arabī, by too rigidly institutionalised or hierarchical settings, which naturally tend to create either social pressures for hypocrisy, or unhelpful illusions of safely 'passive' learning.

[275] Those key sections of his Introduction are more fully translated and outlined, with more extensive explanations and notes, in '**How to Study the Futūhāt: Ibn 'Arabī's own Advice,' pp. 73-89 in *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī: 750th Anniversary Commemoration Volume*, ed. S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan, (Shaftesbury/Rockport, Element Books, 1993); that translation and study is also included, in revised form, in our forthcoming volume *The Reflective Heart: Discovering Spiritual Intelligence in Ibn 'Arabī's 'Meccan Illuminations.'* [complete…?]]** As discussed below, Ibn 'Arabī's discussion there establishes basic epistemological and spiritual distinctions closely corresponding—in both form and phenomenological function—to the related images of the Sun, 'divided line,' and 'cave' at the centre of Plato's *Republic*.

[276] Due to the unfortunately common and painfully inappropriate English mistranslation of the central Qur'anic term *īmān* ('true faith' or '(justified) inner certainty') by 'belief,' it is essential to explain here that the common Arabic expression for the kind of deeply-rooted 'belief' (*i'tiqād*) that is Ibn 'Arabī's concern—and which, quite significantly, does not even occur in the Qur'an!—is not particularly 'theological' and, for Ibn 'Arabī, does not even particularly refer to consciously articulated 'belief-systems.' Instead, as he makes quite clear in the *Fusūs*, his concern is the deeper

'restricting intellect;'[277] or by inspired spiritual 'knowing'[278] and divine 'informing' (*ta'rīf*). While that most elementary three-fold epistemological distinction continues to operate throughout all of Ibn 'Arabī's writings, his pointedly significant remarks here in the Introduction to the *Futūhāt* are considerably more nuanced, and highlight much more clearly the extraordinary complexity of the possible aims and functions of his rhetoric throughout this immense work.

Specifically, Ibn 'Arabī explicitly adds here a fourth distinct form of awareness—the immediate knowing of our experiential 'states,' spiritual and otherwise—which in fact has the effect of *revealing the existentially fundamental operative question of '**discernment**,' the essential key to every form and expression of spiritual intelligence, as the central aim of these revelatory 'Openings.'* Taken in isolation, of course, these abstract epistemological (and ontological distinctions) are not particularly illuminating, since it is their detailed concrete phenomenology, their actual practical significance in the real processes of spiritual life and growth, that is gradually brought to life

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human reality of all the hobbling, 'restrictive limitations' (the root-meaning of the underlying Arabic term), blinders, unquestioned presuppositions and 'lenses'—usually unconscious, for the most part—which unknowingly determine and structure our normal experience and perceptions of all of reality.

[277] *'Aql*: here again an important caution is essential. Ibn 'Arabī—like most other Sufi writers, in Arabic and other languages—tends to use the term *'aql* in three related, but also radically different senses: (a) to refer to the limited 'mental reasoning processes' or 'reasoning' of the *individual human mind*—in which case he typically emphasises the limitations and shortfalls of this dimension (highlighted again by a related root-meaning of that Arabic term); and (b) to refer occasionally (although his later philosophical commentators use *'aql* much more often in this sense) to the highest, First manifestation of the *divine* Knowledge—a dimension which Ibn 'Arabī himself tends to discuss using a dozen or more interchangeable symbolic expressions ('Reality of Muhammad,' etc.). There is also (c) a third very common sense, usually in the participial form (*'āqil*), where the expression has the more everyday Arabic, religio-legal sense of someone who is simply intelligent and old enough to be 'morally and religiously responsible,' or more broadly, possessing practical intelligence and basic 'common sense.'

Now readers familiar with Ibn 'Arabī, Rumi and their like usually have no difficulty seeing immediately, from the context, which particular sense of *'aql* or *'āqil* is actually intended. But the difficulties this contrast poses for translators—and the confusion that it frequently generates among unsuspecting readers—are often substantial. Virtually the same is true, again in Ibn 'Arabī and more widely, with the Arabic word *nafs* (usually translated as 'soul' or 'self')—which, depending on the context, can be referring to the highest, immortal aspects of the 'soul' (i.e., the 'spirit,' *rūh*); to the lowest, human-animal (basharic) drives and automaticities of the human soul; or to the 'Universal Soul,' the second-highest level of divine Self-manifestation, after the universal, 'First Intellect' just mentioned.

[278] *Ma'rifa*: it is important to note that the actual titles of most chapters in the *Futūhāt* are explicitly devoted to one or another of the many forms of this 'inner knowing,' whose Arabic root is close to the French sense of *connaître*, i.e., to immediately 'recognise' and 'know intimately' and directly, from firsthand experience.

throughout these *Futūhāt*. Within that intended phenomenological context of realisation, however, their significance as indispensable keys to Ibn 'Arabī's distinctive language and intentions here can be summarised in the following five fundamental points.

- First, all four of these 'levels' or forms of cognition are at least potentially—and usually actively—alive and accessible to some extent (if only potentially) in the broader experience of *each* human being.[279] Correspondingly, perhaps the most obvious key purpose of the *Futūhāt* is therefore to 'open up' our awareness of those higher dimensions of spiritual understanding which have remained either unconscious or not significantly actualised.

- Secondly, there are critically important distinctions—either between what is 'true' and 'false', or more commonly, between what is *real* and illusory or misunderstood—that operate *within* each level or dimension of knowing. To take only one example, at the level of 'beliefs,' the movement from purely unconscious and habitual conditioning to greater conscious awareness of a previously unconscious determinant belief-structure is a familiar and essential basic step in virtually every spiritual path or discipline.

- Thirdly, the language of 'levels' used here should not delude us into imagining either that individuals are somehow exclusively 'localised' in one particular condition, or that our relative movement to higher levels of knowing implies some kind of total 'abandonment' of the lower forms. On the contrary, Ibn 'Arabī's writing throughout the *Futūhāt* is carefully designed[280] to raise his readers toward an all-encompassing vision of *the whole of the divine action and purpose in the vast 'crucible' of human transformation* (throughout all time and all levels of manifestation), a wholistic vision which depends decisively on an intimate awareness of the indispensable concrete spiritual roles of *every* level of spiritual realisation.[281]

- Fourthly, Ibn 'Arabī's constantly reminds his readers—with an intensity and richness that increases in direct proportion to their own level of increasing spiritual awareness and

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[279] Some of the practical spiritual implications of this key point are discussed below, both in here and in Part II. Everything in Ibn 'Arabī's thought—and in his distinctive understanding of Revelation—is oriented towards awakening his readers to a deeper and more *wholistic* awareness of the *dynamic* nature of existence and the universality of the process of realisation, which alone can explain the central role of the realised human being (*insān*) in his world-view.

[280] Always, of course, in the distinctive form of a uniquely revealing 'super-commentary' on the divine 'Book' in all Its senses: see the following section, on 'the universal Book'—as well as, in greater detail, W. Chittick's entire Introduction to his *SDG*, which is in fact presented essentially in the form of an ongoing 'commentary' developing this single central image.

[281] See in particular his key concluding words to his Introduction to the *Futūhāt*, quoted at the end of this section. Those who have seriously studied Dante's entire *Divine Comedy* (not just the *Inferno*) will immediately recognise the remarkably parallel vision and deeper intentions of these two masters—a profound parallelism (quite independent of any historical 'influences' and the like) which becomes particularly obvious when we closely examine the 'eschatological' sections and teachings of these *Meccan Illuminations*.

intelligence—that true communication and right action in this world depend decisively on the most deeply accurate and empathic awareness of the actual potential for realisation within *each* of those persons with whom we are communicating and interacting.[282]

- Finally, once Ibn 'Arabī's reader has become fully conscious of these four broad levels of awareness and realisation, it becomes relatively easy to see the ways in which each chapter of his work constantly shifts, usually with an intentionally shocking abruptness, between radically different rhetorical forms—for example (to list only a few), metaphysical poems; pointed 'allusions' or problematic analyses of passages from the Qur'an or hadith; direct anecdotal recounting of his own or others' revealing spiritual experiences; allusions to (or partial elaborations of) dozens of rational and traditional 'sciences' of his day; related stories of familiar historical and religious figures; and so on. In almost every case, the particular literary form in question can potentially be grasped and 'received'—given the actual momentary receptivity of each particular reader— initially at *any* of the four basic levels: i.e., as belief, concept, experientially palpable symbol/allusion (Qur'anic '*Sign*'); and actual reality. But likewise, in each case Ibn 'Arabī typically adds a distinctive unexpected 'spin' or peculiar rhetorical device[283] designed to subtly (or obviously!) confuse, disorient, or 'short-circuit' each reader's normal, habitual, unconscious way of receiving that particular 'lesson'—thus potentially clearing the way for (or at the very least, 'reminding' us of) that condition of inner openness, wonder and 'bewilderment' (*hayra*) necessary for any new spiritual 'opening' or deeper realisation.

The possible effects of those distinctive rhetorical devices and the receptive states of 'bewilderment' they intentionally engender are meant to confront Ibn 'Arabī's readers, at almost each step, with *three simultaneous possibilities*: to 'let go' and be carried to or reminded of a higher, more adequate spiritual level of realisation intended by that remark; to try to 'work out' (whether with one's intellect or one's available beliefs) a satisfactorily 'reasonable' solution to the bewildering problem in question; or to abandon further reading, for the time being, in response to the typical corresponding reactions of boredom, frustration and irritation already mentioned. Practiced readers of the *Meccan Illuminations* will notice that one dramatic result of this distinctive rhetoric— *if* it is combined, as intended, with the reader's own ongoing process of practical 'realisation'—is that *the same 'familiar' passages of this work will typically take on an **entirely different** meanings and coloration at each renewed reading*. And another, even more dramatically memorable, common effect of these 'Openings' is that appropriately attentive readers, actively engaged in the process of realisation, will often find to their surprise that the apparently extraordinary spiritual

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[282] Ibn 'Arabī's endlessly rich practical 'lessons' in this area are highlighted above all in his carefully specific, concrete use of hadith and stories of the Prophet, supplemented by vivid autobiographical descriptions of his own spiritual experiences and those of his companions, contemporary Sufis, and earlier prophets and 'Friends of God.'

[283] In this regard, Ibn 'Arabī's 'playfully meaningful' and intentionally puzzling writing in the *Futūhāt*, in particular, is often strongly reminiscent of many of the stories of Borges, as well as much now widely familiar Sufi, Zen, and similar spiritual literature. These literary devices, many already familiar from the *Fusūs al-Hikam*, include many forms of paradox, etymological 'reminders', puzzles, problematic allusions, and so on—some of them discussed in more detail below.

phenomena so richly described in certain passages almost simultaneously actually occur, as if by magic, 'for real' and quite concretely in the context of their own lives.

By way of illustrating the fundamental levels and forms of awareness we have just summarised, it is helpful to quote the corresponding opening section of Ibn 'Arabī's own 'Introduction' (*muqaddima*) to his *Meccan Illuminations*—keeping in mind that the normal human base-level of conditioned, mostly unconscious 'beliefs,' since it is not a form of actual *cognition*, is not directly discussed at this initial stage.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

> We said: From time to time it occurred to me that I should place at the very beginning of this book a chapter concerning (theological) creeds,[284] supported by definitive arguments and salient proofs. But then I realised that that would only distract the person who is properly prepared and seeking an increase (in spiritual knowing), who is receptive to the fragrant breaths of divine Bounty through the secrets of being and spiritual 'finding' (*wujūd*). For if the properly prepared person persists in remembrance of God (*dhikr*) and spiritual retreat, if they empty the place (of their heart) of all mental chatter, and sit at the doorstep of their Lord like a poor beggar who has nothing—then God will bestow upon them and give them some of that knowledge of Him, of those divine secrets and supernal understandings which He granted to His servant al-Khadir.[285] ...So the person with focused spiritual intention, during their retreat with God, may realise through Him—how exalted are His gifts and how prodigious His grace!—(forms of spiritual) knowledge that are concealed from every theologian on the face of the earth, and indeed from anyone relying on purely intellectual inquiry and proofs who lacks that spiritual state. For such knowledge is beyond (the grasp of) inquiry through the intellect.
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> For there are three levels of knowledge. Knowledge through the intellect ('*ilm al-'aql*) is whatever knowledge you obtain either immediately[286] or as a result of

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[284]Or 'statements of belief': '*aqā'id* (s. '*aqīda*) refers to the formal doctrinal tenets that had been promulgated by the various schools of Islamic theology (*kalām*), primarily the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites—whose theological formulations Ibn 'Arabī, like many other Sufis, tended to prefer over the restrictively this-worldly 'rationalism' of the Mu'tazilites. This is the same term that he applies to the three longer 'creeds' that he eventually included in his Introduction (see below).

[285] The long-lived archetype of direct divine inspiration—alluded to in the Qur'anic account of Moses' initiation in a famous long passage from the Sura of the Cave (18:65 ff.)—who played an important role in Sufism and popular Islamic spirituality more generally, and who Ibn 'Arabī personally met on at least three occasions, as he described in several famous passages of the *Futūhāt* which are now accessible in most of the recent biographical studies.

[286]*Darūratan* ('necessarily'): i.e., anything that is known 'of necessity' or self-evidently, in such a way that it cannot possibly be refuted or rejected. Here this term refers to the most basic, intrinsic logical grounds of all reasoning, such as the principle of non-contradiction and the like. But a few paragraphs later, Ibn 'Arabī also admits that the 'knowledge of *states*'—i.e., the second level of knowing discussed here—is also 'necessary' or 'immediate' in this broad psychological sense.

inquiry concerning an 'indicator,'[287] provided that you discover the probative aspect of that indicator. And mistakes with regard to this kind of knowledge (come about) in the realm of that discursive thinking[288] which is linked together and typifies this type of knowledge. That is why they say about purely intellectual inquiry that some of it is sound, while some is invalid.

The second (level of) knowledge is the knowledge of 'states.'[289] The only way to that is through immediate experience: it can't be defined intellectually, and no proof can ever establish that knowing. (It includes things) like knowledge of the sweetness of honey, the bitterness of aloes, the pleasure of intercourse, love, ecstasy, or passionate longing, and other examples of this sort of knowledge. It is impossible for someone to know this kind of knowledge without directly experiencing it and participating in it....

The third (level of) knowledge is knowledge of (divine) secrets:[290] this is the knowledge that is beyond the stage of the intellect. It is knowledge of '*the inbreathing of the Holy Spirit in the heart*,'[291] and it is peculiar to the prophets and

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[287]*Dalīl*: in the technical language of Islamic theology and jurisprudence, this term can refer very broadly to any premise or argument or proof-text, or even to a natural phenomenon or event underlying such an argument—hence the importance of the inquirer's grasping the relevant 'aspect' (*wajh*) of the particular 'indicator' in question. Ibn 'Arabī's scepticism here regarding the epistemological reliability of such procedures typifies his attitude toward the questionable, highly fallible assumptions and procedures of such traditional disciplines throughout all his works.

[288]As will become clearer in the course of the following discussion, Ibn 'Arabī's emphasis here is *not* on the intellective or rational dimension of this sort of knowledge as such, but rather on the exclusive reliance upon the *discursive mental processes* of conceptual 'thinking' (*fikr*) and loosely rationalising, discursive 'inquiry' or 'investigation' (*nazar*), which can lead to all sorts of error and self-delusion. In fact, purely 'intellectual' knowing (*'ilm al-'aql*: see n. 22 above) is one of the essential types of 'inspired' spiritual knowledge included in the third and highest level he outlines below.

[289]*Ahwāl* (singular *hāl*): in the traditional technical language of Sufism, this term usually refers to specifically *spiritual* states (corresponding to the highest, third level of 'knowledge of mysteries' below). Here, however, Ibn 'Arabī is unusually using it—as well as the related common Sufi expression for 'direct personal experience' (*dhawq*, literally 'tasting')—in an unusually broad sense including the most basic levels of everyone's external and internal sensation.

[290]*'ilm al-asrār* (singular *sirr*): depending on the context or perspective, the latter term could also be translated as spiritual 'mysteries'. For example at the end of Ibn 'Arabī's 'Letter (to his Tunisian Sufi friend al-Mahdawī)' which opens the *Futūhāt*, he describes the purpose of this Introduction as '*setting forth the knowledge of the divine secrets/inner meanings this book contains*' (*OY* I, 74.2).

[291]The opening section of a famous hadith, recorded by Muslim and Ibn Hanbal, in which Muhammad alludes to his experience of divine inspiration: see Lane, *Arabic-Englich Lexicon,* s.v. *rū',* and Wensinck, *Concordance,* II, p. 320. 'Friend (of God)' here translates *al-walī*, while the term 'prophet' (*nabī*) is to be understood—following Ibn 'Arabī's own distinctive usage—very broadly,

the 'friends (of God).' This knowledge is of two kinds. One kind is perceived by the intellect, just like the first (category of purely discursive) knowledge, except that the person who knows in this (inspired) way does not acquire their knowledge through intellectual 'inquiry' (*nazar*). Instead, the (*divine*) 'level' of this knowledge bestows it upon them. The second kind (of divinely inspired knowledge) is of two sorts. The first sort is connected with the second (above-mentioned level of) knowledge (i.e., of inner 'states'), except that this knower's state is more exalted. And the other sort is knowledge through (divine) 'informing.'[292]

...Therefore (to illustrate these three basic sorts of inspired 'knowledge of secrets'), the Prophet's saying that a Garden actually exists is knowledge through being informed (by God). His saying with regard to the (Day of) Resurrection that 'there is a Pool in it sweeter than honey' is (an example of) knowledge of states, which is knowledge by direct experience. And his saying that 'God was, and nothing was with him' and other things like that are (illustrations of inspired) intellective knowing (corresponding to the sound results of discursive understanding) perceived through inquiry. So as for this third broad level (including all three sorts of inspired knowing), which is the 'knowledge of secrets', the person who knows it (fully) knows *all* knowledge and is completely immersed in it[293]—while the person who has those other (two lower levels of) knowledge is not like that. Hence there is no knowledge nobler than this 'all-encompassing knowledge'[294] which embraces the entirety of knowable things!

But as for truly intelligent and sensible people, who give right counsel to their soul, they don't reject someone reporting/informing about (such inspired knowledge). Instead, they say: 'In my opinion it is possible that this person may be speaking truthfully or not.' And that is how every truly intelligent person ought to behave whenever someone who is not infallible comes to them with this sort of (inspired) knowledge, as long as that person is speaking truthfully concerning the matter about which they have been 'informed' (by inspiration).... For giving credence to

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extending from the 'friends of God' of his own Islamic era, through the many pre-Islamic prophets designated as such in the Qur'an (or in a famous hadith which mentions their number as 124,000), as well as the much smaller group of prophetic 'messengers' (*rusul*) bearing a particular divine 'revealed-prescription' (*sharī'a*).

[292] I.e., through *God's* directly 'informing' (*ikhbār*) the prophet or saint, by means of one or another of the various forms of divine communication exemplified in the Qur'an and hadith, further developed and analysed by Ibn 'Arabī throughout the *Futūḥāt*. The same Arabic phrase could also be read and understood as 'through *reports*' (*akhbār*)—i.e., as communicated by God or some other angelic agency, as well as by a prophet or saint who has received such inspiration.

[293] Literally, 'knows all knowledges'; the last part of this phrase can also mean 'is completely filled with them' or 'completely masters them.'

[294] This Arabic phrase strongly—and no doubt intentionally—recalls many of the Qur'anic descriptions of God's Knowledge, reflecting Ibn 'Arabī's underlying metaphysical insistence on the cosmic 'mirroring' reality of the 'Perfect Human Being' (*al-insān al-kāmil*).

such a person will not harm you, as long as what they are reporting is not rationally impossible...and so long as it doesn't undermine one of the pillars of the 'revealed-prescription' (*sharī'a*) and doesn't contradict one of its essential principles.[295]

And I am the most worthy of those who give right counsel to their soul with regard to this. For if this person were only informing us about something (already) brought by the infallible (prophet)—only recounting to us what we already had from that (prophet) through another transmitted account[296]—then their report wouldn't give us anything beneficial beyond what we *already* have. *But the (friends of God)*[297]— may God be pleased with them!—*only bring secrets/inner meanings and wisdom in regard to the inner meanings of the (divine) 'revealed prescription' (sharī'a) concerning that which is **beyond** the power of thinking and acquisition (of transmitted reports), secrets which are never ever attained in any way except through direct witnessing and (divinely bestowed) confirmation and other paths like those.*

Don't you see that if someone brought you (these fresh divine inspirations) as if they were a dream he had seen—wouldn't you try to interpret them and figure out what they really mean? So likewise, take whatever this Sufi brings you and let yourself be rightly guided by it for a little while. And open up the place of your (heart) for what he has brought to you, so that their inner meanings can become manifest to you. That is better for you than if you had to say on the Day of the Rising: [*When the True Promise draws near...*] *'But we were heedless of this, indeed we were doing wrong!'* (21:97).

Now any knowledge whose meaning can be easily understood once it has been clearly explained, or which is easily accessible, without difficulty, to the quick-witted

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[295]It is important to underline here that the particular Arabic terms Ibn 'Arabī is using (*rukn* and *asl*) are clearly meant to stress *the extremely narrow character of this limitation*—i.e., restricted to the most fundamental and indisputable literal dimensions of Islamic *scripture*, as distinct from the historically elaborated, diversely institutionalised complex systems of intellectual interpretation developed in the later schools of *kalām* and *fiqh*. The broader political implications of the practically *alternative* understanding of Islam based on the decisive experience and guidance of the 'friends of God' (*awliyā'*) which he begins to suggest here—and develops far more elaborately throughout the *Meccan Illuminations*—are summarised (based on key passages from the *Futūhāt*) in our article on 'Ibn 'Arabī's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority,' pp. 37-64. See also E. Winkel, *Islam and the Living Law: the Ibn 'Arabī Approach* (Karachi, 1997).

[296]*Riwāya*: clearly Ibn 'Arabī is alluding here to the familiar historical, oral (or written) chains of transmission of hadith in particular.

[297]Ibn 'Arabī does not explicitly identify the individuals he is referring to here (using only the 'they' included in the verb). But in the context, it can only be those having received something of the 'knowledge of secrets' who—unlike the prophets—are *not* universally known to be absolutely truthful and without sin: i.e., the living 'Friends of God' (*awliyā' Allāh*). The italicised points in the following sentences reflect strong explicit emphases in Ibn 'Arabī's own Arabic syntax here.

learner, belongs to (the lowest level of) knowledge (attained by) the inquiring (discursive) intellect, because it falls under its domain and includes what can be grasped independently by someone if they should inquire discursively (about it). *But the 'knowledge of secrets' isn't like that.* For when the (rational) interpretive faculty takes it up, it becomes disagreeable, difficult and trying for the understanding to grasp. And sometimes weak and fanatic minds, those which haven't been successful in properly employing the reality of the intellect God gave them for inquiry and investigation, even spit out that (inspired spiritual) knowledge! So this is why those who possess this (inspired) knowledge most often make it more approachable for (most people's) understanding by using symbolic images and poetic forms of speech.

And as for the 'knowledge of states', that is *between* this knowledge of secrets and knowledge (gained by discursive) intellects. Most of those who have faith in the knowledge of states are *people who rely on their own spiritual experiences* (*ahl al-tajārib*). And the knowledge of states is closer to the knowledge of secrets than it is to the intellective knowledge gained by inquiry....[298] Therefore you should know that if this (kind of report concerning spiritual knowledge) seems good to you, and you accept it and have faith in it—then rejoice (in your good fortune)! *For you are necessarily in a state of direct spiritual 'unveiling' (kashf) concerning that, even if you aren't aware of it.* There's no other way: for the heart is not gladdened except by what it knows for sure to be true/real (*haqq*). And the (restrictive, discursive) intellect can't enter in here, because this knowledge is not within its grasp.

In the remainder of his lengthy Introduction to the *Futūhāt*, Ibn 'Arabī—after first stressing, quite typically, the grave spiritual dangers of kalam theology and the fact that everything he is about to explain is already best expounded within the Qur'an itself—responds to his own opening remark about a possible initial chapter of theological 'creeds' by providing instead a series of three increasingly lengthy passages that correspond closely to the first three levels of cognition he had outlined in the opening section of his Introduction, just quoted. First, he gives a very basic, short and entirely unexplained 'creed of the common people (*'awāmm*) among the people of mere outward submission and unthinking compliance (*taqlīd*), and the people of discursive inquiry' (i.e., the kalam theologians).[299] Next, partly relying on one of al-Ghazālī's influential popular theological works, he provides an intellectually more challenging 'Treatise Concerning What is Well-Known Among the Beliefs of the People of External Forms.'[300] Finally he moves on to another—far longer,

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[298]In the few lines omitted here (I,147.6-9) Ibn 'Arabī points out that both the 'knowledge of states' and the inspired 'knowledge of (spiritual) secrets' are indeed 'self-evident' or 'immediate' (*darūrī*) in a way that resembles our immediate awareness of the logical first principles of rational knowledge. But he goes on to point out that such *inspired* knowledge is also entirely *different*, in that '*it is only self-evident to whoever witnesses it*'—and that direct spiritual witnessing (*mushāhada*) is limited to the prophets and the 'friends of God.'

[299] It is worth noting that the purely formal 'contents' summarised here are, in a way, eventually 'explained' by all of *Futūhāt*.

[300] *Ahl al-rusūm*, i.e., religious scholars and intellectuals. This credo covers vol. I, pp. 174-186 in the recent OY edition.

more complex and quite mysterious—symbolic exposition 'Concerning the Belief of the Elite Among the People of God, Between (Discursive) Inquiry and (Spiritual) Unveiling.'[301]

But this is not the end. The fourth and highest level, that of accomplished realisation, cannot be summarised in such a way. That realised spiritual intelligence which is the primary subject and ultimate aim of this book, he concludes, has been intentionally 'scattered' throughout its pages. His initial description of this ultimate goal of his writing here pointedly emphasises the *universality and all-inclusiveness* of the fully enlightened vision in question:

> But as for presenting the creed of the quintessence (of the spiritual elite), I have not given it in detail in any one place, because of the profundities it contains. But I have given it scattered throughout the chapters of this book, exhaustively and clearly explained—but in different places, as we have mentioned. So those on whom God has bestowed the understanding of these things will recognise them and distinguish them from other matters. For this is the Knowing of the Real (*al-Haqq*) and the Truthful Saying, and there is no goal beyond It. 'The blind and the truly seeing' *are alike* in Its regard![302] It brings together things most far and most near, and conjoins the most high and most low....

Perhaps the richest illustration of that final 'quintessential' directive to all his readers comes precisely at the very end of Ibn 'Arabī's work, in its immense closing chapter (560) of '*wise testimonial advice which can be of benefit to the seeker travelling the path, to the one who has arrived (at the Goal), and to whoever happens across it, if God wills.*'[303] The vast body of practical spiritual wisdom and tested advice recounted in this chapter—assembled from countless classical Islamic and wider sources—pointedly brings each one of his readers back into that particular concrete historical and individual situation in which they started. So if anything has genuinely changed in the interval—with its 559 other 'doorways' or chapters—, Ibn 'Arabī emphasises, it is not in the outward forms of these already famous 'wise' words and bits of spiritual advice, but in *the potential transformation, within each reader, of that spirit and realisation which necessarily underlies, informs and guides their actual, unavoidably creative and ever-renewed communication and application.*

THE UNIVERSAL 'BOOK':

 In keeping with Ibn 'Arabī's highlighting of the centrality in the *Futūhāt* of the enlightened vision of the 'quintessence of the elite,' every student of his work, in whatever language, has already repeatedly encountered his recurrent assertions—in countless symbolic forms and applications—of

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[301] *OY* I, pages 187-213.

[302] Here Ibn 'Arabī appears to be playing with the familiar, expected Qur'anic *contrast* or *opposition* of the blind and spiritually seeing (cf. 6:50, etc.): he thereby alludes to the particularly *universal* character of the accomplished wisdom in question here—as he emphasises again in the concluding chapter 560 of this work: its title stresses that its contents concern both the novice or aspiring 'seeker' (*murīd*) *and* the fully accomplished knower who has already 'arrived' at the Goal (the *wāsil*).

[303] IV, 444-554, one of the longest chapters of the entire work, often reprinted as a separate Arabic volume.

the holographic nature of the divine 'Book' (*al-kitāb*) and 'Speaking' as equally manifest in the three homologously corresponding forms of revealed 'Scripture' (including, as throughout the Qur'an, *all* of the prophets and messengers, not only, or even primarily, the handful of historically surviving written 'texts'); the 'Universe' or 'World' (i.e., *all* the levels of creation and manifestation); and the Spirit (including above all the human spirit [*rūh*], or highest dimensions of the 'soul' [*nafs*]). Given the centrality of this unifying perspective throughout all of Ibn 'Arabī's writings, not just the *Futūhāt*, simply to state it may well sound, for anyone even remotely acquainted with his work, like a mere truism—or, at best, a problematic metaphysical 'concept.' Actually *realising* this central teaching, of course, is quite a different matter, and virtually everything in the *Futūhāt*—beginning most obviously with the famous opening chapters on the universal cosmogony of the divine 'Letters' and Names—is designed to bring out one or another meaningful facet of this reality.

From that broadest possible perspective, then, the decisive evidence of an genuinely effective 'translation' of any given section of the *Futūhāt* is when Ibn 'Arabī's words actually do bring about a real 'opening.' That unmistakeable 'opening' effect is beautifully described in the course of the very beginning of his Introduction we have just cited, where he points out the immediate recognition and unshakeable positive certainty that can be occasioned by even the most allusive and indirect statement of an actually experienced spiritual reality:

> For you are necessarily in a state of immediate 'unveiling' (*kashf*) concerning
> that, even if you aren't aware of it. There's no other way: for the heart is not
> gladdened except by what it knows for sure to be **real** (*haqq*). And the
> intellect can't enter in here, because this knowledge is not within its grasp.

Needless to say, this is *not* always the initial effect of many extant translations of Ibn 'Arabī's works, including the *Futūhāt*. Part of the common set of obstacles to more effective translation and communication, in all cases, are the wide range of certain basic and unavoidable challenges that are discussed in more detail below (mainly in Part II). But far more significant, in many cases, are the relatively invisible and unexpected obstacles that arise whenever a translator—whether knowingly or unconsciously—'translates' a particular passage as they have understood it (to use Ibn 'Arabī's vivid language) 'with the eye of,' or from the restricted 'level' of, their particular individual beliefs, conceptual understanding, or an inadequate form of 'unveiling'. Since even the most assiduous, well-prepared and experienced students of Ibn 'Arabī still regularly find many passages which they do not fully and adequately understand at the appropriate level of realisation, we can be virtually certain that even the most able and devoted translators of whole longer chapters of the *Futūhāt*—as opposed to the carefully chosen excerpts and thematic summaries most scholars have cautiously provided until now—will necessarily be passing along versions of a number of important passages that they have grasped, at best, only at the level of their formal intellectual and external, literal coherence.[304] In many such cases—as we have already pointed out in emphasising the special usefulness of informal small group study—, it is often actually possible for careful readers of quite inadequate translations to more effectively 're-translate' the translated words and intentions of Ibn

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[304] This is certainly one very significant—and virtually unavoidable—reason for the continued hesitancy of even the most knowledgeable scholars to provide full translations of longer chapters of the *Futūhāt*. Faced with such a situation, we cannot help but recall the late Prof. Annemarie Schimmel's frequently repeated observation that 'those who really understand the poetry of Hafez know how impossible it would be to translate him!'

'Arabī back into a spiritually more accurate and effective form.[305] This is because *the indispensable spiritual illumination or 'opening' as to his actual intention is, in every case, naturally dependent on factors of preparedness, situation and spiritual sensitivity which differ radically with each individual*—just as they do with those corresponding intellectual and experiential spiritual 'gifts' and endowments that the Shaykh himself highlighted to begin his Introduction to these *Futūhāt*.

As we have repeatedly verified with classroom readings of various English translations of the Qur'an, Hafez and their like (texts raising difficulties quite similar to those encountered with Ibn 'Arabī) students with a minimum of essential background information, native intelligence, and spiritual and aesthetic sensitivity are soon mysteriously able to 'spot' intuitively, almost immediately and unfailingly, many of those places where the translator has failed to comprehend or to convey—two radically *different* and not always conjoined abilities, incidentally!—the intended 'level' of Ibn 'Arabī's writing, and has instead communicated something at the level, for example, simply of the words' outward form ('belief'), or of a misleadingly restricted intellectual or symbolic (theological and metaphysical) coherence. Equally important as an essential touchstone for the actual experience of genuine realisation in respect to any of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings is the reader's immediate, spontaneous *awareness of the **same** spiritual laws and realities wherever they are actually encountered*, whatever the particular tradition, form, context or individuals in question.

Wherever that typically 'Akbarian' universal depth of perspective is lacking—and allowing for the understandable concessions to piety or prudence required in works translated in certain settings, or specifically for certain limited audiences—experienced readers can usually quickly sense that fundamental incompletion even in translation. Thus we can be fairly certain that a significant problem of translation has arisen whenever it seems impossible, even with great intellectual agility, to see any sort of deeper spiritual 'opening' or realisation in prospect. This is regularly the case, for example, whenever a translation makes it seem like Ibn 'Arabī is simply providing an explanatory 'commentary' on a particular scriptural passage or hadith; apparently 'justifying' some limited

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[305] In fact, this is precisely what 'Erāqī, Jāmī, Shabistārī, and so many other later poet-students of the Shaykh actually did. It should be stressed that this observation about the capacities of dedicated readers working with translations is *not* at all a matter of evaluating the qualifications and capacities of particular translators. Rather, as is further illustrated in several sections below, *all* translators of the *Futūhāt*—even those who might understand some parts perfectly—are still faced with almost insuperable challenges in actually *communicating* all the relevant dimensions of their understanding into another Western language, such as English or French.

In many cases, translators are also faced constantly with a gamut of choices involving *unavoidable 'trade-offs'* between equally essential goals—such as fluency, clarity, conceptual coherency, explication of allusions and background, and so on. For example—to take one of the most obvious of such dilemmas—any helpful 'explanation' by the translator of unclear allusions, cross-references, hidden structures, multiple intended meanings, mysterious symbols and the like will inevitably rob certain readers in translation of many of those originally intended individual efforts (*ijtihād*) of thought, reflection and further study which Ibn 'Arabī clearly meant for his readers to develop through their *own* efforts of individual realisation. Being informed of those various connections by a translator or commentator clearly does not get the reader to the same ultimate result, once we understand that the primary *purpose* of such devices often lies precisely in the deeper intellectual and spiritual efforts and processes to which they give rise.

theological point; or is no more than explaining or recalling some already familiar literary or intellectual body of knowledge.

EVERYONE CAN PLAY:

Because of each of the essential considerations that have been discussed above, it should be clear by now that the rhetoric of the *Meccan Illuminations* is carefully designed to engage, awaken, teach and guide every possible reader who is engaged—as we all ultimately are, albeit with radically different degrees of conscious awareness—in the essential human process of realisation. No human being has more privileged access than any other to the two key 'Books' of the world and their own spirit—and indeed the latter, the most essential of all, is the unique 'treasure' and divine '*Trust*' (33:72) bestowed uniquely on each human being. So those familiar with Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of this three-fold 'Book' as the intrinsically universal revelation quickly come to see both that (a) his insights at every point reflect profoundly the essential teachings of *all* the prophetic, historically revealed 'Books,' far beyond those particular ones he usually quotes explicitly (just as his 'Muhammadan Reality' encompasses all of those revelations); and that (b) literal familiarity with this or that historical form of scripture—when embedded in problematic individual and wider cultural forms of belief and all the complexities of the 'restrictive intellect'—often constitutes a profoundly rooted unconscious barrier to any genuine spiritual intelligence and receptivity to those forms of inspiration that are indispensable for spiritual advancement.

As we follow Ibn 'Arabī's own guidelines in his Introduction, briefly summarised in the previous section, his language in these *Meccan Illuminations* is carefully constructed to set up a constantly shifting set of '*spiritual mirrors*'[306] designed to reveal to each of his readers and interpreters, at each moment they seriously encounter these 'Openings,' those particular dimensions of their being and understanding which are momentarily determined by their own unique nexus of the possible 'levels' of belief, restrictive intellect, immediate experience, and active spiritual intelligence—with all the decisive individual nuances and extremes that are operating at each of those levels. Anyone who might not be clear how this is actually the case has only to think of the spectrum of critical and interpretive literatures about Ibn 'Arabī (as much the *Fuṣūs al-Hikam* as the *Futūḥāt*) now available in Western languages, or reported in reviews and critical studies. For there it is immediately apparent that the particular cognitive 'levels' at which each interpreter primarily encounters and describes their experience of the Shaykh's writing is usually unmistakeably (sometimes even embarrassingly) obvious, particularly when such writers indulge in polemics against others who happen to have focused on different dimensions of the Shaykh's teaching and intentions.[307]

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[306] Or perhaps today, we should say '*scanners*'—since that contemporary image more accurately conveys the essentially 'three-dimensional,' constantly multi-faceted nature of this process, always within a given individual, and even more obviously when we consider different readers of his work.

[307] **See our collected volume of studies** *Ibn 'Arabi and His Interpreters: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Perspectives***, which brings together ten monographs and articles, and nearly thirty reviews, all devoted to contextualising the work and influences of Ibn 'Arabī, and to situating the immense range of recent translations, interpretive studies, biographies and works by and about later Muslim interpreters. Downloadable versions (.pdf format) of all of these works, including the long, three-part review article on 'Ibn 'Arabī and His Interpreters' (in** *JAOS***, 1986-87), are currently freely available at the website of the Ibn 'Arabī Society**

Unfortunately, since the intellectual comprehension of the *Futūhāt*—especially for modern readers (of *any* cultural, linguistic and religious background), who are inevitably unfamiliar with so much of its original cultural context—requires elaborate explanatory and background contextualisation, it is all too easy for most potential readers to assume that Ibn 'Arabī was primarily writing this book as an *intellectual* (i.e., primarily philosophical or theological) composition which is therefore really accessible only to a handful of specialised scholars and students.

With regard to Ibn 'Arabī's own potential and intended audiences, at least, nothing could be further from the truth. As anyone teaching in the field of religious and spiritual studies quickly discovers, *the distribution of particular spiritual gifts, insights, capacities, and degrees and forms of spiritual intelligence and sensitivity to be found among human beings have nothing at all to do, in their roots, with the outward accidents of age, culture and upbringing*; and they appear to be considerably more widely distributed than the gifts of exceptional intellectual abilities. For that vast group of spiritually prepared potential readers, then, it is extremely important to know that the striking *spiritually autobiographical* portions of these *Meccan Illuminations*—and those who spend much time with this author soon come to recognise that there is actually very little in his approach to the Qur'an and hadith that is *not* profoundly autobiographical[308]—constitute what is certainly the most extensive 'phenomenology of spiritual experience' to be found in Islamic tradition, perhaps even in all world literature.[309] Most readers approaching the *Futūhāt* within its intended context of active realisation

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(*www.ibnarabisociety.org/IbnArabi*), until they can be brought together in published book form. [[THIS IS IN THIS VOLUME, RIGHT?]]

[308] This openly phenomenological, experiential dimension—conveyed through Ibn 'Arabī's references to his companions, other famous Sufis, and the Prophet as much as in explicitly 'autobiographical' passages—is far more openly displayed here than in the *Fusūs al-Hikam*, especially since that aspect of the Shaykh's work was not the primary interest of later generations of more philosophical commentators on the *Fusūs*. Particularly helpful in this regard are the series of key early spiritual 'illuminations' which have been highlighted by both of Ibn 'Arabī's recent biographers: S. Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn 'Arabī*, (Oxford,1999); and C. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn 'Arabī*. His account of one of the most important of those initiatic visions, expressed in his discussion of his own and other 'ascensions' in chapter 367 of the *Futūhāt*, is now readily available in our translation included in volume one of *Ibn 'Arabī: The Meccan Revelations*; that study is helpfully supplemented by additional notes and corresponding autobiographical material translated from his earlier *K. al-Isrā'* that is also included in our long article on 'The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabī and the Mi'rāj,' in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 107 (1987), pp. 629-652, and vol. 108 (1988), pp. 63-77 (now available for downloading at *www.ibnarabisociety/IbnArabi*) [[FROM THIS VOLUME, RIGHT? SHOULD REREFERENCE]].

[309] We have dealt with subject of the multiple, ongoing influences of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas—passing through a number of different channels—on many aspects of the contemporary study of religion and spirituality, in a number of recent studies, including 'Ibn 'Arabī in the "Far West": Visible and Invisible Influences,' pp. 87-122 in the *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, XXIX (2001), pp. 87-122, the final chapter of *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation*; and 'From Cordoba to Isfahan, and Beyond: Mulla Sadra, Ibn 'Arabī and the Emerging Science of Spirituality,' to appear in the *Proceedings* of the Isfahan Conference on Islamic Philosophy, ed. H. Landolt and

are likely to find many of these particular 'openings' to be readily identifiable and immediately, intuitively accessible and 'speaking',[310] in precisely the way that, as we have seen, Ibn ʿArabī describes and encourages that sort of affinity at the very beginning of his Introduction:

> Therefore you should know that if this (report of the inspired 'knowing of spiritual secrets') seems good to you, and you accept it and have faith in it—then rejoice! *For you are necessarily in a state of immediate 'unveiling' concerning that, even if you aren't consciously aware of it. There's no other way: for the heart is not gladdened except by what it knows for sure to be true.*

Again, in highlighting the absolutely central role of *trusting one's own intuitions* as both the starting point and the ultimate touchstone in any spiritual effective reading of these *Futūhāt*, it is essential to keep in mind Ibn ʿArabī's guiding intention so beautifully summarised in the epigraph above.[311] As he points out there, the whole purpose of all this is the gradual unfolding of each reader's *own* spiritual intelligence, of our uniquely human capacity to perceive the whole world and *all* our experience—i.e., *both* the inextricable sets of outer and inner divine '*Signs…making clear the Real*' (41:53)—directly as 'divine New-Speaking' (*hadīth ilāhī*). And then, having understood, to begin to appropriately 'interpret' and apply that ever-present Guidance. This is the spirit in which he encourages his most apt and properly prepared readers, at the very beginning of these 'Openings,' to pay attention to each of those indispensable, intimate, and uniquely personal forms through which we can begin to 'read' these manifestations of the One divine 'Book':

> But they (the true 'knowers')—may God be pleased with them!—only bring secrets and wisdom concerning the secrets/inner meanings of the revelation, about that which is beyond the power of discursive thinking and intellectual acquisition, secrets which are never ever attained in any way *except* through direct witnessing and (divinely inspired) confirmation and other paths like those. Do you not see that if someone brought you (these inspirations) as if

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M. Mohaghegh (title and publisher t.b.a.), 2004. [[AGAIN, THIS VOLUME, RIGHT?]] See also the related studies brought together in W. Chittick's *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, (Albany, 1994).

[310] Thus in reality the most directly accessible, revealing and fascinating sections of the *Futūhāt* for readers particularly interested in spirituality are likely to be in Part V (the *fasl al-munāzalāt*, an untranslatable term describing his '*mutual encounters with God*'), in chapters 384-461, near end of the book. A considerable number of selections from that Part are now readily accessible in Chittick, *SDG*, although the title of that immense volume might not suggest such subjects.

[311] Drawn from a particularly influential section (chapter 366, on 'The Mahdi's Helpers'), which focuses on the central dimensions of spiritual perception and communication. See our translation of that section in *Ibn ʿArabī: The Meccan Revelations*, and the commentary on that passage which forms the central chapter of *Orientations*:… ('Ibn ʿArabī and the Tasks of Spiritual Creativity and Insight), as well as **'Ibn ʿArabī's Messianic Secret: From "The Mahdī" to the Imamate of Every Soul,' pp. 1-19 in *JMIAS* XXX (2001), pp. 1-19 [[THIS VOLUME, AS WELL, RIGHT?]].**

> they were a dream he had seen—wouldn't you try to interpret them and
> figure out what they really mean? So likewise, take whatever this Sufi brings
> you and let yourself be rightly guided by it for a little while. And open up your
> place (of your heart) for what he has brought you, so that their inner
> meanings can become manifest to *you*.[312]

What happens when one begins to pay careful attention to such apparently 'random' intuitions, to follow the subtle threads of divine guidance and spiritual discernment they always provide, is intimately familiar to everyone consciously engaged in the process of realisation. As for those who might still imagine, after reading such explicit and pointedly detailed admonitions—which are repeatedly scattered throughout the *Futūhāt*—that Ibn 'Arabī's purpose in repeatedly describing his own spiritual experiences and those of his contemporaries, along with those of the Prophet and so many earlier friends of God, throughout this immense work, is somehow simply to point to their useful 'authority' in supporting this or that particular otherwise familiar and straightforwardly accessible intellectual or dogmatic position: such readers, he reminds us, are still unconsciously wandering, for the moment, in this or that lower 'hall of mirrors,' with no effective awareness of what that central human task of realisation actually involves. But Ibn 'Arabī has many devices designed precisely to awaken those readers as well.

INTEGRATING SPIRITUAL DISCOVERIES: PARADOX AND PERSPECTIVE SHIFTS

Given the different levels of belief and awareness that Ibn 'Arabī highlights, as we have just seen, at the very beginning of his *Meccan Illuminations*, it should be clear that virtually all of us—excepting only certain prophets and saints—are still in many respects like the prisoners in the 'Cave' Socrates carefully describes in the *Republic* (Bk. V), unconsciously 'chained' to and governed by the particular sets of blinders, of distorting lenses and illusions which make it impossible for us to read any of the divine 'Books', whether of creation or of our souls, '*as they really are*.'[313] Or as Ibn 'Arabī makes quite clear in his fascinating eschatological discussions scattered throughout this book, we normally find ourselves both suffering and inflicting suffering somewhere among the various 'descending stairways' of Gehenna, entranced by illusory 'fires' rather than the true 'lights' of the Spirit. It should not be that surprising, then—echoing what Socrates had prophetically explained about the reactions likely to be encountered by anyone who might try to tell those cave-dwellers about the *real* world of the Sun—to learn that Ibn 'Arabī immediately follows his initial allusion to these different levels of knowing in his Introduction by quoting three impassioned, highly revealing declarations from three of the most highly respected Companions of the Prophet.

Each of those memorable statements explicitly emphasises the existence of centrally significant elements of divinely revealed spiritual teaching that Muhammad (and by implication, many other major spiritual teachers) had not *publicly* disseminated because those particular teachings would so shock most people, restricted as they are within the lower levels of belief, that they would immediately kill anyone who attempted the wider public communication of those teachings, beyond

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[312] In emphasising this same idea, Ibn 'Arabī often cites one of his favourite hadith, 'Seek the judgment (*fatwā*) of your own heart, no matter what judgment others may give….'

[313] Alluding to a Prophetic prayer which Ibn 'Arabī cites repeatedly: 'O my God, cause me to see things as they really are!'

the circle of those already spiritually apt to receive them in private.[314] Ibn ʿArabī's pointed citation of these three successive authoritative statements takes on added special significance in light of what he goes on to say twice, in the middle and at the very end of his Introduction already quoted above, about his intentional 'scattering' throughout the *Futūḥāt* of his most fundamental teachings, those reserved for 'the quintessence of the spiritual elite.' Since a fuller explanation of the manifold implications and intricate connections between those two decisive passages of his Introduction would require a long essay in itself—and extensive reference to parallel considerations and rhetorical assumptions pervading many other areas of Islamic esoteric thought, writing and culture—we must leave it to thoughtful readers to work out those absolutely fundamental implications for themselves, in the light of their own exploration and realisation of these 'Openings.'

In any case, what is most important for beginning readers of the *Futūḥāt* to keep in mind, in reflecting on those remarks, is the very simple and familiar reality, one which we can all observe repeatedly, for example, in the relations between parents and children, or between experts in a particular discipline and novices or outsiders. Which is that we cannot really 'explain' or teach any particular spiritual phenomenon or direct experience of reality (the actual *results* of the existential process of *tahqīq*) to someone who has not yet 'been there' and actually experienced that same reality for themselves. The results of *any* such attempt, as we soon learn, are inevitable misunderstanding and often grotesque misrepresentation, which may be comic or—as Ibn ʿArabī has just powerfully emphasised in these repeated opening cautions—memorably tragic, depending on the particular surrounding circumstances. The possibilities of resulting misunderstandings—and the corresponding challenges of effective spiritual teaching—are especially dramatic and kaleidoscopic when, as in the case of the different dimensions of belief and 'knowing' Ibn ʿArabī outlines in his Introduction, the various 'levels' involved are not really 'successive' at all, but more like integral and inseparable aspects of spiritual intelligence, dimensions of a single living whole which are potentially explosive and dangerously misleading if *any one* of those partial elements (belief, critical intellect, inspired experience, etc.) is taken in isolation from the larger Reality it inadequately reflects.

Ibn ʿArabī's endlessly fascinating rhetorical response to that unavoidable and distinctively human situation—inspired on almost every point by fundamental features of the uniquely revealing discourse of the Qur'an—is twofold. First, he seeks above all to provoke and bring to conscious awareness all the internal contradictions, limitations and metaphorical 'short-sightedness'—and the fundamental, far-reaching ignorance—of each of his readers insofar as they may be 'locked into' one particular lower form of perception (belief, intellectual reasoning, inspiration, etc.). At the same time, he is equally devoted to highlighting and probing that characteristic inner 'cognitive dissonance' which exists whenever our conscious self is caught or torn between two very *different*

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[314] *OY* I, 142-144. Equally importantly (and again closely paralleling Plato's teaching)—he pointedly stresses that those killing such a forthright spiritual teacher would actually think that they were somehow doing 'good' and even self-righteously following their teacher's own pronouncements! It is important to note that the three authorities Ibn ʿArabī cites here are not somehow recondite or 'dubious,' and that their words do contain some important hints about the particular types of teachings involved. The sayings of Abū Hurayra and Ibn ʿAbbās—two of the foremost initial transmitters of hadith, particularly concerning the meanings of the Qur'an and spiritual teachings of the Prophet, are included in the canonical Sunni hadith collections, while the poem of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is cited from 'the Sharīf al-Rāḍī' (presumably referring to his famous compilation, the *Nahj al-Balāgha*).

levels of 'knowing.'   This is especially visible, for example, in *the familiar processes by which we gradually discover the deeper meanings of our dreams, inspirations, intuitions and so many other forms of spiritual experience, precisely through ongoing reflection on their meaningful interactions with all the relevant particular dimensions of our experience and the events constituting our particular destiny.*[315]

On a more practical, interpersonal level, most people have already encountered the precise practical spiritual equivalents of many of Ibn 'Arabī's essential literary and rhetorical methods in their corresponding experiences with effective teachers, therapists, counsellors, and spiritual guides and mentors (whatever the various cultural 'garments' and historical forms in question). So it is absolutely important to keep all our relevant personal experiences in those domains in mind whenever we approach the reading of the *Futūhāt*—so much of which must be studied, if we are approaching it within the framework of realisation, precisely in light of those specific dreams, visions, and so many other telling 'coincidences' and revelatory experiences that *do* so fortuitously happen to arise in conjunction with our process of reading, study and reflection. Incidentally, most of the points to be made in this regard already apply to the study of Ibn 'Arabī's *Fusūs al-Hikam* as well—but with all the obvious differences flowing from the basic fact that the *Futūhāt* are so many times more extensive and more complex, in both their range of subjects and their corresponding multiplicity of literary and rhetorical forms.

In other words, just as a particular story, joke, question or gesture can be decisively transforming or revealing in a particular individual spiritual constellation (and *only* there), the apparently 'same' items will often be irrelevant or insignificant in any other context.[316] This recurrent rhetorical feature of Ibn 'Arabī's writing constantly bedevils translators (as it already did the classical commentators of his *Fusūs*), since the very process of 'exposing' and explaining many of his characteristic puns, paradoxes, subtle allusions, language-games, intentional self-contradictions, jokes and the like—most of which would otherwise entirely escape modern readers, often even in the Arabic—almost inevitably brings down to a complexly 'intellectual' and strictly rational level this distinctively baroque language which was originally intended to alternately shock, surprise, confuse, intrigue, and delight his readers, or simply to make them laugh. (Students of religion are well aware of the more general way later rationalising, classical 'commentaries' on originally provocative and self-contradictory or hyperbolic spiritual 'paradoxes,' such as the famous Sufi *shatahāt*, Zen koans,

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[315] One cannot overemphasise the key role throughout the *Futūhāt*—both in motivating each reader's continued seeking, and in providing the indispensable experiential 'raw data' for the process of realisation—of what Ibn 'Arabī and other Islamic spiritual teachers normally call '*the secret/inner meaning of (one's personal) destiny*,' *sirr al-qadr*. That same leitmotif of the *sirr al-qadr*—serving as a shorthand expression for each reader's unique process of realisation—is highlighted in even more dramatic forms throughout Book I of Rumi's famous *Masnavī*.

[316] In this respect, as we have already intimated at n. 12 above, the relationship between the serious reader of the *Futūhāt* and the exploration of that text *within the context of realisation* (i.e., where the reader becomes increasingly constantly conscious and attentive to the significance of all the accompanying inner and outer 'events' and experiences that occur or are recalled and illuminated in the course of study) closely corresponds to the transforming experience of the central spiritual process of 'companionship' (*suhba*) with an authentic spiritual master in the wider Sufi tradition (and its effective equivalents elsewhere).

and many of Jesus' parables in the Gospels, almost always have precisely this unintentionally diminishing, reductive spiritual effect.)   Therefore modern-day readers of the *Futūhāt*, especially from non-Islamic backgrounds, if they wish to experience more of the intended effects of Ibn 'Arabī's writing, are obliged to be even more active and co-participatory readers, 're-translating' Ibn 'Arabī's language, as best as they can, so that it is directly applicable, for example, to *our own* operative unexamined 'beliefs' and unconscious patterns, even if those happen to be outwardly quite different from the particular operative piety and platitudes Ibn 'Arabī once assumed in his original historical audiences.

As indicated by some of our wider allusions above, there are indeed a host of different recurrent literary and rhetorical methods for invoking the internal self-contradictions, actual 'ignorance' (hidden by conditioned beliefs), and hidden spiritual awarenesses which are so often the targets of Ibn 'Arabī's writing in the *Futūhāt*. And the best way to discover those methods and to appreciate how they actually work is not through any abstract analysis, but simply by paying close attention to each one of them while studying particular passages in the company of a small group of fellow-explorers. Since we already 'know'—in at least one of the four possible operative senses that Ibn 'Arabī outlines at the beginning of his work—that we all *are* essentially 'spirit', and that that same Spirit is ultimately the common Reality informing all three holographically overlapping 'Books' of existence, it is clear that every imaginable reader already *is* part of the intended audience of these 'Openings.' So given their intentionally multi-faceted, multi-dimensional construction, we can be confident that if we simply move ahead, we will eventually find and be drawn to precisely those facets of the *Futūhāt* which effectively mirror our own complex spiritual state, each time we do open this book.[317] It is particularly important for 'unprepared,' non-scholarly readers to keep this reassuring point in mind, since it is so tempting to get caught up in resolving the many more limited intellectual 'puzzles' which are also an important part of the construction of this work.[318]

Rather than focusing in isolation on Ibn 'Arabī's detailed rhetorical and literary techniques for forcing (and revealing) those fundamental inner shifts in 'perspective' which are always involved in the process of spiritual integration, it may be more practically helpful to start by highlighting two immense fields in which the relevance of those tools is particularly evident, since each individual reader's own unique spiritual 'input' is so obviously indispensable in each case. The first field is the all-encompassing domain of eschatology, a subject which—given its extraordinary primacy and complexity already in the Qur'an and hadith—provides so much of the classical Islamic symbolism, conceptual apparatus and technical terminology for all dimensions of spiritual realisation. The second—almost equally vast, and ultimately inseparable—field is that of spiritual guidance and direction, including the 'spiritual hierarchy' in all its expressions and manifestations. (In both of these areas, incidentally, readers without Arabic or extensive Islamic background will find it highly revealing to read and study the available selections from the *Futūhāt* in parallel with Nicholson's complete translation of Rumi's *Mathnawī*, a classical and virtually contemporaneous masterpiece

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[317] In this regard, as in so many others, the actual experience of studying the *Futūhāt* intimately parallels that of reading its near-contemporary, the *Zohar*, in which outwardly 'chance' scriptural 'openings' likewise reveal and mirror at each stage the spiritual evolution of the central characters— and of the serious reader.

[318] See the following section (in Part II below) for the key role of recurrent structural 'puzzles' throughout the *Futūhāt*.

which so continuously, and even more openly and directly, confronts its readers with the pertinent issues of their own personal degree of 'realisation' and hypocrisy in each of these two fields.) Finally, both of these phenomenological domains are also especially fascinating because their basic existential themes—often expressed in visibly cognate forms—are normally situated at the heart of almost all the historically familiar traditions of spiritual guidance. This means that most readers today—whose cultural background so often inescapably draws on many different historical traditions—can approach Ibn 'Arabī's complex exploration of these key facets of the process of realisation without being unconsciously restricted by the 'belief'-level and presuppositions of any particular set of historical forms.

Probably no other 'original' writer in the Islamic tradition has written so much—and certainly such *lastingly influential* discussions—in both of these key spiritual areas. In particular, Ibn 'Arabī's detailed accounts of spiritual hierarchy, of the 'members,' roles, characteristics and functions of hundreds of spiritual figures and 'types' among the 'Friends of God'—the vast majority of them nominally 'hidden,' but often manifested in fascinating historical personalities whom he has actually encountered and frequented during his many travels—are a central and recurring feature of these *Futūhāt*, from beginning to end.[319] So it is possible—since in this particular case (as compared with eschatology) the explicit symbolic 'resources' provided by Islamic scripture are relatively limited—to take Ibn 'Arabī's own accounts as themselves the primary source for a system of complex beliefs or an intellectually coherent conceptual account of these hierarchical realities and functions, as some later Muslim commentators have occasionally very partially attempted.[320] And likewise, the thousands of powerful (and richly evocative and mysterious) Qur'anic verses and corresponding corpus of hadith relating to our ultimate human destiny were, within a few centuries, pieced together into the complex classical 'dramaturgies' and schemas of belief, of philosophically or theologically coherent eschatological accounts, which were already a traditional part of the beliefs and intellectual assumptions and preoccupations of Ibn 'Arabī's contemporaries and his original audiences.[321]

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[319] See above all Chodkiewicz' invaluable and pioneering *Seal of the Saints*. However, those who have not yet embarked on the study of the *Futūhāt* are not likely to realise that this magisterial study, focusing as it does on Ibn 'Arabī's own vision of his *own* unique spiritual function, actually is only the 'tip of the iceberg' in relation to the central role, both theoretical and highly practical, of *walāya* and the 'friends of God' throughout the entire *Meccan Illuminations*. In particular, it soon becomes clear to any careful reader of the *Futūhāt* that Ibn 'Arabī is not simply concerned with explaining a 'doctrine' and phenomena somehow situated at a 'distance' from his readers—but also, and perhaps even primarily, in *awakening their deeper awareness of the corresponding spiritual dimensions and relevance of **their own** experience and realisation*.

[320] See the preceding note. In fact, the *awliyā'* and their forms of 'inner knowing,' spiritual insights, discoveries and conditions are almost certainly the single most common individual subject of the particular chapters of the *Futūhāt*.

[321] Here one is again struck by the central role of al-Ghazālī's immensely influential writings **(n. 12 above)** as a kind of constant 'foil' or initial 'springboard' for Ibn 'Arabī's deeper spiritual teaching throughout the *Futūhāt*. This is particularly obvious, for example, in relation to the concluding eschatological volume of Ghazālī's immense *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, on 'The Remembrance of Death,' now readily available in T. Winter's beautifully presented translation (Cambridge, England, 1989).

Yet while translators and other 'describers' of Ibn ʻArabī's 'thought' in the *Futūhāt* can more or less conscientiously re-create and analyse the underlying sources and historical traditions connected with his own discussions,[322] these are two central areas in which it is particularly and unavoidably obvious that all readers wishing to ascend beyond the levels of popular beliefs and intellectual discussion of symbols are forced to begin with their own relevant experiences, and with those reflections (and further experiences) that then arise precisely in the *interactions* between their own probative 'unveiling' and 'finding,' and the host of pertinent scriptural symbols and allusions discussed throughout the *Futūhāt*. Not surprisingly, when we turn to working with integral, adequately contextualised translations of Ibn ʻArabī's chapters on these subjects, it turns out that most of his actual writing is clearly oriented precisely toward awakening and elucidating his readers' own significant experiences and insights, and toward challenging or undermining those usually unconscious mindsets and assumptions—the most far-reaching and determinative forms of 'belief'—that keep them from perceiving the full significance of their *own* 'Books' and their *own* discoveries of Guidance.[323]

In fact, the process he puts all his readers through, at every stage of their exploration of this text, is perfectly parallel to the ongoing wider process of realisation itself. That is to say, whatever the subject in question, Ibn ʻArabī's reader, at each stage, is first normally obliged to form a kind of 'working hypothesis' as to what Ibn ʻArabī 'really' means and intends, based on that reader's unique synthesis of their own relevant 'beliefs,' 'knowledge,' comparable experiences and degree of spiritual insight. Then, as a result, we are usually left with a considerably heightened awareness of what we actually do *not* truly 'know' (but at best believe or assume), and a resulting familiar sort of shaky uncertainty about our guiding intuitions and assumptions, along with an essential hunger for further confirmation or clarification which Ibn ʻArabī somehow suggests may be found elsewhere in the *Futūhāt*.[324] While that resulting deeper desire for further clarification and illumination (discussed in the following section [in Part II]) usually does provide sufficient motivation for his readers to keep working and moving 'ahead'— a term placed in quotes here because most of his readers quickly discover how illusory such notions of a smooth forward 'progress' can often be!—

The constant interplay and contrasting approaches of al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʻArabī is also clearly visible throughout Mulla Sadra's vast philosophical 'translation' of the *Futūhāt*, including his famous *Wisdom of the Throne* (*al-Hikmat al-ʻArshiyya*: see our translation and commentary, *The Wisdom of the Throne*)

[322] And some of their readers can still, as in the past, even turn Ibn ʻArabī into their own source of beliefs, despite all his repeated efforts to forestall that sort of recurrent 'idolatry.'

[323] In this regard, see the historically influential illustration provided by his complex treatment of 'the Mahdi' and 'the Imam,' outlined in our three inter-related translations (from chapter 366) and studies already cited at n. 56 above. One of the particularly important hints Ibn ʻArabī gives about 'how to read' his *Futūhāt* within a context of realisation is constituted by his entire chapter 559 (on the successive 'secrets/inner meanings' of each chapter of this work); a number of representative shorter selections from that chapter are already scattered throughout W. Chittick's *SDG*.

[324] Again, this highlights the close phenomenological parallel of ultimate aims and intentions—albeit with outwardly very different rhetorical devices—between the *Futūhāt* and the intended results of Plato's equally unique mastery of the dramatic dialogue form.

readers typically also discover that Ibn ʿArabī's next discussion of that same problematic topic, while it may resolve certain relatively superficial literary and intellectual puzzles, in fact tends to suggest new, previously unsuspected perspectives. And ultimately, the accumulating pressure of those puzzles, quandaries, tensions and unresolved contradictions naturally forces his readers back into the spiritually indispensable domain of their *own* wider experience (at all levels)—and eventually to a deeper, if even more consciously provisional, awareness of all that is involved in these existentially unavoidable spiritual questions. Above all, when it is continued over time, this characteristically *dynamic* intended effect of Ibn ʿArabī's constant alternation of promising allusions, scriptural symbols, and phenomenological accounts of his own and others' decisive experiential 'openings'—together with its troubling reminders of our own deeper ignorance and uncertainty—tends to awaken his readers to those deeper forms of real 'evidence' that can *only* be readily discovered in those worlds (and 'Books') that are actually at hand. Worlds which, we soon learn—if any further reminder were still needed—whose illumination is always intimately connected with our own corresponding *responses* of right action and intention.

PART II: RHETORIC, LANGUAGE AND THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATION

To recapitulate Part I, each particular distinctive feature of Ibn ʿArabī's characteristic rhetoric in his *Meccan Illuminations* is carefully constructed to provoke and to support in each reader the essential human process of 'realisation', or our gradually unfolding discovery of spiritual intelligence of the infinite divine 'Signs.' His distinctive language is designed to do so appropriately, at each level, no matter what the particular circumstances, background and 'preparedness' of each reader. The different facets of this process can be *described* consecutively, even though in reality they typically take place through a continual kind of ongoing 'inner dialogue' involving every relevant dimension of our experience. It begins by his awakening our awareness of what we truly *do* 'know' (in the essential sense of *maʿrifa*, the explicit title-subject of most of this book's 560 chapters), and by simultaneously revealing, with unavoidable intensity, the immensity of our corresponding, usually veiled spiritual ignorance. Secondly, Ibn ʿArabī constantly provides a vast spectrum of *'reminders'* and *'guidelines'*—primarily from the Qur'an and hadith, combined with his own and other knowers' more persuasively direct and detailed experiential accounts—of the particular spiritual realities, practices, intentions and guidelines (both symbolic and intellectual) that we need to actualise in order to begin to move from that awakened awareness of ignorance to inspired knowing of the Real. Next, the combination and motivating existential effects of these two first stages oblige his engaged readers to turn their attention to the necessary forms of *right action* and other previously neglected spiritual resources—always with a *newly refined intention, seriousness, and clearer awareness of the actual goals of those essential actions and experiences*, even where they were already engaged in certain outward forms of 'practice.'[325] And finally, he constantly impels all of his readers *to recall, ponder and reflect about*—the constantly repeated Qur'anic directives of *tafakkur, tadabbur, dhikr, tadhakkur, iʿtibār,* 'travelling,' and so on—*the actual lessons and meanings* to be drawn from their necessarily unique, gradually unfolding personal experience of each of those three equally indispensable preceding elements. Once we keep these four essential dimensions of 'realisation' in mind, the guiding purposes behind almost all of Ibn ʿArabī's often strange, sometimes even apparently 'incoherent,' forms of writing quickly begin to come into perspective.

'SCATTERING': THE 'PUZZLE' EFFECT

There can be no question that Ibn ʿArabī's intentional 'scattering' (*tabdīd*) of the most central spiritual teachings of his *Futūhāt*—openly announced at two key points in his Introduction, and even more emphatically highlighted by his opening quotation of three authoritative statements about the special sensitivity of some of the highest, most esoteric Prophetic teachings (as discussed in the preceding section [in Part I])—is directly inspired by similar structures of exposition and symbolism in the Qur'an itself, which are especially evident when we take to heart the actual, very gradual process of the public revelation of its verses. While many different subsequent Islamic traditions soon brought out and synthesised, within the next few centuries, the extraordinary literary, symbolic, intellectual, theological and many other relevant harmonies and unities to be found in so many dimensions of the Qur'anic teaching, the very familiarity of all those later traditions makes it especially difficult for subsequent informed readers (whether Muslim or not) approaching to the Qur'an under the influence of those familiar bodies of interpretation to appreciate the *original*

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[325] As we have already indicated, those readers who somehow fail to actualise and focus on this absolutely essential third step will soon come to find these purely *textual* 'Openings' themselves of relatively little lasting value.

rhetorical effects of that scattering of key teachings—typically combining awestruck admiration with successive waves of puzzlement and utter confusion—that are still so strikingly evident whenever one is teaching students who are encountering the Qur'an for the very first time.

In fact, the *Futūhāt* tends to restore all its readers, at least from time to time, to that primordial state of wonder or 'open bewilderment' (*hayra*), not least through the clashes of interpretation and perspective which Ibn 'Arabī constantly orchestrates there by rapidly switching—usually without bothering to inform his readers—from one to another of the many traditional religious, philological and intellectual disciplines (usually claiming to be 'sciences' or 'bodies of knowledge', *'ulūm*) that were familiar to his original readers. Since the resulting puzzlement this work often evokes is in so many such places clearly consciously *intentional*—nowhere more obviously than in the often mystifying poems opening each of its chapters—and sometimes playfully ironic, this characteristic rhetorical procedure often confronts translators, and their readers, with a particularly poignant dilemma.[326] In short, conscientious translators of the *Meccan Illuminations*—especially if they choose to provide readers of a particular chapter with key relevant information that is to be found in earlier or later chapters not yet available in complete translated form—frequently find themselves unintentionally 'subverting' many of the potentially important challenges and intended rhetorical effects of Ibn 'Arabī's method of 'scattering.' Or in other cases, as occasionally happens with unrecognised printing or editorial errors, they may find themselves possibly interpreting and inappropriately 'explaining' the many mystifying points which Ibn 'Arabī may have intended simply as playful riddles or ironically intriguing 'dead-ends' (*fausses pistes*), like those so integral to modern video and computer games, lines quite possibly designed to distract, and eventually to admonish and instruct, foolishly 'literal,' lazy or too pedestrian readers *unable to discern what is truly essential*.[327]

Since in the case of the *Futūhāt*, readers are necessarily at the mercy of their translators, and since translators—precisely to the extent that they take their task seriously—are always at the mercy of a host of only too painfully familiar risks and uncertainties, the practically most important lesson here, once again, may turn out to be what has already been said regarding the importance of profoundly trusting one's own intuitions and seasoned judgment as to what is truly spiritually essential (i.e., for one's self). Since we *do* know, and have just seen, something of what Ibn 'Arabī considered most indispensable for his ideal readers, those consciously involved in the tasks of spiritual 'realisation' (the *muhaqqiqūn*), that should be sufficient to remind us that the verification and illumination he is intending ultimately comes from sources situated well beyond both the obstacles and the limited sorts of assistance provided by philological learning. In other words, here again the *Futūhāt*, when

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[326] Another challenge which has no doubt played its role in delaying any longer, integral translations from the *Futūhāt*.

[327] For those young enough to have grown up (like my own children) with a long firsthand acquaintance with the traditional formats of most challenging video and computer games, there are a host of close analogies between their familiar 'quest' structures and so many key structural and rhetorical features of the *Futūhāt*—especially those having to do with this text's intentional and integral features of *multidimensionality* (complexly related 'levels' and their 'preconditions') and *integral interactivity*—that are not so readily suggested by the analogy with earlier, more familiar kinds of puzzles, which we tend to conceive of as somehow objectively existing and 'separate' from their player(s).

approached in the context of realisation, are above all a kind of very practical 'handbook' of spiritual intelligence: the artificial intellectual, literary and linguistic 'puzzles' Ibn 'Arabī's work abounds in, however challenging, eventually prove resolvable at an intellectual level by drawing on information and insights that can usually be found elsewhere in his writings, or beyond. However the actual 'reward' for such purely intellectual solutions, beyond motivating curious readers to continue exploring this vast work, often proves to be superficial and passing. Yet as his readers repeatedly discover, that decisive difference between restricted intellectual and authentically transforming spiritual 'solutions,' the spiritually decisive contrast between those narrowly intellectual discoveries and the exponentially expanding rewards of the *proper* forms of reading and 'investigation,' gradually becomes clearly and unforgettably apparent. And it is through such repeated contrasting experiences and life-experiments, of course, that the deeper perspectives of trustworthy spiritual discernment and genuine spiritual intelligence gradually unfold.

RESOLVING 'INCOHERENCE'—RE-CREATING THE SYMPHONY:

Even more than the far shorter and more compressed *Fusūs al-Hikam*—which itself already generated many dozens of extensive commentaries over the centuries—the *Meccan Illuminations* undeniably give almost all their readers an initial troubling sense of disorder, abrupt changes of topic and perspective, and apparent 'incoherence' of all sorts. To begin with, it is important to emphasise that this initial impression was surely just as true for Ibn 'Arabī's own original, highly qualified Muslim audiences, and that in most respects—even allowing for the additional challenges of translation—this distinctive rhetorical feature is entirely intentional. (In particular, these highly distinctive characteristics are not at all to be dismissed or ignored as the presumed chaotic result of that 'inspired' character of this writing which Ibn 'Arabī himself has highlighted and openly claimed in a number of famous passages; and the types of intentional 'scattering' of premises and allusions discussed in the preceding section explain only a very small part of this phenomenon.)   In practice, readers who seriously study the *Futūhāt* for a considerable time slowly come to appreciate the very precise intentions—and corresponding practical spiritual results—that help to account for this central aspect of Ibn 'Arabī's writing, so that this work eventually becomes more and more coherent and impressive over time.

Now since readers dependent on translations have not yet experienced the full set of demands that Ibn 'Arabī's rhetoric, within longer and entire chapters, constantly presents to his readers, it is important to highlight at the start some of the most basic ways translators are often obliged to 'betray' certain of Ibn 'Arabī's most recurrent original rhetorical intentions, while at the same time being virtually unable to convey other fundamental rhetorical features. As with the other problematic aspects of translation—and compensatory reading strategies—discussed below, simply being aware of these challenges can already help readers to mentally 'adjust' and compensate for the sometimes widely different approaches that are taken, usually with the best of intentions, by various translators. The following items are some of the most obviously important, but each translator and student of the *Futūhāt* in the original could easily add many additional points not cited here.

To begin with, apart from the most obvious distinctions between its titles, opening poetry and subsequent 'prose,' it is particularly important to keep in mind that the Arabic of each chapter of Ibn 'Arabī's work typically contains none of the internal divisions or (unambiguous) markers corresponding to the standard divisions of sections, paragraphs, sentences and the like normally

taken for granted by prose readers in Western languages.[328] Precisely in the longer and more complex chapters, translators (and even some Arabic editors) may be sorely tempted to provide their timorous readers with various kinds of 'section headings,' 'tables of contents' or other clearer sub-divisions of the chapter; and there are cases where that actually may serve a useful, relatively harmless mnemonic purpose. However, our own experience of extended reading in the *Futūhāt*— including the modern critical Arabic edition by the late O. Yahya, which abounds in all sorts of such well-intended 'reader aids'—would indicate that those particular additional 'helpers' can frequently be seriously misleading, not to mention potentially quite embarrassing. For it all too frequently happens, with repeated reading, that what initially seemed like an obvious and inexplicable 'excursus,' digression, sudden change of topic or the like eventually comes into clearer focus as an integral part of *an underlying, essential, spiritually or intellectually meaningful 'progression' of Ibn 'Arabī's discussion, once that chapter is viewed from a different point of view*—such as the larger unifying perspectives that are suggested by, among others, the opening poems, hidden Qur'anic parallelisms (e.g., in Part IV, the *fasl al-manāzil*), or Ibn 'Arabī's own highly revealing discussion of the 'secrets' and progressive contributions of each chapter in his long, penultimate Chapter 559.

In other words, in most cases that we have examined closely, Ibn 'Arabī's apparently 'incoherent' shifts of topic, language or perspective *do* eventually turn out to be powerfully effective literary devices quite *intentionally* meant to puzzle, provoke, stimulate, or simultaneously reveal and 'de-construct' the unconscious perspectives, assumptions and expectations brought to his text by different types of readers. So precisely when translators have provided such artificial additional divisions, readers need to be extremely cautious—even suspicious—about them, and must seek to read and understand that chapter, if at all possible, as it would actually be encountered *without* any such potentially misleading supplements.[329]

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[328] In some longer chapters, Ibn 'Arabī does sometimes highlight particular internal 'sections' (*fasl*), 'adjunct discussions' (*wasl*), and other more significantly named chapter divisions, but those are relatively rare, and usually of only limited assistance. As noted below (n. 74), one gradually learns from experience that it is indispensable for conscientious translators to give *only* Ibn 'Arabī's own section divisions, and to avoid the common temptation to add 'clarifying' or helpful subheadings (see notes 3 and 74) that inevitably turn out to obscure—or even to render completely invisible— the highly intentional, complex web-like interplay of topics and allusions, extending across the entire book, that forms such a key feature of the rhetoric of the *Meccan Illuminations*. In reality, it is actually quite impossible for unsuspecting modern readers to 'tune out' elaborate internal outlines and subheadings added by a translator or editor, when they have been conditioned by a lifetime of practice to consider such markers automatically as key, utterly reliable guides—considerably more so than the following prose they summarise and introduce—to the actual reading process.

[329] In addition, this same caution is also applicable, of course, to translators' unavoidable choices of *paragraph* divisions (likewise *not* present as such in Arabic), although the degree of potential danger and misrepresentation involved in those choices is normally a great deal less severe.

Besides M. Gloton's above-mentioned French translation of chapter 178 (*Traité de l'Amour*), another even more egregious illustration of this danger—although, in this context, explicable in terms of the particular translator's own guiding personal interests—can be found in E. Winkel's pioneering English translation (from most of chapter 68), *Mysteries of Purity: Ibn 'Arabī's **asrār al-tahārah**, (Notre Dame, 1995),* which adds almost a hundred of the translator's own highly detailed titles and

Secondly, every translator of Ibn 'Arabī (not just from the *Futūhāt*, in this case) is well aware of the kinds of potential distortions and misrepresentations that can flow from the usual need, in translating normal modern English prose, to provide (a) relatively short sentences, with (b) clearly defined punctuation breaks, and (c) some meaningful variety of sentence connectors and conjunctions. The problems these standard expectations create, at every stage and on virtually every line, even of relatively straightforward Arabic prose, are formidable and should constantly be kept in mind by those limited to reading in translation, for the following essential reasons. First of all, Ibn 'Arabī's usual discursive prose style in the *Meccan Illuminations*—which is quite different, incidentally, from the quite astonishing, often highly innovative and 'experimental,' range of various challenging prose and rhymed-prose styles he adopted or created, almost like different dramatic *personae*, in other shorter works, especially from the earlier Andalusian and Maghrebi period of his life—is to create extremely long, integral phrases, with a multitude of relevant qualifiers and 'asides,' carefully developing *all the many facets of a single thought*, much as we are used to reading, for example, in classical German philosophical and academic literature. In other words, a *single* coherent prose 'sentence' of the *Futūhāt*, in this sense, if translated honestly and more exactly, would often require a lengthy page or more of English.[330]

Since today's readers of English, unlike German, would normally find a more exact rendering of Ibn 'Arabī's longer phrases intolerable, translators are understandably obliged to break up these discussion-wholes—which typically carefully reflect alternative facets or perspectives for viewing a single subject, much like turning around a multi-faceted gemstone or prism held up to the light—into a much longer series of what readers often naturally expect to be *logically* 'consecutive', 'progressive', or 'sequential' statements. But that sort of '*horizontal*,' sequential expectation—and the translator's attempt to cater to it—can be highly misleading, since the actual distinctive 'logic' and 'progression' of Ibn 'Arabī's presentation and development of topics is more normally to be grasped (just as throughout the Qur'an itself!) as a kind of intentionally vertiginous, highly demanding *vertical* 'jumping' back and forth between the various epistemological 'levels' and aspects of realisation discussed in detail in our preceding sections. Something of what is so often lost

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subheadings—while silently *omitting all of Ibn 'Arabī's own*, absolutely key, explicit section divisions, his indispensable opening poems, etc. While this peculiar editorial procedure—again, silently imposed and entirely unexplained—may be explicable by the translator's own quite explicit, over-riding particular interests (see his related study, **n. 40 above**) and those of the small pietistic audience he is apparently addressing, they also make it virtually impossible for any other readers approaching this 'version' from many other possible perspectives—unless they compare it closely with the actual Arabic text—to have any inkling of the host of other potential levels of meaning, problems, and essential intended connections between this chapter and many other chapters and topics throughout the *Futūhāt*. As W. Chittick has carefully pointed out in his rich discussion of key translation issues in the *SDG* (pp. xxv-xxl, and related appendices and index), the *wide-ranging collective responsibilities and perspectives* involved in translating larger parts of an immense work like the *Futūhāt* today are now far weightier and more demanding than with the 'solo' approach that was once unavoidable for earlier generations of scholars intent simply on 'introducing' particular ideas or larger themes from Ibn 'Arabī, or even the 'teachings of Sufism' and the like.

[330] One encounters quite similar complexities when translating the equally complex Arabic prose of Ibn Khaldūn, despite other egregious differences of style and subject.

even in this relatively uncontroversial 'conversion' to today's normal English prose can easily be imagined, as being roughly comparable to the challenge of creating a schoolboy's 'dummies' guide' to Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, from which all foreign languages and learned allusions have been carefully excluded.

In this regard, one of the most obvious challenges facing any translator is the rendering (into English or other European languages) of the tiny range of connective particles actually found in Ibn 'Arabī's Arabic.[331] Again, most English readers would not tolerate—nor could they reasonably be expected to effectively 're-translate'—all the daunting ambiguities so often *intentionally* created by Ibn 'Arabī's stringing together dozens of '*ands*'[332] and the handful of other particles which may in fact be intended to convey all sorts of logical, temporal, contrastive, expository, or simply unavoidable *alternative* forms of 'connection' and separation. Time and again, it is all too clear—above all to translators themselves, who must constantly 'decide' for their otherwise unsuspecting readers—that the problematic uncertainty and ambiguity of these same constantly repeated particles is often intentionally meant to oblige Ibn 'Arabī's readers to think through several apparently possible meanings, interpretations or allusions of the longer phrase and context in question.

Finally—and again partly reflecting earlier translators' dilemmas in creating understandable versions of the *Fusūs al-Hikam*—the density of surrounding explanation and contextualisation required by most readers of the *Futūhāt* in translation means that it is almost impossible to convey what we might call the '*orchestral rhythm*' or broadly '*symphonic*' effects of Ibn 'Arabī's prose throughout this majestic work.   In Ibn 'Arabī's original Arabic, his extremely long, complex and demanding expository 'prose' periods—truly the precise verbal representation of the 'restrictive intellect' (*'aql*) in all of its dense complexity—are repeatedly, and often quite unexpectedly, dramatically punctuated and juxtaposed with much shorter, powerfully shocking 'direct' forms of expression. These latter include brief, telling experiential and scriptural 'allusions' (*ishārāt*); hammer-like *imperatives* ('Know!' or 'You-all must know!), or poignant *invocations to the reader* ('May God grant you...'); and the familiar, highly evocative, near-poetic solemn cadences of Arabic rhymed-prose (*saj'*)—the latter passages being particularly impossible to translate into any effective English equivalent, especially given the typical density of the allusions that Ibn 'Arabī normally packs into

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[331] The inherent ambiguities and wide range of possible 'connections' implied by the most common Arabic connective particles (*wa*- and *fa*-) are such that translators are constantly presented with a much larger set of possibilities in English or French—while in perhaps the majority of cases, the most neutral and 'accurate' translation (i.e., without *adding* the appearance of particular sorts of logical, causal or temporal connections that may or may not be intended) would in reality be to add yet another in a long set of consecutive 'ands.'   This is an area in which any translator could add their own much longer series of such recurrent dilemmas, no doubt including the common Qur'anic 'emphatic' forms, usually rendered as 'surely', 'certainly,' 'verily', etc., in multiple contexts where the intended meaning might be best conveyed in oral/aural translation by *tone* and *vocal emphasis* (in American English, at least) rather than any added words at all. In all such cases, translators seeking to be faithfully literal, and to catch the subtle nuances of each Arabic word, in fact also run the constant risk of unintentionally suggesting new meanings in translation which may not even be present in the original.

[332] I.e., the Arabic *wa*- (or *fa*-), which can be translated by any number of widely varying English conjunctions, depending on context and (presumed) meaning.

that particular rhetorical style. More often than not, each of these strikingly *shorter* forms of expression clearly corresponds to the hoped-for evocation—in properly prepared readers—of the higher levels of realisation discussed above, either of the 'knowledge of spiritual secrets' or even of more fully realised spiritual intelligence relating to the specific topic under discussion.

However, this full musical range of intended rhetorical effects becomes extremely difficult to carry over into translation—at least where accuracy and completeness are taken as at least equally essential requirements. Within a *translation*, when all these powerfully 'percussive' effects are embedded within pages of demanding prose and additional contextual explanation and footnotes, the resulting net effect might perhaps be compared to a radio announcer's 'play-by-play account' of a visually and aurally unforgettable fireworks display.

Indeed, given the scope and variety of topics and rhetorical styles often included within a single extensive chapter of the *Futūhāt*, it is often helpful for readers to conceive of each 'topic' and its distinctively corresponding 'semantic fields'—for example, a typical mix of Qur'an part-verses, brief allusions to immense hadith, elaborate discussions of kalam theology, Sufi spiritual psychology, Aristotelian/Ptolemaic cosmology (or Galenic physiology), Arabic philology and linguistics, and so on—as representing a single kind of '*instrument*' (or distinctive choral '*voice*'), whose coherent place, role and meaning within the larger whole of Ibn 'Arabī's guiding intention only very slowly and gradually comes into place, through repeated reflection and re-reading. And in reality, if we were not all so very recently grown accustomed—compared to the longer flow of human history—to the facile omnipresence of recorded music; and if we were instead obliged to 'decipher' and re-create for ourselves, mentally and inwardly (or by playing successive individual instruments), our own orchestral 'scores' whenever we wanted to 're-experience' a particularly moving symphonic or choral composition: then we would indeed have one of the most effective possible images for appreciating the actual rhetorical structures and polyvalent intended effects of these *Meccan Illuminations*.

PRONOUN DANCING:

One more limited and concrete—yet far from trivial—illustration of many of the key features of the *Futūhāt* discussed more broadly in the preceding sections, is the ongoing problem of Ibn 'Arabī's distinctive use (or abuse!) of Arabic pronouns, which has already bedevilled the commentators of his *Fusūs al-Hikam* for many centuries, taking up hundreds of dense pages of their elaborate commentaries on that far shorter work. This problem—which again has profound Qur'anic antecedents[333]—is especially obvious in almost all of the poems introducing each of the chapters of the *Futūhāt*, which in most cases only become even remotely comprehensible, at their deeper

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[333] Related pronominal structures, constantly recurring in Qur'anic passages familiar to every Arabic reader (and often highlighted or imitated by Ibn 'Arabī), have been revealingly discussed in other contexts by M. Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an* (Ashland, OR, 2007; second edition), and related discussions in *Early Islamic Mysticism* (New York, 1996), as well as the chapters on the *Fusūs al-Hikam* in Sells' *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* and Chidkiewicz's *An Ocean without Shore.* These recurrent problems of ambiguity of reference are deeply complicated, of course, by the absence—for this purpose, at least—in classical Arabic of anything like our familiar forms of punctuation, which in the Qur'an often leads to multiple possible meaningful readings of the same passage, another Qur'anic literary feature that Ibn 'Arabī often imitates in his poetry, in particular.

levels, once the reader has carefully gone through and studied the remaining prose chapter several times. So students of the *Futūhāt* commonly discover that Ibn 'Arabī has carefully established a kind of intricate 'dance' of meaning between the allusions embedded in his opening poems and the (relatively, if often superficially) more 'prosaic' sections of the subsequent body of each chapter— just as he has also done in the correspondences he develops between each chapter and his fertile discussion of its corresponding 'secrets' or 'inner meanings' in his penultimate chapter 559; or between each individual Sura of the Qur'an (beginning with the last) and the successive, extraordinarily demanding chapters of his long Part IV on the 'Spiritual Waystations' or 'Points of Descent' (*fasl al-manāzil,* chapters 270-383). In each of those situations, the dedicated reader—and *a fortiori*, the responsible translator—is obliged to go back and forth constantly between each of these highly complex potential 'keys' to a given chapter, as the resulting meanings and subtle interconnections gradually fall into a clearer perspective.[334] Thus the eventual overall effects of this rhetorical procedure, especially the wide-ranging inner and 'outer' demands involved, are quite comparable to the successive stages and dimensions involved in 'learning,' for example, any similarly demanding spiritual arts and disciplines.

Returning to the problem of pronouns, in particular, Ibn 'Arabī's absolutely distinctive poems, to begin with, are often intricately constructed from a host of purposefully vague and highly indeterminate pronouns (including similarly ambiguous verbal indicators) whose many possible referents each reader—and translator—must painstakingly decipher, weigh and eventually seek to comprehend in their larger context—all the while knowing, most annoyingly, that in many cases the indeterminacies involved are intentionally meant to have *multiple possible 'right' answers*, each with a distinct meaning equally relevant to the subject at hand! In particular, Ibn 'Arabī loves to construct puzzling lines of poetry in which the decisive 'referents' of absolutely key pronouns may be best supplied not by any visible proximate textual antecedents (as would be the case in 'normal' Arabic prose), but by a gamut of 'implied' subjects or objects that can only be inferred by a kind of inspired guessing from the wider contexts of the following chapter, related larger themes and allusions, and so on. If that were not enough, Ibn 'Arabī's unique metaphysical poetry is often further characterised by a playful underlying aesthetic 'dance' of corresponding masculine and feminine *grammatical* pronominal forms[335] which is clearly intended to musically, aurally mirror and evoke the universal cosmic interplay of (relative) 'active' and 'receptive' factors and divine Names—

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[334] To the best of our knowledge, this absolutely fundamental feature of the *Futūhāt* (and many other of Ibn 'Arabī's more substantial writings) has been most beautifully and effectively evoked in Chodkiewicz's extraordinary *An Ocean Without Shore*, with its carefully illustrated suggestions that *all* of Ibn 'Arabī's writings together form a kind of single inextricable holographic 'mirror' of the deeper meanings of the Qur'an.

[335] See the works of Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*. (These grammatical pronominal forms in Arabic should not be confused with actually gendered 'male' and 'female' referents, although in certain cases the actual gender of possible referents does impact the grammatical possibilities.) The dynamic cosmological inter-relations mirrored here, so typical of Ibn 'Arabī's world-view, are profusely illustrated by many translated cosmological passages from the *Futūhāt* included in W. Chittick's *SDG*.

profoundly comparable to the Taoist notions of Yin and Yang[336]—which is so reflective of his larger vision of reality.   Such richly ambiguous poetry repeatedly poses terrible dilemmas for any translator, since some of its key aesthetic dimensions are always utterly untranslatable, whereas the translator's efforts at providing the necessary clarification and explanation of each line tend to require inordinate amounts of extensive commentary,[337] while at the same time robbing the reader of the originally intended considerable personal efforts needed to decipher and comprehend these intentionally mystifying passages, in their deeper inter-relations with the internal subjects of the chapter.

ACCESSING THE QUR'AN AND HADITH:

For Ibn 'Arabī, there is no question that the Qur'an[338] itself is the 'Translator' *par excellence*, the essential tool for beginning to see, and eventually to decipher, all the other 'Books,' of the world and the soul, as actual, ever-renewed divine 'Speaking.' In other words, his own usage of and reference to the Qur'an is totally different from what we normally encounter in most other Islamic literatures. In most of those literatures—and this observation applies equally to all of the 'religious sciences' (including much later Sufi writing) and to the ways Qur'anic references are also normally brought to bear in the 'rational sciences,' such as Islamic philosophy—by far the most common usage of Qur'anic verses (or hadith) is actually *to argue in support of a point or conclusion* **already believed**, much as debaters (or the partners in a medieval disputation) refer to their card-files or memories to pull up rhetorically useful pieces of information for impressing their particular audiences. This is what Ibn 'Arabī very disparagingly refers to, using the technical language of theology and jurisprudence, as *istidlāl*. Such common usages, in every Islamic intellectual discipline, quickly became standard, constantly repeated stock features of the particular traditions in question, to such a degree that anyone versed in each tradition will immediately recognise and can often 'complete' by heart, or even anticipate, the particular Qur'anic references in question. In such cases, the translator can usually be satisfied with simply identifying the citation or allusion in question (as being from this or that place in the Qur'an or standard hadith collections), or at most with indicating its standard role in the intellectual tradition in question, particularly so that neophyte readers won't imagine that such recurrent stock usages are actually a product of the author's own independent thinking.

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[336] See also S. Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (Albany, 1992), which richly develops this theme, using texts drawn primarily from a wide range of subsequent generations of Muslim interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas and writings. That book is now richly supplemented in her study and translation of two later key Chinese Muslim texts deeply rooted in the tradition of Ibn 'Arabī (and Jāmī): *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* (Albany, 2000).

[337] It should be stressed (for non-Arabists) that this problem is essentially present in the actual Arabic, and is therefore not primarily a function of translation into another language. Thus the classical Arabic commentaries on the *Fusūs al-Hikam*, as well as famous commentaries on the very first opening lines of chapter 1 of the *Futūhāt*, have sometimes taken many pages attempting to resolve and explain alternative readings of these typical pronominal 'puzzles' in Ibn 'Arabī's *prose*— not to mention his poetry!

[338] *Always* including, for Ibn 'Arabī, its equally inspired and revelatory reflection in the very '*character*' (*khuluq*: according to a famous hadith) and teachings of the Prophet himself.

In contrast, Ibn ʿArabi's own use of allusions to the Qur'an and hadith is radically, fundamentally different—so much so that it usually takes students of his work a number of years, and intensive study of several different books of his, to begin to fully appreciate what he is actually doing.[339] To begin with, Ibn ʿArabī almost always refers to something from the Qur'an or hadith *in order to suggest to his reader a **new, different way of seeing***, *of perceiving and 'reading' the world*. Often this intended 'opening' requires that he first somehow shatter or 'break through' fossilised, habitual ways of reading and interpreting the divine words. And many of his characteristic, sometimes intentionally shocking ways of piercing those habitual forms of unconscious 'belief' are already familiar to the readers (and the polemical opponents!) of his *Fusūs al-Hikam*. But this initial radical use of particular verses and hadith to evoke decisive 'flashes' or intuitive 'openings' to deeper, primordial levels of meaning and insight—an approach which continued, by the way, to inspire many generations of later well-known Persian-language Sufi poets (ʿErāqī, Maghrebī, Jāmī, Shabistārī, etc.)—is only the most visible, and very partial, *beginning* of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching.

For it slowly becomes clear, precisely through the gradual accumulation and deepening of many such preliminary, pointillistic insights, that Ibn ʿArabī is actually gradually 'unveiling' the deeper 'Reality'—*his* words—of the Qur'ān (or the divine '*Book*') as a kind of invisible 'force-field' or creative 'web' underlying, shaping, manifesting and giving form to all of creation and experience.[340] Stated or conceived as 'theology' or belief, or as a purely intellectual construct, as we have already noted, such words and concepts remain a literally a 'dead letter.' Instead, Ibn ʿArabī's purpose is to bring about or initiate that *actual perception,* to teach his readers how to 'read' and even to begin to 'hear' that ever-renewed divine 'New-Speaking'—and then to go on to manifest and respond appropriately to that inspired spiritual perception in every area of their lives. Thus over time, such devoted readers eventually do begin to see that virtually everything in his writings implicitly involves key allusions to the Qur'an and specific hadith, even—indeed one might say, *especially*—where nothing is visibly quoted.

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[339] As a memorable illustration of this, I will never forget my first day's 'initiatic' experience as a young graduate student in the intensive seminar Toshihiko Izutsu had devoted for years (in Tehran) to the close study of the *Fusūs al-Hikam* and all its classic commentaries, frequented by many leading Iranian and foreign scholars of Ibn ʿArabī. Having spent several days assiduously preparing the assigned texts, I was asked to begin the session by translating the opening verses of one chapter—and instantly discovered that absolutely *nothing at all*, in Professor Izutsu's understanding of Ibn ʿArabī, seemed to match any of the standard meanings of the same words that could be found in any of my Arabic dictionaries.

[340] As already mentioned (n. 79 above), Chodkiewicz's *An Ocean Without Shore* has provided by far the most elaborate discussion and illustration of this characteristic feature of Ibn ʿArabī's writing, extending to all of Ibn ʿArabī's most influential longer works. One finds a remarkably similar evocative approach to mirroring the entire Qur'an in the poetic works of both Rumi and Hafez (to mention only two of the most influential creators of the Islamic humanities)—a factor which no doubt helps account for the peculiarly lasting and universal cultural impact of both those authors. With both poets, of course, the guiding underlying Qur'anic references are of course initially more 'veiled' by their expanded Persian symbolic vocabulary for alluding to the essential spiritual themes of the Qur'an and hadith.

Obviously this constant guiding intention and extraordinarily ambitious rhetorical procedure presents a daunting range of problems to any would-be translator (and reader), especially when one begins to tackle complete and extensive chapters of the *Futūhāt*. But before returning to those challenges, it may be helpful—since what Ibn 'Arabī is claiming and attempting is so immense in its scope—to make it entirely clear that this guiding perception, and the fundamental role within it of the universal 'Realities' of the Qur'an and the Prophet, all emerge directly from perhaps the single most transformative 'illumination' in his long and always singular spiritual autobiography. The following highly compressed lines are quoted from the autobiographical description he recorded as the summit of his own spiritual ascension or 'Nocturnal Journey' (*mi'rāj/isrā'*) in chapter 367 of the *Futūhāt*, although we understandably find other 'versions' and echoes of this transforming moment throughout all of his works, beginning (at least) with his youthful *Kitāb al-Isrā'*:[341]

> Then I was enveloped by the (divine) lights until all of me became Light, and a robe of honour was bestowed upon me the likes of which I had never seen. So I said: 'O my God, the Signs/verses (*āyāt*) are scattered!' But then '*He sent down upon* **me**'[342] at this moment (His) Saying: *Say: 'we have faith in God and in what He sent down upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes (of Israel), and in what was brought to Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord; we do not separate any one among them, and we are surrendered to Him!'* (3:84). Thus He gave me *all* the Signs/verses in *this* Sign,[343] clarified the matter (i.e., of the universal *Reality* of the Qur'an) for me, and made this Sign/verse for me the key to all knowledge. Henceforth I knew that I *am* the totality of those (prophets) who were mentioned/recalled to me (in this verse).
>
> Through this I received the good tidings that I was in the 'Muhammadan station,'[344] that I was among the heirs of Muhammad's comprehensiveness. For he was the last to be sent as a messenger, the last to have (the direct

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[341] See **note 53 above** for full references to the translation volume (*The Meccan Revelations*) and the *JAOS* article containing our full translations and related explanations of this key autobiographical experience, which is also discussed in the recent biographical studies **by S. Hirtenstein and C. Addas (details at n. 53).**

[342] This is a recurrent Qur'anic expression (*anzala 'alā*) normally referring specifically to the 'sending down' of divine Revelation to the prophetic Messengers (*rusul*).

[343] Or 'verse', *āya*. Since what was revealed to Ibn 'Arabi in this experience was no less than the inner meaning of the true eternal *Qur'ān*—which is also the 'Reality of Muhammad'—encompassing all knowledge (including the spiritual sources/realities of all the prophetically revealed 'Books'), this phrase can also be read simply as 'all the *verses* in that one verse.'

[344] Literally, that I was 'Muhammad-like in spiritual station' (*Muhammadī al-maqam*), i.e., marked by the Prophet's primordial spiritual condition of 'all-comprehensiveness' (*jam'iyya*), encompassing the eternal Realities of all the prophets (the *majmū'* or 'totality') mentioned in the preceding sentence. For details on Ibn 'Arabī's conception of this unique *maqām muhammadī*, see the discussions throughout Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints.*

Revelation) *descend upon him* (97:4). God 'gave him the all-comprehensive Words,'[345] and he was specially favoured by six things with which the messenger of no (other) community was specially favoured. Therefore (Muhammad's) Mission is universal… from whatever direction you come, you will find only the Light of Muhammad[346] overflowing upon you: no one takes (spiritual knowing) except from It/Him, and no messenger has informed (humanity) except for (what is) from It/Him.

…Thus I attained in this nocturnal journey (*isrā'*) *the inner meanings of all the divine Names*, and I saw them all returning to One Subject[347] and One Entity.[348] That Subject was what I witnessed,[349] and *that Entity was my Being*. For my voyage was only in myself and only pointed to myself, and through this I came to know that I was a pure 'servant,'[350] without a trace of lordship in me at all.

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[345] *Jawāmi' al-kilam*: the famous hadith paraphrased in this sentence (see Bukhārī, *ta'bīr*, 11; Muslim, *masājid*, 5-8; Tirmidhī, *siyar*, 5; etc.) is cited repeatedly by Ibn 'Arabī, in many of his works, to emphasise the all-encompassing totality of spiritual knowledge or divine 'forms-of-wisdom' (*hikam*) making up the 'Muhammadan Reality.'

[346] *Nūr Muhammad*: for the historical background of this term (including early references in hadith and the Sīra literature), see Chodkiewicz, *Seal….*

[347] Or 'One Object': *Musammā wāhid*, literally 'One "Named" Reality.'

[348] Or 'One *Eye*,' 'One *Source*,' 'One *Essential Entity*,': *'ayn wāhida*. Ibn 'Arabī clearly means to evoke here *all* these key dimensions of this single multivalent Arabic term.

[349] *Mashhūdi*: this phrase and the following one *together* carefully sum up the ineffable paradox of this experiential realisation of divine Unicity—the very core of Ibn 'Arabī's work—which led to so much subsequent theological and philosophical controversy in the Islamic world (and wherever attempts have been made to treat this realisation conceptually as a metaphysical or theological 'system'). The first phrase, taken in separation, states the thesis discussed by some later Sufis as '*wahdat al-shuhūd*,' and the second the ontological position of *wahdat al-wujūd*—while the simultaneous *combination alone* expresses the experience and fundamental reality the Shaykh attempts to convey here and throughout his writings. The corresponding account in his earlier *K. al-Isrā'* (in the Hyderabad ed. of his *Rasā'il*), pp. 65-66, already includes an extremely important caution: 'So beware and don't imagine that my "conjunction" (*ittisāl*) with (the highest divine Presence) was one of identity of Essence (*inniya*)....'

[350] *'abd mahd*: this formulation (or the related one of *'abd khālis*), used fairly frequently by Ibn 'Arabī, refers to those rare 'knowers' who have become wholly devoted (*mukhlisūn*) to the divine 'I'—i.e., who are therefore among those rare beings God calls '*My servants*,' ('*ibadī*, alluding especially to the Qur'an at 5:42 and 17:65)—and not to the totality of creatures, who of course are all 'servants of God' in a metaphysical (but still spiritually unrealised) sense.

Since the dimensions of the 'Qur'an' and the Prophetic teachings that Ibn 'Arabī is attempting to awaken and deepen in each of his readers, in the *Futūhāt* and all of his works, are precisely the all-encompassing illuminative awareness, the sort of foundational 'opening' so powerfully and succinctly described in this key autobiographical passage, what can the translator do to facilitate the reader's absolutely indispensable awareness of all the relevant allusions to those foundational scriptural sources?[351]   The most obvious points we can mention—reserving the closely related problems of translation for the following sections—clearly highlight the unavoidable necessity for very active, involved and demanding participation by each reader, no matter how much background any translator may provide. To begin with, if modern readers are to have any sense of the underlying importance of Ibn 'Arabī's allusions to—and not just literal quotations of—key passages of the Qur'an and hadith, all translators need, at the very least, to indicate the *full relevant contexts* of the passages in question, in ways that facilitate readers' actually looking up those larger contexts.[352]   Like many Islamic authors, Ibn 'Arabī often quotes literally only relatively small portions

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[351] This is an area where Arabic readers not intimately familiar with the Qur'an and hadith are in just as much difficulty as those reading translations—or perhaps even more difficulty, if their habitual forms of understanding of those scriptural sources are embedded in unconscious belief-systems that block any real perception of Ibn 'Arabī's aims and understanding. Particularly relevant in this context is Ibn 'Arabī's own very direct practical advice on the proper way one should approach 'reading' and contemplating the Qur'an, contained in his particularly influential short treatise **What the Seeker Needs. Our more accurate complete, annotated translation of that work, as well as several other equally important short treatises, and related practical chapters from the *Futūhāt*, should appear soon in our planned volume, *Spiritual Practice and the Spiritual Path: Ibn 'Arabī's Advice for the Murīd*:**

> 'Ask and inquire (of God), with regard to each Sura, what it is *you* ought to ask about regarding that. Try to figure out for every verse its special relevance and lesson *for you*. Meditate and put into practice, for each verse, what is its relevance and connection (to *your* actual situation), and what those qualities and attributes are indicating (that *you* should now learn or do). Reflect on those qualities and attributes *you* have, and on those which *you* are missing. Then give Him thanks for those which you have and those which you have not (yet) attained! And when you read a description of (the contrasting negative attributes of) the hypocrites and those who ungratefully reject (God), then reflect as to whether there is not also something of those same attributes *in you*.'

[352] In addition, adequately 'contextualising' Ibn 'Arabī's usual flood of Qur'an quotations and allusions—as students of the *Fusūs al-Hikam* are already well aware—also often requires first explaining to modern readers the particular sorts of traditional, habitual, often unconsciously taken-for-granted 'frameworks of (*mis*-)understanding' that Ibn 'Arabī is frequently seeking to 'deconstruct,' undermine or reveal in order to enable his readers to penetrate to a deeper level of genuine understanding. This can be a complex and demanding task for any translator. The practical relevance of this approach, especially in certain types of formally 'devout' and (outwardly) pietistic contexts, is vigorously explained and illustrated by E. Winkel in his two studies (both relating primarily to chapter 68 of the *Futūhāt*), *Islam and the Living Law* and *Mysteries of Purity*.

of the larger contexts he is actually referring to, whether those are found in the Qur'an or hadith. So frequently his few quoted words or allusions could possibly come from or relate to several different Qur'anic passages, while often it actually turns out—when one goes back to examine those potentially relevant verses—that in fact he has only one particularly revealing context in mind at that point. In particular, since accurate and even remotely reliable translations of any of the major Sunni hadith collections do not exist at all,[353] it is incumbent on conscientious translators, if at all possible, to provide in footnotes or an appendix the full relevant texts—*and* the traditionally associated historical contexts—of the particular hadith in question. For quite often, it turns out, the essential spiritual lesson Ibn 'Arabī means to highlight requires one to explain first of all the significance of the traditionally assumed context of this or that familiar hadith (or particular Qur'anic verse) within the life of the Prophet and the early Muslim community.[354] In the same way, providing the full text of the hadith alluded to is especially helpful with that recurrent set of certain long hadith and 'divine sayings,' such as the eschatological ones included in Ibn 'Arabī's own *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, which are truly foundational for approaching all of his teaching and spiritual understanding.

However, since the actual application of all of these desiderata would, in the case of the *Futūhāt*, inevitably lead to translations encumbered by a vast apparatus of parenthetical explanations, footnotes and appendices (items which are seldom favoured by cost-conscious publishers and less dedicated readers), and since these essential considerations have in any case often not been taken seriously by translators in the past, in most cases it is Ibn 'Arabī's readers themselves who need to develop the habits of reading the 'translated' Ibn 'Arabi with a least a helpful Qur'an (for the moment, Arberry's is still probably the least misleading in English) at hand, carefully reading and thinking through the *contextual* meaning and relevance of each of Ibn 'Arabī's key Qur'anic allusions as they arise—even if we may think we already 'know' the verses in question. A close familiarity with *all* the hadith included in the *Mishkāt al-Anwār* and (albeit often in highly shortened form) in the appendices to other recent volumes of translations from the *Futūhāt* (especially those by W. Chittick) will also prove invaluable, especially as such familiarity eventually will help readers to detect many highly significant allusions and 'implications' of those key Prophetic teachings which may not have been highlighted by this or that translator.

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[353] All translators should be aware, as we have learned from the repeated experience of years of teaching foundational courses on Islam, that the extant 'English' versions of certain major hadith collections—in most cases apparently not created by native English speakers—are painfully, abysmally inaccurate and misleading throughout, often in profoundly dangerous ways that cannot possibly be corrected by unsuspecting students unable to read the original Arabic. If at all possible, it is therefore essential, in preparing translations of Ibn 'Arabī that will be read by *non*-scholarly audiences without ready access to Arabic and the actual hadith, to provide full and adequately contextualised translations of each of the relevant hadith. Often the task of providing such translations and contexts is itself a highly educational experience.

[354] This is another distinguishing feature of Ibn 'Arabī's characteristic usage of Qur'an and hadith that is radically opposed to their common usage as stock 'proof-texts' in the context of other Islamic religious sciences. In many cases (of both hadith and Qur'an) the essential—but implicit and unstated—point of his lessons often lies in the concretely particular, intensely human situation of trials and tests which are exemplified in this or that particular moment of the Prophet's life and the related early history of the Muslim community.

Equally important as essential background, for any serious student of an immense work like the *Futūḥāt*, is to have read carefully through one of the accessible translations of the *Sīra* (the life of the Prophet and history of the earliest Muslim community), such as Martin Lings' readily accessible study, which is particularly useful in that it often focuses on events, hadith and Qur'anic passages that were taken up by most later traditions of Sufism and Islamic spirituality. Fortunately, over time many of Ibn 'Arabī's most fundamental hadith and Qur'an references do become familiar to attentive readers of his translated works (with good memories!)—although such an ideally wide-ranging background should certainly never be taken for granted by any conscientious translator.

All of these desiderata highlight the tremendous practical and spiritual usefulness, already highlighted in an earlier section (Part I), of teaching and studying the *Futūḥāt* within a small informal group, where each participant can contribute—and help catch and discern—different aspects of this key scriptural dimension of all of Ibn 'Arabī's work.

PROBLEMS OF QUR'AN TRANSLATION:

While we have devoted two other short sections below to broader recurrent problems in translating Ibn 'Arabī, and in 're-translating' from the available translations, there is no question that the most fundamental problems encountered in translating the *Futūḥāt*, in particular, are often virtually inseparable from the challenges facing all attempted translations of the Qur'an into Indo-European languages. Some of the most important difficulties that task involves—both for translators and, above all, for students attempting to approach some degree of serious understanding of the Qur'an—have already been discussed in more detail in other studies, so that they need not be repeated here.[355] Instead of focusing on the litany of particular problems facing translators of Ibn 'Arabī in this regard,[356] we shall move on immediately to some of the various quite practical steps that concerned readers *without* any Arabic can take to 'translate back' to something closer to the intended and possible meanings of the Arabic Qur'an those less than fully adequate Qur'anic

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[355] See, for example, our summary article on 'Qur'an Translation and the Challenge of Communication: Toward a "Literal" (Study) Version of the Qur'an' (*Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2:2, 2000), and the closely related study (and experimental translation of Sura 12 of the Qur'an) 'Dramatizing the Sura of Joseph: An Introduction to the Islamic Humanities,' (*Journal of Turkish Studies* 18, 1994)—as well as M. Sells' range of related observations included in his recent *Approaching the Qur'an*. The vast range of fundamental problems involved in Qur'an translation are of such obvious importance to growing Muslim communities in the West—and to educators more generally—that we should see a much wider range of thoughtful and creative practical responses in the near future. Certainly no other classical Muslim author, compared with Ibn 'Arabī, provides more useful hints and suggestions about the directions which must be taken in order to begin to more adequately communicate the multiple dimensions of Qur'anic discourse and meaning in various Western languages and new cultural settings.

[356] Although this may be restating the obvious, it is still worth pointing out that any 'translator' of Ibn 'Arabī who has not done their own carefully appropriate translating of the Shaykh's complex Qur'an allusions and hadith, constantly reflecting on all the endless issues and challenges that necessarily involves—but who has instead relied upon one or another of the commercially available options in English—is not only assuredly misleading their readers, but is also likely not adequately prepared to translate the rest of the Ibn 'Arabī's Arabic as well.

versions that they may encounter in some versions of the Shaykh's works. Some of these suggested steps are relatively easy to apply, while others are far more demanding, but in each case the important point is to practice each step sufficiently so that it gradually becomes an automatic 'habit of mind' that one naturally applies to *any* translated Qur'anic passage. Again, carefully and slowly studying chapters of the *Futūhāt* in a small group, where some of these preparatory tasks can be shared, can also help in putting these cautions into practice.

- To begin with, simply by way of avoiding the 'compounded' misunderstanding that comes from working with Qur'an commentaries masked as translations, we may cite William Chittick's repeated observation that the readily available translation of the Qur'an by A.J. Arberry is still probably the least misleading version available as a companion for reading Ibn 'Arabī.[357] (More recent Qur'an versions providing a romanised transliteration or transcription of the sounds of the recited Qur'an may also offer the particular limited help of enabling their readers in English to isolate and identify the underlying Arabic roots.) Arberry's usefulness is greatly magnified by combining it with the use of H. Kassis's marvellously helpful English *Concordance*, which is keyed primarily to Arberry's translation: together, that allows readers of the Qur'an in English to move back to those semantic families of *underlying Arabic roots*—usually translated by a host of entirely different English nouns, verbs and adjectives—which are the basic, essential building-blocks of meaning in the Qur'an.

- Since the key to understanding and deciphering the Qur'an lies in its basic tri-literal Arabic roots—whose central (and often multiple) core meanings are inevitably so readily lost when they are broken down into the different English parts of speech—access to the Kassis *Concordance* enables English readers of the *Futūhāt* to begin to move back and forth between the key Qur'anic terms found in their translations and the much wider, characteristic semantic 'resonances' of those same root-meanings in many previously unsuspected passages and other actually related terms in their English Qur'an translation.

- One of Ibn 'Arabī's most common and distinctive methods for 'unveiling' and deepening his readers' spiritual awareness of the more wide-ranging meanings and intentions of otherwise familiar expressions from the Qur'an and hadith—an approach already well illustrated in the widely available English versions and translated commentaries on his *Fusūs al-Hikam*—lies in his characteristic *'etymological' deepening of key Qur'anic roots*. Usually this works by taking his reader away from a later, fossilised 'abstract' (theological, philosophical, legal, etc.) or semi-technical usage, and by returning them instead to a far more concrete, poetically evocative 'literal' awareness of various earlier,

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[357] The primary communication problem with Arberry's translation (and one still shared by most of the other alternative translations, unfortunately) for native English speakers, which can readily be verified in any religious studies classroom, has to do with the students' usually highly complex and far-reaching taken-for-granted fields of association with the apparently 'familiar' language of the King James version—associations which in most cases have nothing at all to do with any formal religious education (which might even help remove such notions!), but rather with more deeply embedded cultural stereotypes, implicit moral frameworks, and the like. **(See our recent study at n. 100 above for further details.)**

original Arabic meanings of those same terms.[358] For appreciating that absolutely fundamental dimension of the Shaykh's rhetoric and interpretive methods, E. W. Lane's now readily available, multi-volume (but unfortunately incomplete!) *Arabic-English Lexicon*, based on the classical Arabic dictionaries (*Lisān al-'Arab*, etc.), allows even English-speaking readers—and indeed many neophytes in Arabic—a chance to follow and complete Ibn 'Arabī's characteristic process of 'returning to the roots' of key Qur'anic expressions. This procedure can become especially helpful in those many cases where translators may not have fully conveyed the full intended impact of Ibn 'Arabī's often quite distinctive semantic usages in that regard.

The following additional practical suggestions are somewhat simpler, and usually—if one is using Arberry or another relatively literal Qur'an translation—can be put into practice simply by reading the Qur'anic passage or citation in question very slowly and attentively, mentally reconstructing a more accurate and discerning version. In each case, the underlying problem has to do not so much with 'mistakes' of translation, but with more profound, sometimes radical metaphysical differences in the ways in which the world is perceived, structured and 'communicated' in the Semitic linguistic structures of the Qur'an, as opposed to the corresponding unconscious deep-structures shared by most Indo-European languages (and today, even increasingly by modern standard Arabic).   Indeed, in a great many cases Ibn 'Arabī's most essential spiritual 'teaching' is quite succinctly conveyed simply by reminding his readers—using the original inimitable and highly compressed language of the Qur'an—of the profoundly illusory nature of their habitual assumptions about 'horizontal' progressions of time (as an unproblematic continuum of 'past-present-future') and about a strict separation of 'subject-action-object', unconscious metaphysical assumptions that are profoundly embedded in most Indo-European grammar, but equally quite different from the (to us, radically unfamiliar) essential structures of Qur'anic divine 'New-Speaking':

- One of the simplest and most far-reaching ways to begin to read and perceive the Qur'an as Ibn 'Arabī does is to read the 'imperfect' verb forms (and many present participles), which appear in almost all English versions in an apparently 'future' tense, back into *the present, ongoing sense* they actually have in the Arabic.[359] Virtually everything one needs to know to begin to grasp Ibn 'Arabī's essential understanding of Qur'anic eschatology, for example, immediately starts to come into clearer perspective as soon as one does so.

- The next simple suggestion regards apparently 'past' passages describing 'events' whose *deeper present significance* typically relates to eschatological realities, divine spiritual laws, or archetypal spiritual situations now actually engaging the Prophet or his community—or even each reader. Even more easily than the last step, but requiring a bit

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[358] The experience involved is roughly comparable to that of moving from the relative 'abstraction' and familiar traditional symbolism of Victorian and many other earlier English poets to the far more 'concrete,' particular imagery associated with William Carlos Williams and so many more recent schools of English-language poetry.

[359] In doing so, of course, readers in English are unable to separate out the relatively very few actual uses of the *explicit* Arabic 'future' indicator (*sa-/sawfa-*), which is usually employed in contexts involving the future subjective eschatological 'unveiling' of the actually operative inner states of *particular individuals*.

more active imagination, the reader can easily substitute for the apparently *temporal* conjunctive phrase 'when' that introduces so many such memorable Qur'anic passages—with its natural English implications (especially for those unknowingly reading the Qur'an as simply another sort of 'Bible') of a naturalistic, sequential 'narration' regarding some far-away 'historical' time and place—something existentially much closer to the spiritually appropriate immediate contextualisation indicated by the actual Arabic *'idh* (some translators do use a more approximate 'Lo!' or 'Behold!'). Whatever the initial English word one encounters in translation, the important thing is to imaginatively move the 'event' in question into the kind of *immediately present*, visionary imaginal 'place' and direct *connection* actually suggested by the Arabic.[360] Ibn 'Arabī himself sometimes calls such frequent, important, and often otherwise mystifying Qur'anic passages '*mashāhid barzakhiyya*', 'places-of-immediate-witnessing in the intermediate, spiritual world.' Such passages represent precisely the kind of humanly central, often dramatically foundational inner 'immediate witnessing' and 'deep memory' (within a highly complex, subjective, or completely unknown time framework) which today forms such a familiar and phenomenologically comparable rhetorical feature of effective cinematic art.

- It is very helpful to find an English version of the Qur'an which will reliably allow readers to distinguish between all the plural, 'generic' second-person *verbal and pronominal* forms, the 'you-all' that usually refers vaguely to everybody somehow receiving this divine message; and the radically different, second-person '*singular*'—that alternately mystifying, terrifying, or undeservedly comforting '***you***' which, as Ibn 'Arabī is constantly reminding his readers, should strike each of us as a kind of shattering hammer-blow or lightning-bolt, as we then struggle to understand how this particular divine 'Address' could possibly encompass both the Prophet and our own soul. Readers more acquainted with the often identical ambiguities of perspective and address in the masterpieces of Persian mystical poetry will of course immediately recognise the central role played throughout that tradition by this same fundamental feature of Qur'anic discourse.

- In reality, there are very few unambiguous common 'nouns' or simple 'objects'—since, as Ibn 'Arabī repeatedly stresses, there is in reality only One true Subject—to be found in the Qur'an. In the original Qur'anic Arabic, the recurrent Arabic *masdar*, participial, and relatively 'concretised' adjectival forms (e.g., '*Muhammad*' already *is* 'the Praised One,' while it is the concretised 'name'-function that is derivative) all to some degree intrinsically and profoundly retain their underlying *active, verbal root-senses* which are essentially observable facets of a single unifying 'process,' of an essentially active, unitary divine '*verbal*' reality: the mirroring of God's (immediately present and active) '*Speaking*,' not some separate, reified 'Speech.' Again, the truly quintessential teachings of Ibn 'Arabī are simply pointed reminders that '*reification*,' in all its infinite forms, is an all-too-human, profoundly distorting 'fabrication,' a deeply unconscious source of endless 'idolatry,' and indeed quite literally—beginning with Iblīs's delusive reliance on his own limited 'restrictive intellect'—*the* root of all evil. The Reality that is momentarily

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[360] See especially the revealing short selection from Ibn 'Arabī's practical advice on how to approach one's reading of the **Qur'an (translated from his '*What the Seeker Needs*'), already quoted at n. 96 above**.

manifest in this particular process-state as being *mushrik*, *kāfir* or *munāfiq*, for example, can—and in reality, constantly does—find itself mysteriously manifest in another situation (previous as well as 'later'!) as *mu'min*.[361] All too often, Ibn 'Arabī's key ideas become simply incomprehensible when those powerfully concrete, phenomenologically so accurately 'descriptive' words of the Qur'an are suddenly transformed by mis-translation—like the petrifying magic familiar in so many childhood fairytales—into lifelessly reified, apparently abstract nouns and adjectives.

- It is always useful to stop and notice the particular divine Names that Ibn 'Arabī discusses in the *Futūhāt*, and to make some effort to decipher their possible meanings and concrete existential 'manifestations' in the particular contexts where he (and the Qur'an) actually use them. Since all of his teaching is most obviously, indissociably centred around these divine Names[362]—an all-encompassing way of speaking and of conceiving of the world, at first glance totally alien to ordinary English and our ambient culture— some attention to their wider Qur'anic contexts can be extremely helpful for all readers seeking to enter more empathetically into Ibn 'Arabī's world-view. Indeed the scattered Qur'anic references to those Names are certainly one central Qur'anic example and source of Ibn 'Arabī's own distinctive rhetorical device of 'scattering' and related puzzles which we have already highlighted in several sections above.

- Finally, it is very helpful to *slow down* sufficiently, whether one is reading Ibn 'Arabī's own Qur'an citations or returning to examine their wider original Qur'anic contexts, to be able to follow and clearly perceive the unique and fundamental '*perspective shifts*' marking the entire Qur'an. That is, to discern carefully *'Who'* or what dimension of the many divine 'Voices' of the Qur'an ('I', 'We', undefined 'narrator', individual 'actors' or

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[361] I.e., 'Associator' (commonly 'polytheist'); 'ingrate' or 'rejecter (of God)' ('unbeliever'!); 'hypocrite'; and 'person of faith' (often translated as 'believer', even though the common, and radically different, Arabic word for 'belief' does not appear a single time in the Qur'an, in any form: **see n. 21 above).** Of course once readers have associated such fundamental Qur'anic terms with particular reified historical or social 'groups' (or individuals, concepts, etc.), it becomes almost impossible to conceive their universal Qur'anic, phenomenological meanings as Ibn 'Arabī typically uses them in the *Futūhāt* and elsewhere.

[362] It is certainly no accident that *both* of W. Chittick's major studies of the *Meccan Illuminations* (*SDG* and *SPK*), despite their different focuses, essentially begin with lengthy preliminary discussions relating to the divine Names and Attributes. It is simply difficult to get very far in reading and understanding the *Futūhāt*, in practice, without encountering complex discussions of the 'Names.' This is not the case, to the same extent, with works like the *Fusūs al-Hikam* or some of Ibn 'Arabī's influential shorter treatises on questions of practical spirituality.

significant 'groups', etc.) *is actually speaking to 'whom' at any particular moment?*[363] In doing so—and those distinctive perspective-shifts were a central rhetorical and literary inspiration not only to Ibn 'Arabī, but also to the world-masterpieces of classical Sufi poetry created around his time in several other languages—one quickly becomes aware of the extraordinary, and usually quite mysterious, shifts in perspective that pervade the Qur'anic discourse, often even within a single verse or short phrase. And gradually, the deeper significance of those shifts—which more closely reflect the unique communicative possibilities of modern *cinema* than our usual familiar literary forms—already moves the attentive reader a great distance in the direction of Ibn 'Arabī's deepest teachings.

It is highly unlikely that any currently imaginable advance in Qur'an translation will ever free readers of Ibn 'Arabī in English from having to make many of the relatively simple, but indispensable, sorts of mental 'corrections' and re-translations suggested above. And any translator of the *Futūhāt* could easily extend this short list of Qur'anic challenges and difficulties almost indefinitely.

OTHER DISCIPLINES AND 'SCIENCES' OF IBN 'ARABĪ'S TIME:

One of the distinctive difficulties of Ibn 'Arabī's rhetoric in his *Meccan Illuminations*, when compared with most of his other writings (including especially *The Bezels of Wisdom* which is most familiar to Western readers), is the way in which he brings into his discussions, throughout the *Futūhāt*—i.e., not just in certain designated chapters—constant technical and fairly elaborate allusions to virtually all the religious and rational 'sciences' of his day. Since today, as much as in the past, it still takes fulltime and dedicated students, possessing all the necessary tools of Arabic and other essential historical background and a knowledgeable instructor, several years of solid work to become reasonably at home in any one of such diverse fields as Arabic logic, *'ilm al-kalām* ('theology'), calligraphy, *fiqh* ('jurisprudence') or *usūl al-fiqh*, (Ptolemaic/Aristotelian) astronomy and astrology, optics and theories of vision, and the like, to mention only a few of the dozens of disciplines Ibn 'Arabī repeatedly draws upon throughout the *Futūhāt*, one can imagine the extraordinary obstacles this characteristic feature poses for both translators and their eventual readers dealing with entire

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[363] Interestingly enough, this same question, in a more openly existential form, directly underlies each of Ibn 'Arabī's practical points regarding the proper way to 'read' the Qur'an, **in the short passage from his '*What the Seeker Needs*' quoted at n. 96 above.** Any answer to this question, of course, relates closely to the fundamental mystery embedded in the different forms of '*you*' already mentioned in an immediately preceding point here, as well as to the wider question of all the intended 'audiences' of any particular Qur'anic 'address' (to use Ibn 'Arabī's language).

These constantly changing metaphysical and temporal perspectives, and the array of distinctive Qur'anic perspective-shifts underlying Ibn 'Arabī's over-arching rhetoric of realisation discussed more broadly above (in the final section of Part I), are of course completely obscured by almost all existing English translations (see our alternative 'literal' translation of the Sura of Joseph, n. 108 above). Again, the relatively new art of cinema immediately offers a wide set of corresponding immediate visual equivalents directly conveying most of these key perspective changes: films like *Bāraka* or *Wings of Desire* (*Der Himmel über Berlin*)—and many, many others—are entirely constructed around such foundational alternating Qur'anic perspectives, including the shifting appearances of *both* time and space.

longer chapters of that work. Even when the translator does feel solidly at home in each of the many requisite medieval disciplines, the challenges of attempting to communicate the *essential* relevant features of the various fields in question can require the kind of introductory and explanatory apparatus that will understandably intimidate all but the most scholastically inclined readers in English.[364] On the other hand, simply translating such frequent technical passages into an actually incomprehensible set of English technical equivalents, while referring serious readers to lengthy scholarly volumes hopefully explaining the particular intellectual or artistic discipline in question (even where such explanatory resources actually exist in English), is neither fair nor conscionable. In light of such challenging situations, which actually abound throughout the *Futūhāt*, it is easy to see why so many qualified translators have until now preferred to give anthologised or thematic 'selections', of greater or lesser length, in which they could carefully avoid this kind of recurrent obstacle.

One useful touchstone that both translators and especially readers of the *Futūhāt* need to keep in mind—particularly the latter group, since they can expect to encounter a wide variety of very different translating approaches—is *some awareness of what is practically and spiritually 'essential' in light of the larger intentions and themes of Ibn 'Arabī's work*. In fact, when one looks more closely, there are often certain Islamic disciplines and technical vocabularies—apart from the truly foundational materials of the Qur'an, hadith, and preceding Sufi tradition—which are, in given contexts, practically indispensable for understanding and communicating Ibn 'Arabī's central teachings: e.g., some understanding of kalām theology when he is involved in discussions of the divine Names; or of jurisprudence and hadith in the long chapters he devotes to each of the obligatory 'acts of worship' (the *'ibādāt*).   Especially in the case of many of the more strictly religious sciences, Ibn 'Arabī's distinctive perspectives and outlook would often seem to suggest potentially radical reforms of the traditional disciplines—and even of much wider, traditionally associated cultural and social institutions—in question. His remarks in such controversial contexts are usually correspondingly detailed, nuanced, and potentially wide-ranging.[365]   Readers in translation need to know when that sort of thing is going on.

On the other hand, there are many other instances, particularly when the Shaykh is speaking of the philosophical and natural 'sciences' of his day, when it is clear—at least to properly informed translators acquainted with the traditional disciplines in question—that his references are

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[364] One excellent illustration—apparently extreme, but unfortunately not a-typical of what is often required for explaining difficult sections and topics of the *Futūhāt*—is provided by Denis Gril's detailed explanation and background related to several short translated passages concerning the 'science of letters,' from chapter 2 of the *Futūhāt*. See *Les Illuminations de la Mecque*, ed.Chodkiewicz, pp. 383-481 and 608-632: only 48 of the total of 122 pages are occupied by the actual translation; an English translation of all the French texts in that volume can be found in volumes one and two of *The Meccan Revelations*. Until now, virtually all the translations from the *Futūhāt* mentioned **above (n. 3 and following) have**, for understandable reasons, either avoided such challenging passages or adopted alternative approaches which inherently make the 'translation' in question practically accessible to only a small, already highly specialised audience.

[365] See, for example, *Orientations: Islamic thought in a world civilisation*, our **article on 'Ibn 'Arabī's "Esotericism": The Problem of Spiritual Authority,' pp. 37-64 in *Studia Islamica*, LXXI (1990), a**nd the related recent study by **E. Winkel also cited at n. 39 above.**

sometimes more in the nature of the sorts of the scattered allusions and evocative references that we are all accustomed to encountering in poets, novelists, essayists, popular spiritual authors and the like, who are not themselves writing as experts in the fields or disciplines from which they are quoting. In such cases Ibn 'Arabī, somewhat like those familiar types of literary and more popular writers, sometimes seems to be throwing out a variety of diverse illustrations and references intended primarily to motivate, contact or otherwise interest potentially curious students coming from quite different educational backgrounds and interests.[366]

Thus, in those cases where it is clear that Ibn 'Arabī (a) does not actually need that particular discipline (or his reader's knowledge of it) in order to make or prove his points, and (b) is not trying to undertake the deeper reform or correction of the particular science in question, it is often more spiritually useful—for all but the most pedantic historically and scholarly-minded readers—to point out to contemporary readers something of the *possibly cognate forms in our own cultural, social, historical settings today*. Concretely, one of the particular pertinent cases in question is Ibn 'Arabī's persistent *apparent* reliance, in so many of his different presentations, on the established Ptolemaic-Aristotelian cosmology (of the concentric heavenly spheres, though apparently without any epicycles) and the Galenic physiology (i.e., of the four humours, elements, root qualities, etc.) which, in varying forms, were largely accepted by much of the civilised world in his day, even beyond the realms of Islam and Christianity. While most modern scholars would agree that the underlying *symbolism* of his cosmology, physiology, optics, and the like—especially in its original scriptural sources—was *not* in fact dependent on the scientific 'truth' of the particular theories of medieval astronomy or biology in question, the translator somehow has to translate and contextualise the extensive passages of the *Futūhāt* involving such earlier assumed worldviews in such a way that contemporary readers can at least understand all the relevant assumptions of the accepted sciences of Ibn 'Arabī's time, while also eventually being able to arrive at their own accurate reworking of the *perennial symbolism* involved, in its deeper relations to metaphysics and the phenomenology of spiritual life. This is no easy task, whether for the translator or for the serious reader—but it is often practically unavoidable at a great many places in the *Meccan Illuminations*.

RECOGNISING AND CORRECTING FOR THE SPECTRUM OF ARABIC TRANSLATION POSSIBILITIES:

'Last, but not least:' If we have left until the end this insoluble question of technical terminology and translation, it is certainly not because of the relative practical importance of this subject, which must constantly be a central and ongoing concern of any serious translator (and reader) of the *Futūhāt*. Our essential observation here is intended not for translators—who hopefully are already

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[366] In many ways, these sort of passages frequently correspond to a familiar genre in our contemporary culture of relatively popular spiritual writings intending to show that familiar, traditional spiritual teachings are in some way also 'proven' by, correlated with, parallel, or otherwise foreshadow various features of this or that particular contemporary scientific field. This is obviously a genre which tends to be renewed with each generation (and each changing audience), as the operative 'science' of the preceding generations becomes dated or dubious. There are dramatic and historically quite influential Islamic examples of precisely this sort of approach to be found throughout the famous *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Safā', a work whose writing style and spiritual use of popular scientific and cosmological themes is often explicitly echoed by Ibn 'Arabī—e.g., in the constantly repeated Arabic catch-phrases with which he begins many of his chapters and sub-sections (e.g., '*May God assist you and me with a spirit from Him*…').

conscientiously aware of the endless difficulties involved—but for *every reader* of their translations. Much as with our preceding remarks about the closely related problems of Qur'an translation, what each reader must keep in mind is precisely the vast spectrum of Arabic translation possibilities, so that they can quickly detect each translator's own proclivities and corresponding assumed audiences (whether or not those fundamental issues are actually explicitly highlighted by the translator), and then begin the difficult but essential task of consciously 'correcting' for each of those factors.[367]

It is not really that difficult, even without knowing any Arabic at all, to envisage the two possible extremes of that spectrum, as well as the obvious problems and challenges that arise, for translator and reader alike, along any point in the continuum between those extremes. One extreme is that in which the teacher finds all the appropriate words and other pedagogical devices—always at the very least a lengthy and highly personalised 'paraphrase', taking into account the relevant predilections and sensitivities of each particular student—so that the maximum of meaning contained in the Shaykh's writing is communicated in the form that is most effective for each particular student. That is in fact close to the centuries-old traditional teaching form of the *majlis*, of lengthy, intimate personal discussion and explanations by a living master and students that teacher knows well, in which weeks are often devoted to a single page or even a few lines of Ibn 'Arabī's text. When 'translated' into *written* form—which is sometimes approximated by the famous classical tradition of immensely detailed Arabic commentaries on almost every word of the *Fusūs al-Hikam*—this effective traditional method of oral communication, even in moderation, can easily lead to the kind of work in which Ibn 'Arabī's *own* text and language is often almost completely lost from sight.   It is also a kind of translation intrinsically very much tied to the language, setting and expectations of its particular audience, and difficult therefore to compare with or complement translations by others (even of the same Arabic work!), as it is normally impossible to transpose effectively to other, different audiences and cultural settings.

The opposite extreme—which we might imagine in the form of a kind of advanced 'graduate seminar,' in which all the participating readers are actually already completely at home in Ibn 'Arabī's text and all the nuances of his Arabic language, technical vocabulary, and wider cultural background—would be to translate each key term (or better yet, each Arabic root, in *all* its grammatical variations and appearances!) by a single constant English equivalent,[368] or even better,

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[367] It is indeed essential for readers of Ibn 'Arabī to be aware of this problem and to seek to make the necessary adjustments, since experience has shown that published translations are unfortunately not likely to be re-done, no matter how inadequate the first attempt may have been.

[368] In order to pack more essential dimensions of the relevant Arabic root into a single English equivalent, translators have at their disposal a variety of possible devices, instead of simply a single noun (which in any case often does not have suitably corresponding English verbal or adjectival forms that would parallel the wide variety of Arabic words formed from a single root), including a range of other possible 'equivalents' and neologisms: e.g., employing a standard adjective and noun (or adverb and verb) combination; several 'component' equivalents all joined by hyphens (to indicate clearly a *single* underlying Arabic term); capitalisation (to highlight certain technical or theological usages); the use of a 'slash' separating two or more equally important (but in English quite different) component aspects of the same Arabic root, which are impossible to represent by

simply *by citing the most familiar form of the transliterated Arabic root*. Within that resolutely 'literal' approach (which was actually historically adopted in many of the earliest Arabic and then Latin translations of classical Greek philosophical texts), the ideal would be that the reader could always immediately 'translate back' from English into the actual underlying Arabic.[369] While this is probably the approach that most knowledgeable translators of Ibn 'Arabī might personally like to be able to use—if only they lived in a world in which all of their readers were indeed other professors and advanced graduate students already familiar with Arabic and Islamic thought!—its multiple insuperable drawbacks, for less elite and committed audiences, are dramatically apparent as soon as one has to teach or present this kind of translation in a more representative classroom or other public venue.

As a result of this usually insoluble dilemma, most conscientious translators of the *Futūhāt*, as they begin to take on whole chapters and larger sections of that work, necessarily find themselves somewhere in between these two equally ideal extremes, constantly attempting to discover new means and methods to better communicate—what is always their 'final cause'—as accurately and deeply as possible the infinite meanings and intentions to be found in Ibn 'Arabī's incomparable '*Openings*'. This is not the place to enter into our own or others' detailed efforts to respond to those perennial challenges. It is far more important, whatever methods translators may have adopted for particular audiences, for Ibn 'Arabī's readers in translation to recognise their own intensely demanding responsibilities in 'translating back' what they do find before them, within the indispensable context of realisation, in such a way that they come away more richly and fully equipped to undertake *the real, universal human task of 'Translation'* that he so poignantly evoked in the passage selected as the epigraph for this essay.

Finally, it must be said that one can find few other areas of life which more immediately, richly and irrefutably demonstrate one of Ibn 'Arabī's most central spiritual teachings: the unimaginable power and influence of spiritual *intention*. The constantly growing, visibly worldwide interest in Ibn 'Arabī's ideas and teaching, despite the full spectrum of challenges and limitations enumerated here—not to mention the fragmentary and very limited extent of all our existing translations of his writings—, is already more than a minor 'miracle.' It is also another lesson. For it powerfully corroborates, on an

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single English word; and so on. **Again, see the further discussions and illustrations in the studies cited at n. 100 above.**

[369] In particular, E. Winkel's translation of much of chapter 68 of the *Futūhāt* **(see full references in notes 74, 97, and his related study at n. 39 above)** actually applies throughout a particularly radical version of precisely this extreme possibility, retaining the original Arabic (in transliteration) of almost all of its dozens of complex technical terms, supplemented by extended dictionary entries from the classical Arabic dictionary *Lisān al-'Arab*. There readers can see immediately how problematic such an extremely 'literal' approach would be for reaching any wider, non-specialist audiences. However, the translator's introductory remarks there about the absolutely central role of somehow conveying the actual underlying Arabic 'root-meanings' of Ibn 'Arabī's language—which we have highlighted in this essay mainly within the earlier sections on Qur'an access and translation above—in order to grasp the highly concrete, exquisitely appropriate 'phenomenology' that is at the heart of Ibn 'Arabī's essential procedure of 'realisation' in every domain, are valuable and illuminating, as are his detailed illustrations of that particular point throughout his version, using directly integrated dictionary passages from the *Lisān al-'Arab*.

increasingly global scale, what some teachers are fortunate enough to be able to verify in their classrooms each year: that the spiritual force and intentions of this author—and of *his* 'Sources'— stand behind his translators and readers alike, in mysterious ways that he challenges each of us to pursue and 'make real' through our own necessarily creative response, our own uniquely adapted 'translations' of *His* 'new-Speaking'.

Freedoms and Responsibilities: Ibn ʿArabī and the
Political Dimensions of Spiritual Realisation

One of the more dubious popular stereotypes about "mystics" and spiritual teachings, whether in Islam or other religious traditions, is the notion that they are somehow peculiarly "other-worldly" and therefore essentially divorced from the inherent political demands and implications of our ordinary earthly existence. Whatever the justice of such a judgment with regard to other figures, the extraordinary, still ongoing history of vociferous public theological controversies surrounding Ibn ʿArabī's work and of heated polemical appeals for and against his writings and distinctive theses should quickly dispel such notions in his regard. Indeed the highly visible emergence in recent decades, throughout the Muslim world, of peculiar hybrid political ideologies marrying popular religious slogans with the familiar dualistic categories of Marxism and fascism has led to a rapidly increasing awareness of the practical contemporary pertinence of the Shaykh's distinctive understanding of the proper relations between religious life and our wider political existence and responsibilities.

In a recent article in this *Journal* devoted to one of the most historically controversial and influential chapters of the *Meccan Illuminations*,[370] I concluded with the following telling quotation from Ibn ʿArabī's immense final chapter of "spiritual advice for both the seeker and for the one who has arrived (with God)"—a passage which beautifully summarises the fundamental political context of the Shaykh's teachings:[371]

> You should uphold God's limits with regard to yourself and whatever you possess, for you are responsible to God for that. So if you are a ruler, you have been designated for upholding God's limits regarding all He has entrusted to you. For (according to a famous hadith) "each one of you-all is a shepherd, and responsible for his flock," and that is nothing other than upholding God's limits regarding them. Therefore the lowest form of "right rulership" (*wilāya*) is your governance of your soul and your actions. So uphold God's limits respecting them until (you reach) the "greater Khilāfa" (divine stewardship)—for you *are* God's representative (*khalīfa*) in every situation regarding your own soul and what is above it .

As this concluding exhortation clearly indicates, perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Shaykh's political teaching is the way it is essentially grounded in *every* human being's unique experience and inescapable practice of the spiritual life, in those necessarily concrete processes of spiritual tests and realisation that are briefly outlined in the remainder of this study.

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[370] **"Ibn ʿArabī's Messianic Secret: From 'the Mahdi' to the Imamate of Every Soul", pp. 1-19 in *JMIAS* XXX (2001).** The chapter in question is number 366 in the *Futūhāt*, and the English translation of key passages of that chapter is now readily available in volume one of *The Meccan Revelations*.

[371] Chapter 560: IV, 462-63.

As such, the specific political implications of that teaching are discovered and slowly built up "one soul at a time": through their initially individual discovery, followed by the wider creative processes of interpretation, communication and social cooperation that naturally flow from the effective expression of realised spiritual insight. Needless to say, this intrinsic, naturally unfolding political dimension of Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual teaching is radically different in almost every respect from those familiar public systems, slogans, organisations and coercive, "top-down" images that are ordinarily associated with the political in today's popular, journalistic discourse. Instead, the relevant political contexts of actual spiritual responsibility and realisation, as Ibn 'Arabī pointedly emphasised in the passage just cited, always begin with—and necessarily remain actively rooted in—the most intimate interactive spheres of our family, colleagues, and other personally relevant communities.[372] So a closer examination of the contexts and processes of realisation presupposed in the Shaykh's teaching should suggest radically new ways of looking at the actual human interplay of religion and political life not just in challenging contemporary situations, but throughout many earlier comparable historical settings.

Within its original Islamic context, of course, the wider political implications of Ibn 'Arabī's teaching turn on the problematic inter-relations between scriptural interpretation and various historical claims to interpretive authority—recurrent and fundamental political issues which tend to be as obvious to learned Muslim audiences (including most of Ibn 'Arabī's original readers) as they are invisible or opaque to many modern Western readers. In that respect, the dramatic recent expansion of worldwide interest in Ibn 'Arabī's writings has repeatedly raised fundamental problems of interpretation which are often overlooked or passed over in silence by the scholarly specialists involved in this new wave of publications. However, teachers working with non-specialist audiences in different languages and cultures are constantly faced with the dilemmas posed by the fact that most students of the Shaykh today (whatever their language or culture) naturally approach those studies without much informed understanding of the original practical contexts—both historical and especially the "operative" or existential ones—which are needed for an adequate understanding of his writings as they were meant to be read and utilised by his original audiences. So in the absence of that basic contextual background, such students are necessarily obliged to interpret whatever fragmentary studies of Ibn 'Arabī's writings they do encounter either in terms of today's very different prevailing religio-cultural categories and ideological frameworks—or else, in the case of academic specialists, in terms of whatever particular Islamic religious disciplines and received categories of thought they happen to take as their own implicit personal framework for approaching Ibn 'Arabi.

Such basic hermeneutical problems, of course, have always been raised by the intentionally unique and intrinsically challenging, never-imitated nature of Ibn 'Arabī's own distinct rhetoric.[373] And they are beautifully illustrated in the familiar historical processes by which the more theoretical approaches to his work, throughout much of the Eastern Islamic world, became limited soon after

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[372] As the preceding quotation makes very clear (and as is dramatically illustrated throughout Ibn 'Arabī's own spiritual autobiography), these spiritually relevant contexts and communities should never be confused with such outward factors as either geographical or temporal proximity.

[373] See the more detailed introduction to this dimension of the Shaykh's work in my recent study of **"Ibn 'Arabī's Rhetoric of Realisation: Keys to Reading and 'Translating' the *Meccan Illuminations*", in *JMIAS*, vol. XXXIII (2003), pp. 54-99, and XXXIV (2003), pp. 103-145.**

his death to a particular set of philosophical and theological perspectives framed almost exclusively in terms of the detailed intellectual analysis of his *Fusūs al-Hikam*, in ways that have deeply shaped the wider public conceptions of the man and his writings down to the present day.[374]

This study, intended as a brief response to that need for proper contextualisation, attempts to outline—in language and examples accessible to non-specialist readers, as well as more scholarly audiences—some of the most basic features of that universal hermeneutical situation (i.e., one that applies intrinsically and necessarily to the moral and spiritual testing situations, responsibilities and obligations engaging *all* human beings) which is presupposed in all of Ibn 'Arabī's writings, although it is most richly developed in his magnum opus, the immense "Meccan Illuminations" (*al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*). That essential hermeneutical problematic is beautifully summarised in a key eschatological passage near the end of chapter 64 (IV, 471-76 in the O.Yahya edition), where Ibn 'Arabī has begun to prepare his readers for the proper approach to understanding his long following chapters on the inner spiritual meanings implicit within the fundamental acts of purification and worship (*asrār al-'ibādāt*).

There he explains that while that uniquely salvific Bridge through the "fires" of earthly existence—described in the famous hadith of the Intercession as being "finer than a hair, and sharper than a sword"—is none other than the "divinely revealed Path" (*al-sirāt al-mashrū'*), in reality the essential qualities of inspired insight and spiritual discernment needed to safely traverse that Bridge can only be discovered through each person's own unique process of hermeneutical discovery or realisation. As he beautifully summarises that dilemma, the safe traversing of each of those fires, of each soul's unique set of spiritual tests and learning experiences, requires:

> …(true inner) knowing of the divinely revealed Pathway (*'ilm al-sharī'a*) in this lower life. For (without that true spiritual guidance and inspiration) the actual aspect of Right/Truth/Obligation (*wajh al-haqq*) with God applying to that particular problematic situation is not known. Nor do we know which of those striving to understand that has rightfully succeeded in reaching that (real divine meaning) in itself. So because of that (i.e., if we rely on external claims of authority) we are led to worship according to the predominance of their suppositions !

This constantly recurring spiritual dilemma, Ibn 'Arabī goes on to explain, can never be resolved simply on the basis of the outward authenticity and relative accuracy of transmission of the verbal form of those teachings. For as he points out, those traditional accounts, even in their most accurate form, "can only give us the *form of words* of the (Prophetic) saying," by "knowing that the Messenger…said this or did that" in some earlier, only imperfectly known circumstances. For the essential direct inspiration of the original divine intention actually pertaining to each relevant

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[374] **See the basic outline of this historical heritage in the three-part study "Ibn 'Arabī and His Interpreters", in the** *Journal of the American Oriental Society* **[***JAOS***], vol. 106 (1986), pp. 539-551 and pp. 733-756, and vol. 107 (1987), pp. 101-119; and "***Except His Face...***: The Political and Aesthetic Dimensions of Ibn 'Arabi's Legacy", in** *JMIAS***, XXIII (1998), pp. 1-13. These two articles and several dozen related historical studies and reviews are now freely available in the web-based volume** *Ibn 'Arabi and His Interpreters: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Perspectives***, which can be downloaded at the website of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society,** *www.ibnarabisociety.org/IbnArabi***.**

existential situation we freshly encounter is simply not accessible in terms of external claims, authorities, or alternative interpretations:

> For what we are (really) seeking is *to know what should be understood* from that (original Prophetic) saying or action, in order to apply its (relevant) judgment to this (new) problematic situation, with absolute certainty.

Now to put this fundamental point as simply as possible, every writing of Ibn ʿArabī's can ultimately be understood as providing essential elements of the appropriate, necessarily individual practical response to that universal spiritual situation, or—to use his own pregnant expression—as a kind of comprehensively all-inclusive act of *nasīha* or "spiritual advice".[375] So whenever we look at the *Futūhāt* and his other works in terms of that unavoidable practical spiritual context, the effective roles and intentions of each of their highly diverse forms of expression and teaching eventually come into clear focus. While on the other hand, if we approach those writings in terms of any number of other purely intellectual or worldly-practical concerns, those same works can just as quickly shatter into a host of radically differing topics, approaches, perspectives, and subjects of analysis.

It may help then, in understanding why Ibn ʿArabī's works always look so very different depending on each reader or interpreter's own particular hermeneutical perspective, to visualise this underlying situation in terms of the following schematic diagram, which places around the *outer* circumference of a circle what appear to us, when we approach them simply from the point of view

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[375] See the extended illustrations of this principle in *The Reflective Heart: Discovering Spiritual Intelligence in Ibn ʿArabī's "Meccan Illuminations."* For the key historical role of this public mission of *nasīha* in the later, Eastern period of Ibn ʿArabī's life, see "Introducing Ibn ʿArabī's *Book of Spiritual Advice*" (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 28, 2000)—and in particular the following key autobiographical passage from his *R. al-Mubashshirāt* (translated more fully in "Some Dreams of Ibn ʿArabī" in the *Newsletter of the Muhyiddīn Ibn ʿArabī Society*, Autumn, 1993):

> I saw in a dream that I was at the Sacred Shrine in Mecca, and it was as though the Resurrection had already begun. It was as though I was standing immediately in front of my Lord, with my head bowed in silence and fear of His reproaching me because of my negligence. But He was saying to me: '*O My servant, don't be afraid, for I am not asking you to do anything except to admonish* [root n-s-h] *My servants. So admonish My servants, and I will guide the people to the straight path.*'

> Now when I had seen how rare it was for anyone to enter the Path of God, I had become spiritually lazy. And that night I had resolved only to concern myself with my own soul, to forget about all the other people and their condition. But then I had that dream, and the very next morning I sat down among the people and began to explain to them the clear Path and the various evils blocking the Path for each group of them, whether the learned jurists, the "poor" (*fuqarā'*), the Sufis or the common people. So every one of them began to oppose me and to try to destroy me, but God helped me to overcome them and protected me with a blessing and lovingmercy from Him. (For the Prophet) said: "Religion (*al-Dīn*) is admonishment (or "straight advice," *al-nasīha*), for God, for the leaders of the Muslims, and for the common people among them," as is mentioned in Muslim's *Sahīh*.
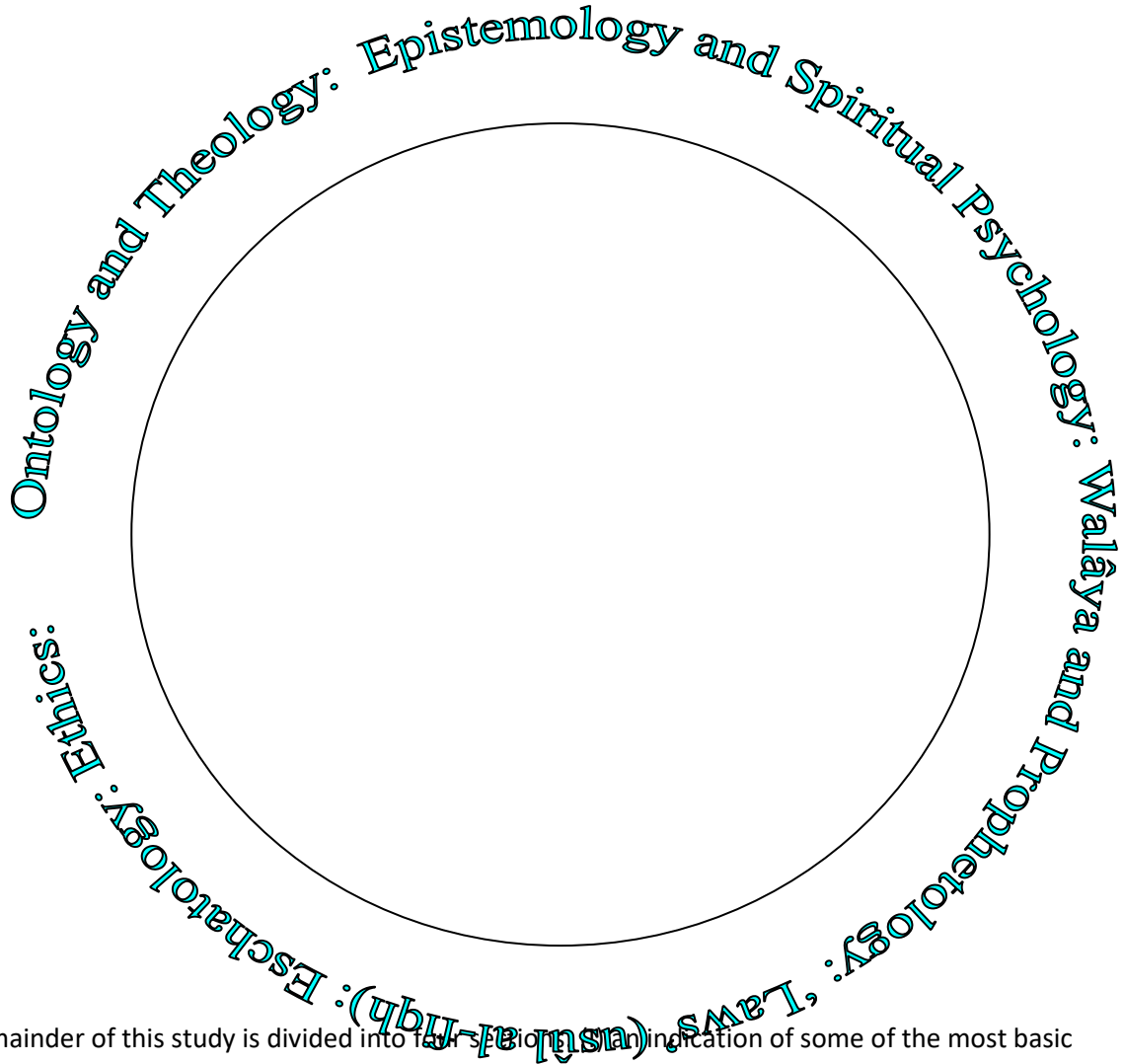
of our determining conscious and especially unconscious "beliefs" (our *i'tiqādāt*, in Ibn 'Arabī's own far-reaching sense of that term), as the many different constitutive elements both of the outward surviving forms of each revelation (*shar'*), and of their corresponding intellectual interpretations and ongoing elaboration by later traditions. It is important to keep in mind that the handful of particular terms and elements listed here are purely for the purpose of illustration: the brief allusions here could easily be expanded indefinitely to include the appropriate terminologies of many different interpretive schools, ideologies, and historical traditions. Thus "inside" that circle represents the actual universal hermeneutical context of spiritual realisation,[376] whose most essential features are briefly outlined in the following section I.

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[376] Throughout this study, "realisation" translates the multi-faceted Arabic expression *tahqīq* (as practiced by the individual *muhaqqiq*). While Ibn 'Arabī himself consciously uses a vast range of Qur'anic and other technical expressions to point to different facets of this fundamental human task, *tahqīq* was the single term which later Islamic spiritual and intellectual traditions most commonly used to convey all the equally essential elements of the actual *process* of spiritual realisation. Thus it includes the search for what is truly Real and Right (*al-Haqq*); the intrinsic human obligations and freedoms following from—and indispensable for—our discovery of that Right; and the endless forms of inspired knowing and awareness, of enlightened spiritual intelligence, flowing from the appropriate actualisation of those responsibilities.

DIAGRAM: HERMENEUTICAL ALTERNATIVES

Outside the circle = "beliefs" (in Ibn 'Arabī's broad understanding of *i'tiqād*); the realms accessible to the physical senses and the limited intellect—and the corresponding historically evolved intellectual disciplines of interpretation.

Inside the Circle = the necessarily individual arena of actual spiritual realisation (*tahqīq*)

Ontology and Theology: Epistemology and Spiritual Psychology: Walāya and Prophetology; Laws (*sharā'i'*): Eschatology. Ethics:

The remainder of this study is divided into four sections: (I) An indication of some of the most basic features of the "hermeneutical crucible" of spiritual realisation. (II) A brief discussion of the problematic role—and necessarily multiple levels and intentions—of Ibn 'Arabī's highly distinctive types of *writing*, when his distinctive rhetoric and language is seen in terms of the contrasting realities and perceptions represented in this diagram. And continuing in Part Two, in the next issue: (III) An equally summary discussion of a few of the most familiar illustrations of that double-sided rhetoric which recur throughout the Shaykh's works. (IV) A short list of some of the key practical, political conditions—which are necessarily both obligations and corresponding freedoms—for spiritual realisation, which arise whenever individuals begin to take those interpretive responsibilities seriously. We conclude with a brief allusion to the recent, ongoing historical re-discovery of the manifold ways that Ibn 'Arabī's successors creatively applied and worked out, in their own radically differing historical and cultural situations, these wider responsibilities and political implications of his spiritual hermeneutics.

I. THE CONTEXT OF SPIRITUAL REALISATION:

To begin with, most people drawn to the serious study of Ibn ʿArabī—and certainly those who choose to devote many years to developing a deeper appreciation of his teachings—are typically already motivated by lifelong spiritual concerns, accompanied by fellow "spiritual researchers" (*muhaqqiqūn*), and so immersed in the ongoing processes of spiritual practice and realisation that they naturally tend to take for granted the basic features of that spiritual hermeneutical context "inside the circle", without paying much attention to the wider spectrum of ways the challenges of interpretation may actually arise or be framed for others less self-consciously involved in spiritual pursuits. One way of helping to break out of those unconscious assumptions, while also providing a very practical illustration of this situation of *spiritual* hermeneutics which in itself is already nearly universal in its inclusivity, is simply to consider one of Ibn ʿArabī's own favourite examples: the celebrated "hadith of the Questioning" at the Last Day.[377] In that frequently reiterated divine saying (*hadīth qudsī*), whose spirit permeates all of Ibn ʿArabī's writing, God confronts a nameless, self-righteous person (i.e., each of us) on the Last Day and challenges him, in succession, with the statements: "I was sick, and yet you did not visit Me", "I was hungry and you did not feed Me", and "I was thirsty, yet you did not give Me to drink"—before going on to explain that if person had actually responded appropriately to that human-divine Presence and painful need, each time he also "would have found God", and his *own* divine solace, precisely in and through that fatefully neglected act of compassion.

Now when we bear in mind the full range of pervasive spiritual "maladies", hungers and thirsts evoked throughout the Qur'an, and when we juxtapose the essential lesson illustrated here with the equally famous Prophetic hadith in which the culminating spiritual virtue of *ihsān* (recognising and realising what is both good and beautiful)—depicted as the ultimate aim of all Religion (*dīn*)—is explained as "worshipping God *as though you see Him*…": then the full universality of this "hermeneutical crucible" constituted by all our earthly life becomes dramatically apparent. For from that perspective, everything each person encounters in life, whether outwardly or inwardly, suddenly appears as a very concrete, infinitely demanding and illuminating, ongoing set of "private lessons" from God, necessarily calling for, evoking, and teaching each of the central spiritual virtues articulated by the Qur'an and the other divine revelations.[378] For as Ibn ʿArabī repeatedly points out, each of us is always simultaneously on "*both* sides" of this recurring Encounter, gradually learning the transforming reality of divine Compassion through our own suffering as well as through our responses—and failures to respond—to the sufferings of others.

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[377] See the version attributed to Abū Hurayra recorded in **Muslim's *Sahīh* (*birr*, 43),** which is the source for the same hadith in Ibn ʿArabī's own *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, number 98 (full English translation by S. Hirtenstein and M. Notcutt in *Divine Sayings*, pp. 93-94).

[378] See the more detailed discussion of this fundamental contrast, which permeates the entire Qur'an, between the difficult attainment of the true spiritual virtues and their illusory, socially validated substitutes, in the chapter on **"The Mysteries of *Ihsān*: Natural Contemplation and the Spiritual Virtues in the Qur'an" included in the forthcoming volume *Openings: From the Qur'an to the Islamic Humanities.*** For a shorter discussion of these same issues, in more metaphysical terms relating directly to the divine "Signs" and "Books" of creation and the human soul, see our Introductions to *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation* and to *The Reflective Heart.*

While some reflection is of course required at first to connect these revelatory teachings with their actual concrete illustrations in our own experience, once that indispensable connection has been established, over time even a little further reflection will quickly bring up the following essential features of this universal hermeneutical situation. Each person can quickly expand the very abstract points listed here:

- The "Unique Point" (*nuqta*) of time and circumstance: While the circle of the diagram above has to be drawn large simply to allow for the text surrounding it, everything in Ibn 'Arabī's teaching—especially his principle of the "ever-renewed Creation" of all things at every instant—highlights the fact that our individual freedom and corresponding responsibility, the particular "interpretation" immediately required of us by God, necessarily relates to the very particular challenges of the unique situation, possibilities, and constraints posed for each individual by *this* particular instant. So when we are "lost in thought", intellectual elaboration, or the many states of puzzlement or heedlessness, we are necessarily somewhere "outside" that circle (actually, that unique Point) of what is truly real.

- Those particular divine lessons that constitute each person's spiritual life always involve a unique, intrinsically individual, and shifting set of highly specific personal "dispositions" and spiritual potentials, which Ibn 'Arabī typically alludes to with a deceptively simple reference to the divine "Providential Caring" (*'ināya*) that has brought each individual soul to this uniquely particular spiritual state and situation. We are all very well aware—and Ibn 'Arabī repeatedly takes great pains to highlight this fundamental reality—that most individuals' very different relative capacities to live "inside the circle", to accurately perceive and respond appropriately, with true *ihsān*, to the manifold sufferings of those all around us, seem at first glance to be something relatively innate or divinely given, without much relation either to study or conscious effort: indeed small children often seem far more accomplished at actually practicing this fundamental spiritual responsibility than most adults.

- Within the hermeneutic circle of actual spiritual experience and testing, Ibn 'Arabī loves to remind his readers that every particular spiritual testing situation is unique and never-repeated. Since our normal intellect intrinsically works with abstractions and general principles, and takes pride in its accumulation of "lessons" and knowledge, framed by its natural unconscious reliance on life's "customary regularity" (*'āda*) and visible, apparent causes (*asbāb*), this is a particularly pertinent lesson that we tend to have to rediscover again and again.

- The real process of spiritual hermeneutics always requires an ongoing dynamic interplay between the inexplicable "vertical" divine element of illumination (or grace, in all its forms) and our gradually maturing faculty of spiritual intelligence. That is to say, the actual process of realisation takes place in the constantly shifting interactions between each moment's particular spiritual problem, the divine element of illuminating insight, the ensuing challenges of its practical application, and further reflection on the observed consequences and lessons drawn from that experience.[379]

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[379] Again, see the detailed explanations and illustrations of this principle in the Introduction and throughout *The Reflective Heart*.

- If we look more closely at the role of external "spiritual teachings" (of whatever source or expression) in the actual living context of each individual's spiritual growth, we can repeatedly see that the actual spiritual process of this "existential hermeneutic" typically involves the effective simultaneous integration and application—most often implicit (i.e., not consciously or separately distinguished)—of many key elements that would appear intellectually, from "outside" the circle of realisation, as disparate and separate teachings. In Qur'anic terms, this reality is expressed in the fact that reference to the all-encompassing spiritual virtue of faith (*īmān*) always precedes its pairing with its spiritually appropriate, creative expression in the corresponding inspired right responses (*sālihāt*). Equally importantly, we quickly discover that the actual practice of spiritual hermeneutics in reality always involves the implicit application or "existential interpretation" of what are in reality a vast ensemble of related scriptural exhortations (Qur'anic verses, hadith, etc.)—just as the individually "named" spiritual virtues can rarely be separated from each other in real-life testing situations.[380]

- One telling "subjective" feature of the actual process of spiritual practice and hermeneutics which is particularly highlighted in some of Ibn 'Arabī's most distinctive teachings, as in his characteristic presentation of earlier Islamic and Sufi tradition, is the gradually maturing awareness of the *divine* (in all its manifestations and effects) as the real "actor" and "interpreter"—an awareness expressed, for example, in the Shaykh's characteristic doctrinal emphases on the reliance of the spiritually mature soul on silence, listening, surrender, spiritual repose, and so on.[381]

- Turning to the practical consequences of this hermeneutical context of realisation, and flowing from the uniquely individual factors highlighted in each of the preceding points, even a small degree of spiritual practice quickly reveals the typical uniqueness and contextual specificity of all those "answers" acquired in the actual process of learning and growth. That is why, as each reader of Ibn 'Arabī must actually discover from his or her own experience and practical application of his teaching, while on the one hand virtually everything that the Shaykh wrote can be viewed initially as in some sense "Ibn 'Arabī's *ta'wīl*" (spiritual interpretation of the Islamic scriptures)—at the same time, his writings cannot be usefully appropriated (explained, summarised, or reduced to simpler terms) except by *individually passing through the actual spiritual processes that gave rise to those particular "openings"*.[382]

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[380] See the detailed illustration and analysis of these spiritual principles in *"Dramatizing the Sura of Joseph: An Introduction to the Islamic Humanities,"* this is included in expanded form in the forthcoming **Openings: From the Qur'an to the Islamic Humanities.**

[381] See the extensive illustrations of these basic principles of Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual psychology in Chapters 1 and 2 of *The Reflective Heart*.

[382] And at that point, as Titus Burckhardt has ironically pointed out in a most memorable tale of his own youthful discovery of the *Futūhāt* (in his foreword to R.W.J. Austin's translation of the *Fusūs al-Hikam, The Bezels of Wisdom*), one no longer needs Ibn 'Arabī's books to discover those actual inspired interpretations.

- A second practical consequence of the actual realised practice of spiritual hermeneutics—and one that is constantly and quite typically emphasised by Ibn ʿArabī (no doubt explaining and typifying his later epithet as "the greatest Master", *al-shaykh al-akbar*)—is the gradual discovery of *expanding circles of responsibility and of spiritually effective "action"*, on different planes and in many outwardly different spheres of action. The remainder of this article focuses on some of those recurrent political dimensions of spiritual responsibility as they emerge, again and again, from that unique testing context of spiritual hermeneutics.

- One final noteworthy practical consequence of this particular hermeneutical context is of course a dramatically heightened awareness of the indispensable practical role and influences of *spiritually realised individuals*, again on many different planes. In other words, the actual operative process of spiritual realisation necessarily highlights the multi-faceted reality of *walāya*, which is probably the most distinctive and pervasive theme of the Shaykh's writings and teaching.

Now while the brief description of each of these points has been phrased here in positive terms, one could certainly add to this list of the hermeneutical challenges and implications of spiritual realisation a heightened awareness of the limited practical efficacy of external writings, teachings, intellectual interpretations, and any number of other historical institutions ostensibly devoted to public religious teaching and guidance—and a correspondingly heightened awareness of the mysteries of the effective creative transmutation of those teachings into the lastingly effective forms of the Islamic humanities. The wider practical creative and political tasks, and the unavoidable conflicts, which are revealed by that recurrent tension are outlined in the remaining sections of this essay, beginning with their manifestations in some of the peculiar rhetorical features of Ibn ʿArabī's writing.

II. "Straddling the Line": Recognising The Multiple Aims of Ibn ʿArabī's *Writing*

Most of the points just made about the intrinsic features of the actual hermeneutical context of spiritual realisation initially tend to highlight the practically indispensable roles, at every stage, of living,[383] effective spiritual guides and teachers. Often that recurrent awareness, in the many branches of Islamic spirituality just as in other practical spiritual traditions, has led to an understandable knowing deprecation (as in the famous Taoist dictum "he who speaks does not know…") of the roles and claims of those religious writers and related formal institutions who happen to be acting primarily "*outside* the circle" of actual spiritual realisation. That sort of pejorative judgment that is sometimes evident, for example, in the cautious or even openly critical attitude taken by certain Sufi teachers, both past and present, with regard to the prolific and wide-ranging, highly intellectual literary output of Ibn ʿArabī in particular. But that is surely not the whole story, as we can readily see simply by noting the ongoing wider spiritual influences—just as visible in our own day as in past centuries—of these and other written masterpieces of the Islamic humanities.

We have already devoted a number of more detailed studies to carefully illustrating and explaining the distinctive features of Ibn ʿArabī's "rhetoric"—i.e., the complex relationship between his

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[383] An essential quality never to be confused, in any spiritual tradition, with simply "existing bodily on earth".

characteristic forms of writing and their different intended audiences—in terms of his own explicit epistemological explanations and assumptions, since those issues are such essential prolegomena to a deeper appreciation of his writings and their intentions.[384] Within the context of this essay, though, the essential conclusion of those scholarly studies can be stated much more simply: all of Ibn ʿArabī's writing—from the spiritually autobiographical, mysteriously veiled poetic and symbolic texts of his early life in the Maghreb on to the better-known longer works from his later Eastern period of self-consciously public and wide-ranging "wise-counsel" (*nasīha*)—tends to straddle the invisible "boundary" of the hermeneutical circle introduced above. As such, his writing simultaneously expresses two different "faces", two very different aims and possibilities, depending on whether it is read from the perspective of prevailing beliefs and suppositions, or from the more demanding perspective of realised spiritual knowing.

On one level, for that relatively restricted set of readers and students who would already approach Ibn ʿArabī's writings from the perspective of their own spiritual practice and individual tasks of spiritual hermeneutics, his books, taken together, cover and exemplify virtually the entire spectrum of literary devices, topics, methods, and creative approaches to the problems of spiritual realisation that were developed within the preceding Islamic tradition (including many important elements of earlier Hellenistic and Arab heritages already deeply integrated in that tradition). Thus in this particular respect, just as each accomplished spiritual guide already integrates all those equally indispensable dimensions of the *actual ongoing* divine revelation so completely and profoundly that they are able to apply that inspired wisdom appropriately to each of the new and uniquely individual circumstances outlined in the preceding section—so likewise Ibn ʿArabī's *Futūhāt*, for example, might equally be described as comprehensive guidebook "for the person who has no spiritual guide".[385] Or more realistically, given the intrinsic challenges, and uniquely universal perspectives, of Ibn ʿArabī's writing, one could conceive of his extraordinarily demanding texts functioning ideally as a kind of ongoing "teacher of shaykhs".[386] In any event, as recent historical and manuscript studies are increasingly revealing, there is no doubt that the widest circle of influences of Ibn ʿArabī's writings has always been through the combination of their direct and indirect usage in the full range of actual situations of spiritual guidance and direction. This includes both the later institutionalised Sufi orders, as well as the wider, usually unacknowledged borrowing of his teachings and hermeneutics by preachers, teachers, and others working in more publicly visible arenas.[387]

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[384] **See especially our recent studies cited in notes 5 and 7 above. (IN THIS VOLUME NOW?)**

[385] I.e., as a kind of "*Kitāb man lā yahduruhu al-shaykh*", to use the formulaic title of a longstanding Arabic literary genre of practical handbooks, usually found in such fields as medicine and law.

[386] This particular role of the study of the *Futūhāt*, among the heads of many different Sufi orders in Ottoman Istanbul, down almost to the present day, is memorably described in Victoria R. Holbrooke's "Ibn ʿArabī and Ottoman Dervish Traditions: The Melāmī Supra-Order," Part One (*Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn ʿArabī Society* 9, 1991) and Part Two (*Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn ʿArabī Society* 12, 1992).

[387] For a number of telling contemporary illustrations of this phenomenon, **see "Ibn ʿArabī in the 'Far West': Visible and Invisible Influences", *JMIAS* XXIX (2001), pp. 87-122, and "*Except His Face...: The Political and Aesthetic Dimensions of Ibn ʿArabī's Legacy", *JMIAS* XXIII (1998), pp. 1-13.** As

In reality, though, Ibn ʿArabī's writings are for the most part unlike the texts typically associated with spiritual traditions in Islam in two very distinctive and pervasive ways. First, there is his characteristic insistence—deeply rooted in his own key spiritual experiences and understanding of his own personal destiny and mission[388]—on visibly and emphatically connecting every aspect of his spiritual understanding and communication directly with its ultimate "roots" (spiritual, at least as much as historical) in the Qur'an and the Prophetic example.[389] Secondly—and intrinsically rooted in the preceding distinctive feature—there is his more problematic insistence on connecting his distinctive spiritual insights and teaching with an endless host of related features drawn from virtually the entire extant body of both the religious and the philosophico-scientific learned traditions of his own time: i.e., with all the various intellectual disciplines lying "outside" the hermeneutical circle in our diagram here. Taken together, those two characteristic and relatively unusual features of Ibn ʿArabī's writing mean that the greater part of it is largely inaccessible in its original form to anyone but the most highly educated and inquisitive intellectual elites, who were a tiny urban minority in all pre-modern settings. That is to say, most of his surviving books (and the immense *Futūhāt* in particular) were carefully crafted so as to be fully accessible only for an unusually curious, highly motivated and spiritually inquisitive subset of those highly trained, fully Arabic-literate *ʿulamā'* and *hukamā'* who had already spent years acquiring the requisite formation and background in each of those demanding intellectual disciplines.[390]

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pointed out there, the usual historical assumptions and text-based methods of analysis and demonstration of "influences" are profoundly limited and inadequate when applied to contexts focused on actual spiritual realisation, rather than text-centred intellectual traditions. Those intrinsic limitations were further aggravated by the widespread prevalence after Ibn ʿArabī's death of polemical contexts in which Muslim religious writers often had compelling reasons not to mention explicitly their wide-ranging debts to his works. See, for example, revealing the later Egyptian Sufi illustration of this process in the study **by R. McGregor cited at n. 45 below [Part Two].**

[388] The basic autobiographical framework of his self-conception as the "Seal of the Muhammadan Saints" is introduced in the excellent biographies by S. Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn ʿArabī*, and Claude Addas, *The Quest for the Red Sulphur*, and is explained in greater detail in Chodkiewicz' *Seal of the Saints.*

[389] To avoid any possible misunderstanding of this point, it is sufficient simply to compare Ibn ʿArabī's writings either with any of the classical early Sufi "manuals" (Qushayri, Makki, etc.) or with any of the masterpieces of the Islamic humanities in other languages (ʿAttar, Rumi, Hafiz, and so on). All of the Islamic humanities, whatever their particular artistic form and cultural setting, are of course profoundly rooted in and inspired by the same scriptural sources. But what sets a work like the *Futūhāt* apart from them is precisely Ibn ʿArabī's thoroughgoing pedagogical concern, at every stage of exposition, to relate his teachings and expressions explicitly and unambiguously to a scrupulously "literal" reading of the actual words of the Qur'an and hadith.

[390] In this respect, the inherent challenges for modern translators and interpreters attempting to communicate Ibn ʿArabī's teaching—**discussed in detail in "Ibn ʿArabī's Rhetoric of Realisation: Keys to Reading and 'Translating' the *Meccan Illuminations*" (n. 5 above)**—were already largely shared by most earlier, non-scholarly Muslim audiences interested in his work. Indeed the inherent obstacles raised by his characteristic use of so many highly intellectual and culture-specific forms of

To put the implications of all this more directly, in terms of the diagram introduced above, these two distinctive features of Ibn 'Arabī's work together mean that one of the most consciously central audiences for most of Ibn 'Arabī's distinctive body of writing was the most highly educated—and therefore the most politically, culturally, and religiously influential—*intellectual* representatives of those diverse intellectual traditions scattered around the "outside" of that circle of spiritual realisation. The result of his persistent focus on those influential learned audiences, as we shall see in more detail below, is that these characteristic literary features implicitly reflect correspondingly *wide-ranging political intentions* that underlie—and potentially illuminate—these two crucially distinctive aspects of the Shaykh's writing.

Ordinarily, of course, as was just as obvious in Ibn 'Arabī's own time as in our own, the learned practitioners of those intellectual disciplines, whether religious or philosophico-scientific, often have their feet firmly planted "outside" the circle of conscious spiritual realization, being based instead in the narrowly self-involved pursuit of those intellectual traditions and their own this-worldly rewards.[391] But while Ibn 'Arabī has a number of memorably appropriate things to say about such learned authorities in his own day, his own creative, extraordinarily comprehensive lifelong response to their traditional claims and pretensions obviously goes far beyond the facile stereotypes of polemics and public controversy. First, the inventive rhetorical ways in which he evokes, presents and engages each of those learned religious disciplines clearly are meant to function as challenging, intellectually complex spiritual "*reminders*". As such, they already make it possible to "convert"— i.e., to bring partially *inside* this hermeneutical circle of conscious spiritual realisation—at least some of the expert practitioners of those intellectual traditions. And in doing so, the Shaykh is boldly encouraging those influential religious scholars to turn their own teaching and practice of those traditional religio-intellectual pursuits into newly effective vehicles for awakening—in themselves and their spiritually apt students, and even among the wider mass of their "followers" (their *muqalladūn*)—a deeper awareness of the actual tasks and opportunities for spiritual realisation within their own particular historical circumstances.

Secondly, even among the larger group of those powerful practitioners of those traditional religious disciplines who remain (to borrow Max Weber's memorable phrase) "spiritually tone-deaf", Ibn 'Arabī's impressively thoroughgoing and profoundly original linkage of the practices, conditions and expressions of the spiritual life with every conceivable dimension of the Qur'an and hadith (and with the related normative social forms of their study and transmission) means that his teachings should have at the very least a cautionary and irenic effect in defending the necessarily creative forms and renewed expressions of active spiritual life. In other words, as a result of Ibn 'Arabī's distinctive approach, within those recurrent situations of political, cultural and social conflict that are

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expression are immediately apparent to modern-day readers encountering the numerous recent translations of Ibn 'Arabī's works using the technical language of such traditional learned Islamic disciplines as ontology, cosmology, theology (of the divine "Names", in particular), law, and so on.

[391] See the detailed references to key aspects of Ibn 'Arabī's often openly critical attitude to the *'ulamā'* of his time (and to his far-reaching understanding of the wider issue of their religious authority) that are brought together in **"Ibn 'Arabī's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority," *Studia Islamica*, LXXI (1990), pp. 37-64,** and in the corresponding key sections of chapter 366 of the *Futūhāt* (on the figure of the Mahdi) translated in volume one of *The Meccan Revelations.*

historically inseparable from the effective expression of spiritual realisation and creativity, those publicly influential religious scholars and intellectuals who study Ibn ʿArabī should at least be persuaded to evince a minimum of practical tolerance and open-mindedness with regard to unfamiliar spiritual activities and their creative manifestations.

We have only to think of the very different examples and lasting influences, for example, of such key religious intellectuals as an al-Ghazālī or an Ibn Taymiyya, in order to something of the full spectrum of practical possibilities that are raised here, and to recognise the ongoing political and historical importance of these far-reaching religio-political intentions guiding and underlying Ibn ʿArabī's writing. So in Part Two of this essay we turn to a few relatively familiar illustrations of how this intentionally multi-faceted rhetoric actually functions in the Shaykh's writings (section III); and finally (in section IV) to briefly highlighting the Shaykh's ongoing concern with the impressive range of fundamental political implications—both freedoms and corresponding responsibilities—inevitably raised by the wider process of spiritual realisation, as each generation of seekers rediscovers and wrestles with the familiar hermeneutical dilemmas posed by our existential situation simultaneously "inside" and "outside" our initial circle of spiritual realisation.

III. "Seeing With Both Eyes": The Wider Circles of Responsibility

Recognising the larger unifying political themes and intentions that pervade all of Ibn ʿArabī's writing is difficult for several reasons. Most important, certainly, is the long-established association of his work and teachings in the centuries following his death—both by its defenders and by many polemical critics—with historically later institutions and forms of "Sufism" and popular religious and devotional life. There are indeed important and valid reasons for that later historical association, which we will return to briefly in our conclusion. But here it is sufficient simply to place the *Futūhāt* side-by-side with Rumi's near-contemporary and at least equally influential and encyclopedic *Spiritual Masnavī*, for example, in order to recognise quite clearly and unmistakeably the radically different rhetoric, audiences, and characteristic interpretive approaches of the Shaykh's work that have just been briefly outlined in Part One. Such a comparison also dramatically highlights the peculiar *intentional difficulty* and (at first encounter) almost perversely complex literary structures and assumptions of the majority of Ibn ʿArabī's writings, which seem in many cases forthrightly designed to put off all but the most highly motivated "inside" readers[392]—and which we know occasionally mystified even his own long-time disciples!

A second, equally understandable factor in obscuring these unifying political concerns is the fact that learned scholarly interpreters of Ibn ʿArabī's writings—in the past at least as much as today—have almost exclusively tended to focus on a relatively limited set of issues, topics, or approaches dictated by the problematic intersection between the Shaykh's own texts and the distinctive concerns of particular intellectual disciplines, familiar to some later interpreters, clearly included among those

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[392] This quality is particularly obvious, of course, in the mysterious, often more openly autobiographical symbolic works, in both prose and poetry, dating from Ibn ʿArabī's younger period in the Maghreb (*K. al-Isrāʾ*, *ʿAnqāʾ Mughrib*, and so on), prior to his receiving his mission for more public dissemination of his teaching and acts of *nasīha* **(n. 7 in Part One).** To a great extent, those earlier symbolic writings have been decipherable only through careful comparison with a wide range of illuminating passages from his *Futūhāt* and other more didactic later compositions.

listed outside the circumference of our opening diagram (in Part One).[393] Even a cursory glance at past commentaries or most modern studies of Ibn ʿArabī beautifully illustrates that familiar interpretive process, which at best tends to arrive at an intellectually coherent image of the Shaykh's purported "doctrine" or "system" profoundly rooted in each particular interpreter's own assumptions and intellectual preoccupations.

Now one more cohesive and practically accessible approach to rediscovering and actually recognising these unifying political intentions is to begin directly with our own easily replicable experience of the wider *practical pre-conditions*—simultaneously appearing both as necessary freedoms and as the most basic human spiritual obligations and responsibilities—that naturally arise, in every historical setting, simply through the very process of spiritual realisation itself. This approach, which is especially helpful for students with only a very limited acquaintance with Ibn ʿArabī's writings and the many unfamiliar intellectual disciplines he addresses, is the starting point of the following section (IV).

Here, though, we may begin by mentioning three typical illustrations of this wider rhetorical approach, focusing on recurrent practical and methodological differences that are likely to be familiar in each case to serious readers of the Shaykh today, even to those limited to the increasing body of English or French-language studies and translations. In each instance, when we look more closely, we can see how Ibn ʿArabī's distinctive rhetoric allows him to communicate in very different, but equally necessary and beneficial, ways to different audiences situated "outside" and "inside" the circle of spiritual realisation. For his own spiritual colleagues and collaborators *inside* that circle, his abstract theological and metaphysical discussions are clearly intended to heighten and inform their nascent awareness that the ultimate perfection (*kamāl*) of human responsibility always involves the rare mature ability to see the human situation, as his later interpreters put it, "with both eyes"—and hence to act creatively through all the appropriate means, following the Prophetic example, to further the enlightened awareness of "things as they really are".[394]

On the other hand, for those learned readers approaching his work from the limited perspective of their inherited ambient beliefs and suppositions, unaware of their spiritual ignorance, each of these characteristic methodological discussions has two distinct aims and possible outcomes. On one level, Ibn ʿArabī's words normally constitute a dramatic, multi-faceted *invitation* to move beyond the restrictions of belief and misleadingly circumscribed "thinking" (*fikr*, or *ʿaql* in its restrictive sense)— an invitation that calls into question the epistemological limits of those intellectually restricted standpoints, while simultaneously suggesting possible alternative pathways of spiritual realisation. Less ambitiously, but politically no less significant, Ibn ʿArabī's elaborately careful theological and methodological discussions tend to help defuse an all too familiar set of stock accusations and

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[393] This is particularly evident in the long—and extraordinarily influential—line of philosophico-theological commentaries on Ibn ʿArabī's *Fusūs al-Hikam*, focusing on the intersection of his teachings with prevailing philosophical (Avicennan) and theological (F. Rāzī, etc. (issues and conceptions, that was inaugurated by his son-in-law and close disciple, Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī. See now the magisterial discussion of Qūnawī's own highly creative role in this process by Richard Todd, in his **recent Oxford PhD thesis (*Writing in the Book of the World*), which hopefully will soon be more widely available in published form.**

[394] Referring to a famous Prophetic prayer to which Ibn ʿArabī often alludes: "O my God, cause me to see things as they really are."

stereotyped criticisms—some far more practically threatening than others—that religious intellectuals in Islam, as in every civilisation, repeatedly tend to apply to the locally pertinent claims and practices of spiritual realisation. Those targeted misunderstandings include, for example, standard fears of supposed anarchy, messianism, revolutionary chiliasm, quietism, antinomianism, dualism, idolatry, and so on. Of course the actual prevention and avoidance of such pitfalls and dangers, whether individual or collective, is a basic practical function of spiritual guides and teachers in all religious traditions (in Islam and elsewhere), and such concerns are therefore frequently dealt with throughout the literature of Sufism in every period. But Ibn 'Arabī's learned discussion of these issues is aimed at a different, more scholarly audience, and is thereby intended to limit and overcome those official fears and misunderstandings which inevitably tend to conflict with spiritually active movements in any political and cultural setting.

THEOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS: THE UNIVERSALITY OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

One of the central preoccupations of Ibn 'Arabī's interpreters, past and present, has been his recurrent concern with highlighting—both in the literal symbolic terms of Islamic scripture and in more abstract theological and metaphysical language—the absolute universality of each of the key dimensions or elements of the spiritual life. Indeed, as I have pointed out elsewhere, his all-inclusive approaches in that area were so persuasive and comprehensive that they subsequently inspired the most influential Muslim "official theologies" throughout key multi-religious, multi-cultural regions of the Muslim world during the centuries of extraordinary spiritual creativity and expansion following his death; while over the past century they have played an equally influential role in developing the conceptual frameworks of the modern study of religion.[395] However, the very familiarity of this central dimension of universality in the Shaykh's writing—even before its philosophical elaboration by the commentators of the *Fusūs al-Hikam*—sometimes tends to blind us to the obvious fact that those actively practicing the spiritual life do not necessarily even need such reminders. To recall that fundamental "hadith of the Questioning" with which we began this essay, the real-life situations of spiritual testing and learning are universally present and compelling in their own right, standing immediately before us in every situation.

Here again, Ibn 'Arabī's highly intellectualised, abstract expressions of this unifying theme in its different theological and metaphysical contexts are addressed above all to intellectuals (self-styled *'ulamā'* of one discipline or another) who might at least be persuaded by his arguments to tolerate—or perhaps even to begin to investigate and explore for themselves—unfamiliar spiritual phenomena and claims that they might otherwise negate or, given the necessary political influence, even suppress out of hand. On the other hand, for those more consciously practising their spiritual life within the circle of realisation, the abstract philosophical or theological discussions of this theme are just the tip of the iceberg. For those audiences, what lends such hermeneutical discussions their life and truly lasting appeal is the actual experiential "phenomenology of spiritual life" scattered so

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[395] **In addition to the two articles cited at n. 19 in Part One, see also the forthcoming studies "Ibn 'Arabī in the 'Far West': Spiritual Influences and the Science of Spirituality," in *Journal of the History of Sufism*, V (2006) (special issue: proceedings of Kyoto Conference on Ibn 'Arabi's Influences in Asia, ed. Y. Tonaga); and "From Cordoba to Isfahan, and Beyond: Mulla Sadra, Ibn 'Arabī and the Emerging Science of Spirituality," to appear in *Proceedings of the Isfahan Conference on Islamic Philosophy* ("Cordoba and Isfahan: Two Schools of Islamic Philosophy"), ed. H. Landolt and M. Mohaghegh.**

memorably throughout Ibn 'Arabī's writings, and pre-eminently in his *Futūhāt*. In that respect, Ibn 'Arabī's work provides a vast phenomenological panorama of the full spectrum, prospects and potential forms of spiritual realisation that certainly has no equivalent in Islamic religious literature. From within the circle of spiritual realisation, then, the message conveyed by precisely this same language of universality is a radically different one indeed: here it highlights the practical human centrality of humility, self-knowledge (in the sense of the growing awareness of one's creaturely limits and corresponding total dependency on God), surrender, and spiritually effective openness in every dimension of one's life—a realisation epitomised in Ibn 'Arabī's repeated evocation of the Prophet's telling prayer: "O my Lord, increase me in knowing!".

THE LIMITS OF PHYSICAL OBSERVATION AND LOGICAL DEMONSTRATION

Another, almost equally recurrent (and indeed closely related) hermeneutical theme in Ibn 'Arabī's writing—again familiar from a number of arguments in the *Fusūs*, but highlighted even more strongly in the Shaykh's Introduction (*muqaddima*) to his *Futūhāt*—is his emphasis on the intrinsic *limitations* of unilluminated human "rationalising": i.e., *'aql*, in its etymologically restrictive sense, which he usually highlights whenever he is using that key Arabic term in this particular way. Our individual "ratiocination" in that limited sense, he insists, is already inadequate to understand more than a few of the actual meanings of the revealed scriptural symbols, and its inherent inadequacies are even more obvious in the Aristotelian philosophers' unfounded reliance on their proven methods of logic and rational demonstration once they have moved beyond the outwardly observable phenomena of the physical universe.[396] Indeed there are a number of well-known extended passages and sometimes comic personal anecdotes, directly evoking Ibn 'Arabī's own encounters with such adherents of *falsafa*, scattered throughout the *Futūhāt*—perhaps most dramatically in the elaborate contrast between the very different ascensions of the intellectual (Avicennan philosopher) and the spiritual knower/seeker in his famous chapter 167, on the "Alchemy of True Happiness".[397]

Again, these recurrent methodological and epistemological cautions are clearly meant to be taken very differently from outside and inside the circle of spiritual realisation. For those learned

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[396] See the detailed enumeration of important discussions of this theme, from throughout the *Futūhāt*, in the pioneering article of Franz Rosenthal, "Ibn 'Arabī Between 'Philosophy' and 'Mysticism." Many of the passages analysed by Prof. Rosenthal have to do particularly with the politico-legal implications of those contrasts Ibn 'Arabī repeatedly draws between the limitations of the individual intellect (*'aql*) and the deeper wisdom of divinely inspired revelation (*shar'*).

[397] It is surely no accident that Ibn 'Arabī actually begins his basic Introduction (*muqaddima*) to the entire *Futūhāt* with an elaborate epistemological discussion of the limitations and respective domains of the different human intellectual and spiritual faculties and capacities that are essential for understanding the remainder of that immense work. See the translation of key elements of that foundational section in **"How to Study the *Futūhāt*: Ibn 'Arabī's Own Advice", pp. 73-89 in *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī: 750th Anniversary Commemoration Volume*, ed. S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan (Shaftesbury, Element Books, 1993),** along with the more extensive analysis of that passage and its relationship to the pertinent rhetorical forms of Ibn 'Arabī's writing in the article **cited at n. 7 above ("Ibn 'Arabī's Rhetoric of Realisation: Keys to Reading and 'Translating' the *Meccan Illuminations*").**

audiences whose very lives and disciplines are entirely caught up in this kind of inherently restrictive intellectualising, of course, Ibn 'Arabī's remarks are at least a provocative and cautionary reminder of the unexamined assumptions and possible limitations of their own perspectives. As such, they are also an "invitation to dance" inside the circle of spiritual realization, to discover significant realities lying beyond the limitations of those disciplines and approaches—or again, to enter into a new kind of spiritual dialogue whose results and premises, much less its ultimate outcome, are as yet unknown. For Ibn 'Arabī's considerable familiarity with the language and outlook of those religio-intellectual disciplines is a powerful indication that he is anything but an ignorant "irrationalist" or inspired "enthusiast", devoid of any serious interest in wider understanding and communication—a portrait which is of course the intellectual's standard pejorative stereotype of mystics throughout many religious traditions.

For Ibn 'Arabī's colleagues and active companions (*ashāb*, *qawm*, *tā'ifa*) in the individual hermeneutical process of actual spiritual realisation, of course, these passages in which he highlights the inherent limitations of ratiocination, far from marking some "end" of the active role of reason and intellectual reflection, are instead meant to point to the truly endless tasks of *spiritual intelligence* or wise discernment (*hikma*) at every stage of the process of realization.[398] Indeed the very goal of that process, as he constantly reiterates, is active existential conformity (*'ubūdiyya*) to the knowable aspect of the divine, to that "First Intellect" (*'aql*) which is Itself the all-encompassing "Muhammadan Reality" and common Ground of each of the prophets and divine messengers.

THE TENSION OF SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL "ETHICS": DISCOVERING NON-DUALISM

In one very peculiar sense, theologians and other public moralists standing "outside" the circle of spiritual realisation—whatever the particular religion or polity in question—are always right in their perennial suspicion of "what must be going on" inside that dangerously unknown territory.[399] For two of the most fundamental requisites of spiritual growth and discernment, the most basic tickets for consciously entering this circle of realisation, are the admission of one's profound ignorance (in so many different domains), and the dawning recognition that the most important and lasting spiritual lessons are those we learn precisely from our own unveiled mistakes and inadequacies. In most spiritual literatures, whatever the tradition in question, these "politically incorrect" basic facts of life are only rarely or quietly mentioned, despite their indispensable pedagogical role in actual practice and in even the most basic development of self-awareness.

Now whether we find ourselves outside or inside this circle, the initial inchoate awareness of those unnameable fears and dangers lying beneath that usually unacknowledged spiritual ignorance typically gives rise to the recurrent psychic reactions of *dualism* (good vs. "evil") and *projection* (the "other" as purely evil), together with the reification of both those extremes and unacknowledged idolatry (or in Qur'anic terms, spiritual "hypocrisy") that such familiar reactions always entail. Indeed this is so much the case that much of what we normally call "history" is little more than the endlessly repeated catalogue of the collective manifestations of those same recurrent reactions. In dramatic contrast, the entire process of spiritual growth and realisation—at least at the preliminary

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[398] See the development and illustrations of this central theme throughout *The Reflective Heart*.

[399] In this respect, as in so many others, Plato's Socratic dialogues provide memorable illustrations of the most fundamental features of Ibn 'Arabī's thought and teaching, in closely parallel forms that are yet clearly not dependent on the same language or cultural traditions.

levels that normally concern most of us—is largely devoted to exploring and learning to recognise, process, contextualise and integrate those unavoidable initial reactions, in increasingly challenging and probing ways. In addition, this is a domain in which each individual's gradual individual discovery of *spiritual* ethics—based on the ever-expanding demands and obligations of real inspired knowing (*ma'rifa*, or *'ilm* in its actual Qur'anic sense)—necessarily comes into conflict in various ways with the previously unconscious, socially, culturally and politically conditioned, belief-based systems of "social ethics" necessary to the smooth functioning of any complex human collectivity.[400] Some of the most dramatic illustrations of that particular recurrent type of human conflict, for Ibn 'Arabī and his original audiences, are of course to be found in the archetypal stories and spiritual biographies embedded in the hadith, *sīra*, and companion literatures, as well as the familiar tales of earlier prophets.[401]

This is a central area of Ibn 'Arabī's writing and teaching in which the practical phenomenology of spiritual life is intimately connected to the most abstract theological and metaphysical considerations, especially those famous controversies that later arose in the centuries-long polemics surrounding the "Unicity of being" and the necessarily paradoxical expressions of non-dualism. What Ibn 'Arabī is trying to accomplish in these elaborate metaphysical and cosmological discussions (often centring on the mysterious divine "Names" of the Qur'an), which are scattered throughout his *Futūhāt*, is clearly directed above all to a very narrow, highly learned theologico-philosophical audience. But we must keep in mind that it is precisely that learned audience of religious scholars who—in their recurrent public role as politico-theological authorities and officially sanctioned "interpreters" of the revelation—were (and still are) constantly called upon to ratify and legitimise all the destructive collective manifestations of those mass expressions of dualism, projection, reification and self-aggrandising idolatry whose actual worldly effects are never far from our view.

Against that exceedingly practical human backdrop, Ibn 'Arabī's characteristic elaborately developed distinctions of hierarchal or progressive "stages", "dimensions", and "levels"—familiar features (always reflecting the pregnant subtleties of the Qur'anic text) both in his cosmology and metaphysics, and in his even more complex spiritual phenomenology—are far from mere arbitrary systematising; and they certainly have nothing to do with some inexplicable mania for classification. For if we take them seriously, as his readers are certainly meant to do, we begin to discover that each of those hierarchical distinctions eventually corresponds—again, within the living circle of individual spiritual realisation—to actual realities and experienced phenomena that tend to reveal

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[400] See the chapter **on "The Mysteries of *Ihsān*: Natural Contemplation and the Spiritual Virtues in the Qur'an"—and the related study of the dramatisation of this contrast of spiritual and belief-based "ethics" in the Sura of Joseph [DRAMATIZING THE SURA OF JOSEPH?] (n. 12 in Part One above)—both included in the forthcoming volume *Openings: From the Qur'an to the Islamic Humanities*.**

[401] His famous *Fusūs al-Hikam*, of course, is devoted in large part to the careful rhetorical "deconstruction" and "re-revelation" of the dramatically revealing situations and spiritual meanings conveyed by many of those scriptural stories, whose originally intended spiritual implications are rapidly obscured, in every religious tradition, by the recurrent patina of familiarity and official respectability.

themselves, not so surprisingly, once we actually take the trouble to look.[402] Equally important in this context of warring dualisms, reification, idolatry, and self-deluding *makar* (unconsciously manipulative pretence), of course, are such familiar and better-studied rhetorical features of Ibn 'Arabī's writing as his reliance on paradox, irony (of endless sorts), terminological multiplicity and innovation, and the pointed etymological "deconstruction" of key Arabic terms and Qur'anic symbols—all familiar rhetorical efforts clearly intended, within the hermeneutical circle of realisation, to open the way to the truly revelatory discovery of those textual divine "Signs" (*āyāt*, as Qur'anic verses) at last *as* genuinely theophanic Signs.

Once one has begun to grasp the manifold intentions of those characteristic rhetorical devices, what emerges above all—especially in contrast with the far less ambitious devotional and pietistic literatures otherwise commonly associated with popular Sufism—is the extraordinary efforts this Shaykh goes to in order to unveil, for even his most recalcitrant learned readers, the inherently *dynamic* and open-ended nature of every soul's innate process of spiritual discovery.

IV. "DANCING IN BOTH WORLDS": CONDITIONS FOR SPIRITUAL REALISATION

No doubt the easiest way to come to recognise the larger unifying political intentions scattered throughout the constantly shifting discussions and topics of the *Futūhāt*, rather than starting with each of those particular passages in itself, is to begin instead with our own experience of those familiar responses, prospects and challenges that tend to arise whenever we are actively engaged in the processes of spiritual learning and discovery. In other words, to examine our own unique creative responses to that perennial hermeneutical question raised by Ibn 'Arabī (and by the hadith of the Questioning), with which we opened this study. If we keep those particular personal discoveries and unveilings clearly in mind, then we will immediately recognise—just as the Shaykh intended—the full relevance of each of the corresponding discussions and pertinent insights that come to our attention as we gradually move through his own unique spiritual "Openings" in the *Futūhāt*.

If we return to our own memorable experiences of that powerful "hadith of the Questioning" introduced in Part One, the first thing we typically discover—besides, or just after, our initial recall of those rare and usually unforgettable moments when we were either the agent or (as is perhaps more common) the unexpected recipient of one of those miraculously unexpected human manifestations of the divine Loving Compassion (*rahma*)—is the paradoxical recognition of two equally powerful realities. First, there is our extraordinary, often outwardly inexplicable ability to intuit the actual suffering and inner disturbance (if not its outward "cause" or occasion) of even total strangers we may encounter. And secondly, there is the familiar host of paralysing, equally inexplicable fears and reticences (usually with an added layer of noisy intellectual obfuscation) that ordinarily keep us from actually acting upon and responding to our mysteriously compelling awareness of those painful needs in others.

The next and considerably more subtle stage of realisation, usually arising after extended experience and reflection on this challenging situation, involves the gradually dawning awareness of the real depth of pain and loss that we are actually experiencing (however deeply we may repress it)

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[402] Again, this constant interplay of "theoretical" and phenomenological concerns within the actual operative dimensions of spiritual realisation is illustrated in detail throughout the passages from the *Futūhāt* translated and discussed in *The Reflective Heart*.

whenever we fail to act on our spiritual intuition— indeed whenever we see and experience others, as well, egregiously failing to respond that depth of suffering in ourselves and others. And that painfully awakening realisation is usually followed rather quickly by the further intimation that our own previous experiences of suffering and needfulness, within this perennial earthly situation, do somehow mysteriously inform and help to account for the relative depth and acuity of our own growing capacity for actualised compassion. At that stage, perhaps, we also become ready to appreciate what Ibn 'Arabī reports—as the culminating spiritual testament of Idrīs—about the "Fire" of life in this world as the purifying crucible of spiritual perfection (*kamāl*) that eventually reveals the "gold and silver" of each purified fully human spirit and its unique good-and-beautiful actions (*ihsān*).[403]

But how can we move beyond—or rather, through—this perennial challenge? Without yet referring directly to Ibn 'Arabī (since virtually everything he wrote can be construed as a part of his own practical reply to that question), there are certain basic practical responses, or at the very least preconditions for further discovery, that seem to arise in a natural, inevitable manner at this stage of realisation. And each of those practical responses, while it is certainly experienced as an inherently compelling spiritual obligation and responsibility, can also be expressed as a kind of *essential freedom*—a freedom that is necessary, in any case, if that human responsibility is to be actualised in wider circles of realisation. From yet another perspective, each of these conditions is also a practical prerequisite for the effective exercise (and indeed the very discovery) of the pre-eminent spiritual virtue of *ihsān*: i.e., for first recognising and then accomplishing in each circumstance what truly *is* both good and beautiful. In the following list, no particular order or ranking is intended, since each of these practical elements seems equally essential; indeed it is virtually impossible to separate them within the actual exercise of *ihsān*. The necessarily brief references here to related themes in the *Futūhāt* are more fully illustrated in our earlier preliminary studies of Ibn 'Arabī's approach to the problems of religious "law" and spiritual authority.[404]

THE FREEDOM/OBLIGATION TO QUESTION AND LEARN: ENABLING "SPIRITUAL LITERACY"

Ibn 'Arabī's beautiful formulation of the all-encompassing dilemma of spiritual hermeneutics with which we began was, not surprisingly, itself an open *question*. For every step of real spiritual growth begins with a question: with an open-ended intention or aspiration whose ultimate aim, by its very nature, always remains "not yet" known, and at best only vaguely intimated. So when we add to the initial natural spiritual testing situation of those ever-renewed divine Signs "*in our own souls and in the world*" (Qur'an 41:53) the additional transforming catalyst of the revealed scriptural "Signs" (*āyāt*) and Prophetic indications, it quickly becomes apparent that the proper individual application

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[403] See the full translation of this key chapter 15 from the *Futūhāt* in the volume in preparation**, Elevations: Insight and Transformation in the "Meccan Illuminations"**, as well as the shorter excerpts included in the concluding Chapter 5 of *The Reflective Heart*.

[404] See especially the **Studia Islamica article ("Ibn 'Arabī's 'Esotericism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority")** cited at n. 23 (Part One), as well as numerous related passages included in F. Rosenthal's study, "Ibn 'Arabī Between 'Philosophy' and 'Mysticism.'" **Each of the points briefly mentioned in this section is the subject of a full chapter in my book on Ibn 'Arabī's political thought now in preparation**. See also the related discussions and translations from the *Futūhāt* summarised in E. Winkel, *Islam and the Living Law*.

and appreciation of those bare scriptural elements understandably requires a whole host of complex enabling conditions.

While we tend to take the providential presence of many of those practical conditions for granted, not much reflection is required to begin to appreciate and outline the different essential elements of that mature "spiritual literacy"—far more demanding than linguistic literacy, and even more difficult to acquire—which we need in order to move successfully through the successive stages of spiritual realisation. We can better appreciate the remarkable historical challenges and creative achievements involved in satisfying these conditions simply by studying even briefly the extraordinarily mysterious processes by which the great spiritual works and institutions of the past actually came into being. But that same historical study constantly reminds us just as forcefully how every age and every individual is obliged to create anew the appropriate means for the new spiritual challenges facing each generation. The provision and fulfilment of these conditions are perennial human responsibilities that Ibn ʿArabī mentions and highlights for his readers in many different ways.

As the Shaykh constantly points out throughout the *Futūhāt*—and just as consistently, if sometimes less obviously, in all his other works—there is no human spiritual responsibility or obligation (*taklīf*) which is somehow free from the genuine exercise of our most distinctively human spiritual quality of free will and reasoned choice (*irāda*). So even though life "outside the circle" of realisation necessarily relies, in every human society, on its own specific forms of largely unconscious social consensus, agreement, and "belief" (a common Arabic word which, quite tellingly, does not occur even a single time in the Qur'an), Ibn ʿArabī's writing can be seen, from this perspective, as one never-ceasing reminder that our movement into the circle and process of realisation, our gradual active assumption of our true human dignity (as *insān*, and not the conditioned-animal *bashar*), always begins with the discovery and exercise of our inalienable obligation to learn and discover the truly divine Self-revealing. For that transforming discovery necessarily precedes any effective transcendence of the dependencies of our ambient socio-cultural conditioning (*taqlīd*).

THE FREEDOM/OBLIGATION TO CREATE, INNOVATE, EXPERIMENT: EXPANDING DIVERSITY

One of the most ironically delightful surprises one encounters again and again in the *Futūhāt*—given the familiar contrasting keynote of today's Islamist political ideologies—is Ibn ʿArabī's frequent return to illustrate, in different contexts, the central practical spiritual importance of the famous hadith in which the Prophet lavishly praises the lasting, ever-multiplying spiritual rewards of "good-and-beautiful innovation" (*bidʿa hasana*) in the spiritual path.[405] Underlying this fundamental spiritual necessity and obligation, of course, are two even more fundamental themes in the Shaykh's thought: his insistence (following many Qur'anic verses to that effect) on the providential, absolutely *irreducible diversity* of individual human natures and communities (30:22); and his characteristic emphasis, already elaborated above, on the *inherently dynamic*, continually unfolding nature of each human being's spiritual development—and on the correspondingly inexhaustible divine Creativity underlying that central human spiritual responsibility.

Moreover, these points are not something Ibn ʿArabī piously preaches simply in words, but teachings that he dramatically illustrate with literally hundreds of fascinating "case-studies", in his telling accounts of both contemporary and earlier spiritual figures, including individuals with whose practical approaches and arguments he quite openly disagrees—yet with whom, in many cases, he

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[405] See the full references and more extensive illustrations in the **studies in notes 36 and 23 above.**

seems to have happily lived, worked and taught. For example, his well-known critical attitude toward the widespread spiritual practice of musical *samā'* is only one illustration of this revealing co-existence of his own strong personal judgments together with an evident practical tolerance of opposing perspectives and interpretations.

Another recurrent expression of this same recognition of the spiritual necessity and inevitability of constant creativity—and the concomitant result of ever-expanding individual, social and cultural diversity and individuation—is his often forceful pronouncements, in various outwardly "legal" contexts (and again reflecting repeated explicit Qur'anic warnings to the same effect), radically questioning the ability or right of anyone to seek to *impose* the results of their own hermeneutical reasoning and spiritual discoveries on anyone else.[406] Equally revealing are his even more outspoken criticisms of many of the most basic assumptions and pretensions of the historical disciplines of *fiqh* and *usūl al-fiqh*, when those arbitrary assumptions are construed as the basis for some purportedly all-encompassing system of public religious "laws".[407] One key implication of these pointedly radical judgements, which he returns to even more frequently, is his sympathetic embrace of the open-ended, infinite profusion of individual modes of "belief".[408]

At an even deeper level, of course—as with Ibn 'Arabī's highly distinctive personal notions of the timeless "individual archetypes" (*a'yān thābita*) of each person's existence, and of each human soul's "direct line" to God (*al-wajh al-khāss*)—this awareness of truly absolute individuality and spiritual diversity goes to the very heart of the Shaykh's distinctive conception of the divine Reality and Its infinite Self-manifestations. But here, as everywhere else, those famous metaphysical theories have their roots and illustrations profoundly anchored in the spectrum of spiritual realities and probative experiences always accompanying the ongoing practical processes of realisation and discovery, of revelatory "finding" and "unveiling" (*wujūd* and *kashf*).

THE FREEDOM/OBLIGATION TO "MAKE BEAUTIFUL" (*ihsān*):

While Truth (*al-Haqq*), rather than Beauty (and the inseparable reality of love), is surely the overall keynote of Ibn 'Arabī's best-known writings—at least when they are compared with the classical poetic masterworks of the later Persian, Turkish, Urdu and other Eastern Islamic humanities—his books are also filled with practical acknowledgements of the essential role of these other indispensable elements of the spiritual Path. And in a number of places (such as his famous chapter

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[406] Again, see the detailed illustrations of these key political principles, throughout the *Futūhāt*, in the earlier studies **cited at n. 23 above.**

[407] On this point, see especially the translation (and explanatory notes) of chapter 366 of the *Futūhāt* ("The Mahdi and His Helpers") in volume one of *The Meccan Revelations*; chapter 2 ("Ibn 'Arabī and the Tasks of Spiritual Insight and Creativity") in *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation*; **"Ibn 'Arabī's Messianic Secret: From 'The Mahdī' to the Imamate of Every Soul", JMIAS, vol. XXX (2001), pp. 1-19; and the legal studies cited notes 34 and 21 above.**

[408] *I'tiqād*: a term that could be more adequately translated (especially in light of the Arabic etymological connotations of "restriction" and "binding" that Ibn 'Arabī is always quick to highlight) as "the spiritually determinative conscious and unconscious assumptions and perspectives informing our uniquely individual 'framing' of the nature of reality". See especially the concluding passage, from chapter 318 of the *Futūhāt*, translated at the end of this article.

178 on Love in the *Futūhāt*), he provides what is essentially the template for many centuries of later commentaries, which we find in all Islamicate languages, that are meant to bring out more openly and explicitly the originally scriptural elements and Prophetic lessons so effectively conveyed in the popularly accessible local forms of the Islamic humanities, from the devotional classics like al-Busīrī's *Burda* to the great mystical poems of Ibn al-Fārid—and their even more celebrated equivalents in other non-Arabic cultural and linguistic contexts.

We have separated this point out here as a distinctive pre-condition for the actual hermeneutical processes of spiritual realisation simply because the prevailing religio-political ideologies of our own time have so puzzlingly pretended to divorce the obligation of *ihsān* (understood simply as "doing good") from those even more essential components of divine Beauty and the motivating power of love which are so inseparable from the actual spiritual reality of *ihsān*. Hence we find ourselves all too often facing the strange dilemmas of a multitude of contemporary societies and cultures in which human beings, given their innate spiritual "hungers" and "thirsts", naturally gravitate toward the realities of Beauty and the endless creative expressions of *ihsān* whenever they have the requisite freedom—yet where those principial divine realities are paradoxically assumed by religio-moralistic ideologues (of virtually every stripe) to be somehow excluded from those fantasised impersonal, ideal systems of monolithic public "morality" that they arbitrarily portray as being somehow imposed from without or above.

THE FREEDOM/OBLIGATION TO ASSOCIATE AND COMMUNICATE:

If each person's first conscious steps on the spiritual Path are necessarily "individual" (or rather, happen to appear as such), certainly all the remaining advances are often taken in many indispensable kinds of "spiritual companionship" (*suhba* and *walāya*), whose transforming presences and indispensable influences are described and illustrated on virtually every page of Ibn 'Arabī's *Meccan Illuminations*. So whenever we are able to respond positively and appropriately to those uniquely individual spiritual challenges emblematically portrayed in the hadith of the Questioning, that actual movement toward realised compassion (*rahma*) and *ihsān* is almost inevitably with and through the influence, encouragement, and grace of spiritual companions and guides, present on many levels of being, whose roles and full influence become ever more visible and palpable as we advance. Once again, this is a basic phenomenological reality of all spiritual life whose scriptural, practical, and intellectual dimensions are elaborately described throughout Ibn 'Arabī's writings.

Moreover, some of the most remarkable and thought-provoking lessons of Ibn 'Arabī's works— emerging most clearly in scattered autobiographical remarks about himself and his Sufi companions and other spiritual contemporaries—have to do not with his formal doctrinal teachings, but with the peculiarities of certain social and cultural conditions he evidently takes for granted, and which he specifically chose to highlight in his *Rūh al-Quds* (partly translated as *"Sufis of Andalusia"*) and other autobiographical works. What is so striking in those personal accounts, almost everywhere that Ibn 'Arabī travels, is his remarkable encounters with an extraordinary set of spiritually accomplished individuals (with or without visible charismatic powers, or *karāmāt*) who are themselves distinguished by their tell-tale signs of accomplished "spiritual *ijtihād*", their surprisingly creative endeavours of experimentation and realisation that are often radically different in both kind and expression from the formulaic institutional accounts and classical guidelines of proper *adab* available in the classical Sufi manuals. As we can see throughout his writings, Ibn 'Arabī forcefully criticises those recently developed eastern "Sufi" institutions and formulaic approaches on many occasions precisely for their routinisation (and elitist specialisation) of intrinsically *universal* spiritual tasks and responsibilities which he always insists are actually incumbent on all human beings (and certainly on all Muslims), not just a handful of self-styled initiates.

On an even more visible, indeed inherently political level, when we consider those ever-present testing situations posed by our opening hadith of the Questioning, it is clearly close to impossible even to recognise the full extent of the sufferings and needs of those around us—all the endless individual forms of inner "sickness", "hunger" and "thirst" compressed in the succinctly forceful imagery of that unforgettable hadith—whenever those same individuals are not *free and empowered to communicate openly and effectively the actual realities of their state*. Hence any truly effective response to that fundamental human right and responsibility of genuinely free communication also necessarily requires a corresponding *freedom of association and collective action*, a right which is typically most directly efficacious (outwardly as well as spiritually) when it is closest to the particular needs and suffering that are in question.[409]

RESPECTING THE *AWLIYĀʾ*:

No theme is more central to the *Meccan Illuminations* than that of *walāya* (of the divine "Proximity" and "Guardianship"), in all of its dimensions and manifestations. This includes by extension the vast domain of prophetology, and the wide-ranging practical spiritual functions, in Ibn ʿArabī's world-view, of that rare group of "the Friends of God" (the mysterious *qawm* described at 5:54) who are always at the centre of his concern: that specially missioned "group whom (God) *will* bring" in these later times, "who love Him, and He loves them…". So far, even the brilliantly summarised presentations and typologies of M. Chodkiewicz' classic *Seal of the Saints* (or the traditional commentaries now available discussing this same issue as it arises throughout the *Fusūs*) do no more than scratch the surface of this immense and all-encompassing topic.

This is perhaps the perfect illustration of a subject in Ibn ʿArabī which appears initially as abstractly theological (and at least implicitly political) when viewed intellectually, from the "outside" of our hermeneutical circle. But when we approach it from the more illuminating perspective of actual spiritual practice and realisation, in a very real sense virtually everything (and certainly everyone) one encounters on the Path comes down to the probative manifestations and reassurances of the divine *walāya*. For no one advances very far in the process of spiritual realisation—or discovers any lastingly satisfying answers to that fundamental hermeneutical question with which we began this essay—without the tangible guiding presence of the "Friends of God". And each step, after that initial discovery, is accompanied by the ever-growing awareness of their influences and guidance on every plane of our being—and of their presence all around us, as so many of these "Openings" (and the hadith of the Questioning) constantly remind us, for "those with eyes to see…".

In that light, the virtual absence of their mention—and indeed the not infrequent attitude of vehement denigration and even outright denial (extending even to the point of bombings and other sacrilege)—among the publicly prevailing pseudo-religious ideologies of our own day is one dramatic measure of the particular concrete challenges facing the "people of realisation" in this era. Even— or perhaps especially?—small children can immediately recognise the transforming presence of each human and angelic instrument of divine compassion that they encounter—an intuitive spiritual awareness, like that of holy and sacred places, which is built into the very essence of the human heart. So few teachings of Ibn ʿArabī could be more widely neglected, yet more poignantly indispensable, in the distracted public circumstances in which we find ourselves today.

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[409] Not surprisingly, then, Ibn ʿArabī's ongoing discussions of the spiritual themes of charity throughout the *Futūhāt*, both as *zakāt* and *sadaqa*, are among the most immediately accessible and spiritually powerful passages in that work.

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL NECESSITY OF CONSENSUS AND CO-OPERATION

What this particular heading points to is not those familiar types of spontaneous, small-group spiritual association just mentioned, which develop directly and spontaneously from our natural response to those individual situations of suffering and need dramatised in the opening hadith of the Questioning. Instead, I am referring here to a far more visible, essentially political reality lying "outside" the circle of specifically spiritual concerns, a creative political challenge which is daily re-enacted at levels stretching from the couple and family, at one extreme, to the most inclusive global moral communities. Ibn ʿArabī was no unrealistic "utopian" (in the ordinary sense of that term), but a keen observer of the visible surrounding political realities in a time of widespread turbulence and traumatic disorder so extreme that we can scarcely imagine it—caught as he was, throughout his life, between resurgent Crusades of both West and East, and the even more devastating Mongol invasions already underway to his East. As such, he devotes considerable attention throughout the *Futūhāt* and elsewhere to dealing with the inevitably fraught and problematic relations between those rare individuals whose existence is conscientiously devoted to spiritual matters lying "within" the circle of realisation, and that much larger portion of humanity who, on the level of their conscious attention and intention, are ordinarily so deeply embedded in the manifold forms of unconscious *taqlīd* and reflexive natural behaviour that they may well imagine they are living solely in that "lowest life" (*al-hayāt al-dunyā*) lying entirely outside the circle of realisation.

In that light, another unfairly neglected subject scattered throughout the *Futūhāt* is Ibn ʿArabī's careful attention to those basic matters of common worldly interest (*masālih*) and corresponding shared principles of practical wisdom and prudence (*hikam*, here in a more worldly sense) which necessarily underlie every lasting and successful form of public worldly order—again, at every level of human association.[410] Unfortunately, since Ibn ʿArabī often contrasts that shared domain of earthly practical wisdom with the dramatically more inclusive and far-reaching spiritual aims of the divine revelations (*sharāʾiʿ*), it is clear that some modern interpreters have occasionally misunderstood such contrasting passages as a kind of—typically "ascetic", or dangerously "mystical"—denigration or even an outright denial of the ongoing importance of such worldly considerations and of the complex forms of public consensus and compromise that underpin any stable socio-political order.

In fact, given the radical individuality and expanding creative diversity that Ibn ʿArabī views as inevitably arising from the active pursuit of spiritual realisation, he repeatedly makes it clear—as is indeed evident in all his above-mentioned rhetorical forms of careful attention to the organising opinions and influences of that socio-cultural world "outside the circle"—that only a constant, widely shared public spirit of compromise, consensus, and appropriate concern with those central matters of public interest (*masālih*) can make possible *in practice* each of these preceding essential supportive conditions for the tasks and obligations of spiritual realisation. In this respect, once again, Ibn ʿArabī's far-reaching political insights continue to highlight these essential perennial conditions for spiritual realisation and creativity in the ever-expanding, inherently diverse, multi-cultural and multi-confessional political and moral orders of the contemporary world—just as they

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[410] See the pioneering article of F. Rosenthal ("Ibn ʿArabī between 'philosophy' and 'mysticism'") for an especially helpful enumeration of the key passages in which Ibn ʿArabī discusses these essential, humanly universal rational political principles, which also extend to the shared this-worldly aims that are also served by the divine revealed-pathways (*sharāʾiʿ*).

already did in the far more fragmented, scattered, localised, and highly unstable historical circumstances of the tumultuous centuries immediately following his death.

CONCLUSION

Thanks to an extraordinary amount of detailed historical and textual research over the past few decades, we can now follow in considerable detail during the centuries following Ibn ʿArabī's death, throughout the regions north and east of the original Arab conquests, many beautifully illustrative cases of those extraordinary local processes of spiritual and religious creativity—of *ihsān* in the most profound and lasting sense—underlying those forms of the Islamic humanities that in turn eventually made possible the emergence of Islam as a truly world religious tradition.[411]   (In our own time, incidentally, the same creative spiritual phenomena are still happening all around us, though of course more visibly for those who know where and how to look.) Against that inspiring backdrop, it is one of those curious historical ironies which one frequently encounters in the study of religion, that so many of the prevailing dualist religio-political ideologies of our own day have chosen to portray those remarkable centuries of cultural creativity and diversity, and that hemisphere-wide theatre of spiritual effervescence and religious expansion, as an age of supposed "decadence", inactivity, and decay.

As the result of that recent detailed historical research, we can now find the traces of Ibn ʿArabī's influence throughout that period, both visible (textual) and implicit, almost wherever we turn. And that influence is equally palpable in *both* the integral facets of his writing discussed in this paper. Most obviously, it can be seen "outside" the circle of realization, in the public, learned defence and theological articulation of his distinctive theses and understanding of the Islamic tradition, in ways which frequently dominated official religious circles, even in certain cases—as with Khumaynī's famous "*Letter to Gorbachev*"—down to our own day.[412] Less obviously demonstrable, but probably far more profound and lasting, was the actual spiritual interpretation and creative application of his intentions and insights by dedicated readers and students who actually put into practice, in the domains of realisation, all those lessons he sought to communicate to his spiritually prepared readers, those he addresses so tellingly at the end of his Introduction to the *Futūhāt*, who are able to move from allusion to insight, and from insight to its realised expression and communication.[413]

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[411] For an initial overview of the increasingly prolific and geographically wide-ranging spectrum of recent historical research illustrating the local impact of these phenomena in very different historical settings, see the web-based volume (incorporating several dozen articles, monographs and reviews of related publications**), *Ibn ʿArabi and His Interpreters: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Perspectives* (details at n. 6 in Part One).** One of the best measures of the vast geographical and historical extent of the subsequent use and application of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings is in the highly detailed regional case-studies of the polemics and opposition to those Akbari influences, in a range of local settings, included in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies & Polemics*, ed. Frederic de Jong & Bernd Radtke (Leiden, 1999).

[412] See "***Except His Face…*: The Political and Aesthetic Dimensions of Ibn ʿArabi's Legacy", in *JMIAS*, XXIII (1998), pp. 1-13, and other references at n. 19 (Part One) above.**

[413] See the translation of those key sections of his *muqaddima* in **"How to Study the *Futūhāt*: Ibn ʿArabī's Own Advice" (n. 29 above).** One recent, and historically particularly important, illustration of this kind of wide-ranging "unpublicised" influence of the Shaykh's thought within and through the

That latter group of readers, who are not satisfied to "worship according to the prevailing suppositions" of others, are indeed most likely to seek out and put into practice these and many other dimensions of Ibn 'Arabī's own response to the recurrent dilemmas of spiritual hermeneutics and realisation. Some of the key features of the Shaykh's own deliberate response, carefully indicating how we may discover this mysterious, divinely intended "aspect of the Right/Truth/Obligation with God applying to *this* particular problematic situation", are beautifully summarised in the following later key passage from the *Futūhāt*:[414]

> Now you must know that if the fully human being *(al-insān)* renounces his (own personal) aims, takes a loathing to his carnal self (*nafs*), and instead prefers his Lord: then the Real (*al-Haqq*) will give him a form of divine guidance in exchange for the form of his carnal self, ...so that he walks in garments of Light. And (this form) *is* the revealed-pathway (*sharī'a*) of his prophet and the message of his messenger.   Thus he receives from his Lord what contains his happiness. And some people see (this divine guidance) in the form of their prophet, while some see it in the form of their (spiritual) state.

In the former case, Ibn 'Arabī continues:

> That (form) *is* the inner reality of that prophet and his spirit, or the form of an angel like him, who knows his revealed-pathway from God.... And we ourselves have often received in this way the form of many things among the divinely revealed judgments which we had not learned about from the learned or from their books. (For even) if the form (revealing that inspiration to the seeker) is not that of his prophet, then it still necessarily refers to his (particular spiritual) state or to the stage of the divine-revealing (*shar'*) with regard to *that* moment and *that* situation in which he saw that vision.

So nothing could be more universal, or more far-reaching in its practical implications and demands, than the Shaykh's summary conclusion here, his remarkable response to those recurrent dilemmas of scriptural interpretation and true authority with which we began—a response that immediately takes us back to each of those essential practical conditions for spiritual realisation discussed in the preceding sections:

> … (For) apart from what is (unambiguously) forbidden or enjoined, there is no restriction on what he accepts from that (inspiration), whether with regard to beliefs or other things: *for God's Presence encompasses the totality of all beliefs.*

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arenas of actual spiritual realisation—and at the same time, of the carefully adapted cultural and political creativity highlighted throughout this essay—can be found in Richard McGregor's *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: The Wafā Sufi Order and the Legacy of Ibn 'Arabī* (Albany, 2004), as well as in the author's other related studies in medieval Sufism.

[414] Chapter 318, vol. III, p. 70. The phrases placed in quotes in the preceding sentences here are drawn from those longer key passages on the challenge of true spiritual hermeneutics, in chapter 64 of the *Futūhāt*, **translated at the beginning of this study (Part One above).**

Ibn 'Arabī's Messianic Secret: From "the Mahdi"
 to the Imamate of Every Soul

Ibn 'Arabī has many ways of teaching his serious students to "read between the lines", to seek out those most essential metaphysical teachings which – as he explains at the very beginning of his *Meccan Illuminations*[415] – he had intentionally scattered throughout that immense work and destined for his most qualified and well-prepared readers, the "quintessence of the elite". Although we have no extended commentaries of large portions of the *Futūhāt* that explicitly attempt to build on Ibn 'Arabī's opening advice and separate out those most essential sections of his work, one of the obvious clues to the judgments of many earlier generations of well-informed students of Ibn 'Arabī is those chapters which have been repeatedly discussed and mentioned (favourably or unfavorably) by subsequent authors. In the past, one of the most frequently discussed chapters of that immense work has of course been Chapter 366,[416] on "the Mahdi and His Helpers", which we have partially translated and separately commented – from the quite different perspective of his distinctive personal approach to the sources and interpretations of *fiqh* and "Islamic Law" – in earlier publications.[417] Thus the annual Symposium dedicated to the general theme of "The Spirit of the Millennium", and the wider ambience of speculation and historical reminiscence surrounding that rarely repeated time, all help to highlight the deeper human significance and broader resonances, whatever one's own religious tradition, of the "messianic" issues which Ibn 'Arabī raises most explicitly – and perhaps also most problematically – precisely in this famous chapter.

At the same time, the interpretive approach applied in some detail in this new partial "commentary" on that same chapter also helps to illustrate concretely some of the basic hermeneutical steps and processes which any student of the *Futūhāt* needs to follow in order to piece together and integrate – both intellectually and existentially, as is always the case with the Shaykh – this author's distinctive way of gradually introducing and slowly unfolding his deeper understanding of almost any theme in

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[415] See the translation and discussion of those key programmatic passages from his *muqaddima* in our article **'How to Study the *Futūhāt*: Ibn 'Arabī's own Advice,' pp. 73-89 in *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī: 750th Anniversary Commemoration Volume*, ed. S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan (Shaftesbury/ Rockport, Element Books, 1993).** His model and inspiration for this structural device, as with so many of his unique rhetorical features throughout the *Futūhāt* and his other works, is of course to be found in the Qur'an itself.

[416] One of the most dramatic recent illustrations of this phenomenon was the case of the famous 'Mahdi' of Sudan, at the end of the 19th century, who appointed his 'ministers' (*wuzarā'*) in a literal, self-conscious imitation of Ibn 'Arabī's discussions in this particular chapter. One of Ibn 'Arabī's most influential and persistent critics, the philosopher Ibn Khaldūn, likewise focused throughout his famous *Muqaddima* on what he claimed to be dangerously 'messianic' tendencies encouraged by Ibn 'Arabī's writings and their misguided interpreters: see our forthcoming study of **'Ibn Khaldūn's Critique of Sufism', to appear in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy: A Historical Journal* (2002).**

[417] See our article (originally prepared as a commentary on chapter 366), **'Ibn 'Arabī's "Esotericism": The Problem of Spiritual Authority', in *Studia Islamica*, LXXI (1990), pp. 37-64,** and the long excerpts from chapter 366 translated and annotated in volume one of *The Meccan Illuminations*.

that immense book. And as usual when reading and interpreting Ibn ‘Arabī, we must begin with the specific Arabic language of the Qur'an.

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To begin with the most essential Arabic grammar and vocabulary, the term *al-mahdī*, in its original form, is simply the passive participle of the verb *hadā*, meaning "to lead or guide correctly, in the right direction": thus *al-mahdī* means literally "the rightly guided person". In the Qur'an, which here as always shapes and determines the key parameters of Ibn ‘Arabī's thought, the "right direction" in question is always *God's,* and the various forms of this root occur some 330 times, indicating its centrality as one of the fundamental themes of Qur'anic thought.[418] But curiously enough, the particular form *al-mahdī* doesn't occur in the Qur'an at all. And indeed it is only subsequent Islamic tradition that has struggled to discover hidden Qur'anic allusions to that figure and the related actors (the evil *al-dajjāl*, Jesus, etc.) mentioned repeatedly in the eschatological dramaturgies outlined in most of the collections of hadith. These basic facts turn out to be quite significant once we begin to explore Ibn ‘Arabī's treatment of the Mahdi in his *Futūhāt*.

For when the theme of this recent Symposium was announced (as "The Spirit of the Millennium"), I returned with great interest to the wider text of the *Futūhāt*, assuming that this particularly appropriate "millenarian" subject must surely be treated at some length throughout Ibn ‘Arabī's mature compendium of his teaching, particularly since scholars have recently been able to explore more readily his allusive youthful treatment of that same subject through the new edition and translation of his early *‘Anqā' Mughrib*,[419] a difficult work whose very title alludes to the Islamic traditions concerning the eschatological context of the Mahdi's appearance. In this case an initial query – aided by a new CD-ROM enabling one to quickly search the entire printed text of the *Futūhāt*– came up with some rather surprising results. In fact, the word "*al-mahdī*" occurs only 33 times in the entire book, and all but eight of those mentions are included in Chapter 366.[420] However, when one looks more closely at the ways Ibn ‘Arabī actually had used that term on the seven occasions where he mentions it prior to Chapter 366, an interesting discovery emerges: on each of those earlier occasions, that expression (*al-mahdī*) is used in an entirely *non*-technical sense, not as a sort of honorific title or proper name (as it usually is in the hadith that are the initial, apparent subject of Chapter 366), but instead in the much more ordinary sense of any person who is spiritually "rightly guided", who has received and actively assimilated some kind of inner divine guidance in various domains of life. Now this distinctive method of "deconstructing" an overly

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[418] The importance of this Qur'anic theme becomes even more obvious if we also include the repeated forms (19 times) of the closely related Arabic root *r-sh-d*.

[419] G. Elmore, *Anqā' Mughrib, Islamic Sainthood in the Fulness of Time: Ibn al-‘Arabī's ‘Book of the Fabulous Gryphon'* (Leiden, 2000).

[420] After chapter 366 there is only one final allusion to ‘the Mahdi' (in the messianic sense) in chapter 557 (IV, 195), on the ‘Absolute Seal of the Saints [= Jesus]', where he simply refers his readers to his detailed discussion of the spiritual rank of Jesus (as Seal) and of the Mahdi in his *K. ‘Anqā' Mughrib*. Apart from the chapter title in his opening table of contents, the other seven uses of the term (all in a non-technical sense) preceding chapter 266 are in chapters 36, 72 (twice), chapter 73, and 365 (twice).

fossilised, routinised theological or religious expression by returning to its deeper etymological roots and underlying network of subtle meanings in the Qur'anic Arabic is of course familiar to every student of Ibn 'Arabī. And here, as in many of those other cases, he uses the same method to turn the attention of each of his readers towards their own specific existential meanings of the underlying "Reality" – in this case, the experiential manifestations of the divine Name *al-Hādī* ("the Guide"). Moreover, the particular way that these scattered uses of this term in preceding chapters would eventually orient the carefully attentive reader who actually follows Ibn 'Arabī through the *Futūhāt* vividly illustrates the usefulness – if not indeed the necessity – of following the Shaykh's own slow, explicitly "scattered" method of writing and revealing his deepest intentions.

In this case, the way Ibn 'Arabī has introduced and treated this particular term in his earlier chapters inevitably creates a peculiar cognitive "shock" when the reader suddenly first encounters the mysterious – but often quite vividly detailed – discussions of "the Mahdi" as a very specific messianic character in the hadith that are quoted at length in the first pages of Chapter 366. That shock is then heightened, or at least highlighted, when the reader then moves on from the hadith to Ibn 'Arabī's strange discussions of the characteristic spiritual gifts of this Mahdi's "ministers" or "helpers" (*wuzarā'*, themselves not even mentioned in the original hadith) that take up most of the remainder of this long chapter.[421] To put it as simply as possible – which means setting aside for the moment the complex and highly subtle rhetorical tools Ibn 'Arabī uses to raise and pursue these questions – the thoughtful and well-prepared reader who has already navigated through some two-thirds of this oceanic work is rapidly forced to consider three basic alternative interpretations.

First, that Ibn 'Arabī is talking here about a particular militarily powerful, charismatic political figure – as described in the "obvious" sense of the hadith – who will appear at some remotely distant "end of time" (*ākhir al-zamān*, as the chapter title has it).[422] In short, "al-Mahdi" here is the title of a specific historical individual (whether "mythical" or otherwise), and the immediate relevance of such speculations to most readers – and to the meanings of divine "Guidance" in their own lives – is apparently rather remote, fascinating and curious though such apocalyptic speculations might be.

A second possibility, which at least brings the discussions in this chapter closer to the existential concerns and responsibilities of Ibn 'Arabī's readers, is to *shift the time-frame* within which one reads both these prophecies from the hadith and Ibn 'Arabī's interpretations sharply towards the present or the impending future – but still on the this-worldly, historical plane. In that case, the reader's focus is turned towards an understanding of the Mahdi's impending reign of justice as a much more immediate political and religious imperative, and towards a more practical focus Ibn 'Arabī's discussions of the Mahdi's "Helpers" and advisors as possible allusions to the conditions for bringing about a hoped-for radical transformation of this-worldly political and social arrangements –

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[421] Vol. III, pp. 327-340: the discussion of hadith (mixed with some powerful personal anecdotes) takes up roughly the first four Arabic pages, and Ibn 'Arabī's even more enigmatic and puzzling list of the distinctive divine gifts of 'knowing' (*'ulūm*) characterising this particular spiritual stage (*manzil*) cover more than two pages at the end of the chapter.

[422] For readers unfamiliar with the descriptions of the 'Mahdi' found in most of the major Sunni hadith collections (or who do not have access to our summary and partial translation **cited at n. 3 above),** that figure is described in terms that strongly echo many of qualities of the expected 'Davidic' messiah in Jewish and Christian eschatology.

perhaps even to the roles of particular individuals (including Ibn 'Arabī himself)[423] in this prophesied transformation. It is important to note that there were ample historical antecedents for that kind of politico-religious perspective in Ibn 'Arabī's own Islamic milieu, both in his time (especially in Andalusia and the Maghreb) and in earlier and later periods.[424] And in particular, the vividly anti-clerical rhetoric of much of this chapter[425] has been echoed in popular messianic movements, tensions and expectations far beyond the Islamic world as well.

Since the wider messianic resonances of this language – and the standard historical, religious and metaphysical assumptions that underlie them – are probably apparent to everyone in this millennial period, it may be helpful to consider some of the ramifications and eventual weaknesses of either of these interpretive options. Because both of these possible understandings of the Mahdi are closely echoed by perennial tendencies in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic thought and expectation (and in particular by ostensibly "secular" messianic variants that have memorably ravaged most of the globe over the past century), the weaknesses, pitfalls and dangers – both worldly and spiritual – of both those options are widely familiar. Either one is left "*waiting* for the Mahdi" and his future apocalyptic struggle and eventual reign of justice, while the present age cycles downwards into deeper and deeper chaos;[426] or one could turn more actively to the requisite overt political "preparation" for that epiphany, an approach whose actually recurrent consequences, over the centuries, are and have been evident enough to anyone who might bother to look.

Now in the larger context of what we know of Ibn 'Arabī's life and his writings, neither of those recurrent interpretive options seems very persuasive. One certainly can't "disprove" such interpretations – especially since each has clearly had its own historical proponents – but at the least they seem to raise all sorts of apparent contradictions. Within the context of Chapter 366 itself, each of these first two interpretations highlights a particularly jarring contradiction: why this sudden emphasis on the unique role in religious guidance of *one particularly privileged historical individual* – whose political role and defining characteristics are curiously identical to those of the Prophet Muhammad, though in an indeterminate and brief future time (reigning only nine years, Ibn 'Arabī

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[423] Chapter 366 is the site of some of Ibn 'Arabī's most open allusions to his self-conception as 'Seal of the Muhammadan Saints' to his unique relationship with the Qur'an and its Source, and contains some striking anecdotes about contemporary acquaintances of his who appear to embody various characteristics of the Mahdi's Helpers. (For more details, see our translation and notes **[at n. 3 above],** and the authoritative and exhaustive discussion of this key theme in Chodkiewicz' *The Seal of the Saints*.)

[424] Many of the central terms of Ibn 'Arabī's discussion in this chapter (*imām*, *hujja*, and *mahdī* itself) had powerful, explicitly historical and political connotations in earlier Shiite movements and writings (one may mention in particular the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Safā', whose language is sometimes literally echoed in expressions used here). See the further historical references cited **at n. 2 above and in the notes to our translation (n. 3).**

[425]See the ample illustrations in our partial translation **(n. 3), further explained and contextualised in our article on '*Ibn 'Arabī's "Esotericism": The Problem of Spiritual Authority'*, n. 2 above.**

[426] A trans-historical perspective and approach to Ibn 'Arabī perhaps most familiar in the influential writings of René Guenon and some of his interpreters.

curiously emphasises) – when everything else in the *Futūhāt*(and indeed in Ibn 'Arabī's writings more generally) emphasises the *universality* and immediate *presence* of the revelation/inspiration of the Qur'an and the "Reality" of Muhammad, and the corresponding responsibility (and spiritual necessity) of *every* individual human being to seek out and begin to realise that "Guidance"?[427]

This question brings us directly to the third possible interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī's intentions in Chapter 366: the possibility that the *al-mahdī*, the "rightly guided one" in question here, far from referring to some particularly effective warrior and chieftain, is precisely – if only potentially at first – *each* properly prepared reader (and actor) who begins to realise that Guidance in action. That *al-mahdī* is, whoever, by actualising that divine guidance, actually becomes the *imām al-waqt*, the "guide-of-the-present instant", as Ibn 'Arabī mysteriously describes that figure throughout the central sections of this chapter.[428] In that case, those familiar messianic terms and stories – far from being solely about a particular historical group of actors, like each prophet and his supporters – are translated here into the facets or stages of a single repeated process of transformation. For actualising the spiritual qualities of the "Helpers" (the *wuzarā'*), as Ibn 'Arabī describes them here in detail, does necessarily make us "rightly guided" (*al-mahdi*), and by the same token it makes us a living guide and model (the literal meaning of *imām al-waqt* and *al-imām al-mahdī*) for all those with whom we interact. Indeed one has only to look at Ibn 'Arabī's own life and work – and especially at its ongoing and fascinatingly far-reaching influences, which continue to be amplified in our own day – to see precisely how that ongoing transformational process works. In fact, as he constantly points out, we can only genuinely see as much of that "eschatological" process as we have already begun to realise for ourselves.

Yet this is a process – as Ibn 'Arabī and the Qur'an alike insist – that ultimately engages each person. Without that divine guidance, each person is necessarily "guided" by a constantly shifting combination of inner impulses and fears, together with even more unstable social programming: within the individual and in larger groupings alike, both those sorts of purported "guidance" are in constant conflict, disorder and states of change. And it is precisely those providentially arranged perpetual conflicts which eventually lead people to seek and discover (and translate into practice) that genuine Guidance which moves them towards a different kind of order. Seen from this perspective, Chapter 366 turns out to be a kind of epitome of the entire *Futūhāt*– or rather, the decisive point at which the responsible reader is openly challenged to translate its practical spiritual teachings, so carefully summarised there, into the kind of realised practice that is itself, in Ibn

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[427] It is important to note in this connection that assiduous (or perhaps personally initiated) readers of chapter 366 would be aware that this chapter corresponds in a pervasive and detailed symbolic way with the images, themes and detailed language of the Sura of the Cave (Qur'an 18), which is perhaps the single most influential Qur'anic source (especially because of the central section on Moses and his divinely inspired teacher) for the themes of divine 'spiritual guidance' (*hudā*, *hidāya*, etc.). All students of Ibn 'Arabī are particularly indebted to **M. Chodkiewicz [[IN OCEAN WITHOUT SHORE?]]** for explicitly pointing to this fundamental correspondence of each of the chapters in the *fasl al-manāzil* with a specific Sura of the Qur'an (in inverse order). The scope of this article did not allow us to explicitly develop those multiple symbolic connections, which are certainly indispensable for a more adequate commentary of the entire chapter.

[428] See the detailed illustrations of this rhetorically striking and inevitably puzzling shift in our translated selections **and notes (n. 3 above).**

'Arabī's perspective, the constantly repeated "end of time": since each moment of awareness of that divine guidance takes place quite literally "beyond time" and returns there as the lasting (spiritual) "fruits" – the symbolism is centrally Qur'anic – of the rightly guided action and communication inevitably flowing from that enlightened awareness.

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What Ibn 'Arabī develops more fully here in Chapter 366 is already dramatically foreshadowed in his discussion of each individual's *personal* "end of time" in Chapter 274,[429] a chapter which corresponds to his spiritual exegesis of the innermost meanings of the dramatically eschatological *sūrat al-Nasr*. The title of this chapter is "concerning the awareness of the spiritual stage (*manzil*) of the 'appointed time' (*al-ajal al-musammā*)", a recurrent Qur'anic expression popularly understood to refer to the moment of each person's bodily death. However, Ibn 'Arabī pointedly and unambiguously stresses here that this Qur'anic expression can in fact only refer in reality to the moment of each person's spiritual "*awakening*" (*ba'th*), an awareness which is beautifully expressed in the dramatic words of the corresponding *sūrat al-Nasr*. Thus he quickly moves on to a marvellous phenomenological description of that process, clearly referring to his own experiences and those of his own spiritual companions, which he refers to in a kind of technical shorthand as "the Greatest Providence" (*al-'ināyat al-kubrā*). The key term *'ināya* – one of Ibn 'Arabī's central spiritual and existential themes throughout the *Futūhāt*– refers specifically to God's "watching over" and taking care of each individual creature, and this case specifically to the spiritual destiny and gradual perfection of each human soul.

> Know, o (true) listener, that the people of God, when the Real One (*al-Haqq*) draws them toward Himself … , He places in their hearts something calling them to seek their (true) happiness. So they seek after that and inquire about it (until) they find in their hearts a certain tenderness and humility and striving for peace and release (*salāma*) from the state of ordinary people (*al-nās*) with their (normal condition of) mutual envy, greed, hostility and opposition.

> Then when they have completed the perfection of their moral qualities or have nearly done so, they find in their *nafs*[430] something calling them toward solitary retreat and withdrawal from ordinary people. So some of them take to wandering (*siyāha*) and frequenting the (wild) mountains and plains, while others do their wandering between the towns and cities – moving from one to another as soon as they've come to know and get used to the people of a particular place – , while still others isolate themselves in a room in their own

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[429] II, 587-590; see n. 12 for the Qur'anic correspondences of each chapter in this larger Section (*fasl*) of the *Futūhāt*.

[430] It turns out that Ibn 'Arabī's stress here on the *nafs* (in the sense of the often distracting or deceiving 'basharic soul'), rather than the *qalb* (the locus of truly divine inspiration and perception), is quite important, since this impulse to wandering or retreat turns out to be at best only a momentarily necessary stage in the process of each person's spiritual growth. (See detailed discussions cited in following note.)

homes, staying there alone and cut off from people.[431] All of that is so that they can be alone and at ease with the Real One (*al-Haqq*) who has called them to Him – not in order to find any particular being or miraculous event, whether sensible or in their innermost selves.

Thus all of those we have mentioned continue like that until they are suddenly illuminated by something from God that comes between them and their *nafs* – which for some of them occurs in their *nafs*; for others in their imagination[432]; and for others from outside themselves. Then they are suddenly filled with longing from that occurrence and immediately seek the company of (other human) creatures … . Now there comes to them through that (divine) occurrence (*wārid*) a (divine) "addressing"[433] and informing them of their state or of what (God) is calling them to, as with ... .[434] Then they are given comfort and solace (*uns*) wherever they are … .

But all of this (comfort in their loneliness) is only a test (*ibtilā'*) unless God gives them comfort with (the company) of *the angelic spirits of light*. For this (alone) will bring about their spiritually successful labour (*falāh*), indeed verifies and realises it, and this (alone) is "the good news (*bushrā*) from God" through which God's Providence has come rushing to them in this way. As for anything else, it is an enormous danger, and they should struggle to separate from it … . (But if the person favoured with this enlightenment perseveres), then the (angelic) spirits continue to accompany them in the world of their imagination during

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[431] The temporary role of spiritual retreat and 'wandering' briefly alluded to here is developed in more detail in a number of passages from the *Futūhāt* which we have translated and discussed in the article '*He moves you through the Land and Sea...*: Learning From the Earthly Journey', in *The Journey of the Heart: Foundations of the Spiritual Life According to Ibn ʿArabi* (Oxon, England, 1996), pp. 41-69 ~~Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī Society, vol. XVIII (1996), pp. 1-30~~. Full translations of these and other related treatises of Ibn 'Arabī (including his *K. al-Isfār*) are included in that volume. ~~our forthcoming volume *The Traveller and the Way: "Wandering" and the Spiritual Journey.*~~

[432] I.e., in their *khiyāl*, which would include dreams, visions, intuitions and any other form of spiritual perception not conveyed in an outwardly material form.

[433] The technical 'phenomenological' language of spiritual experience Ibn 'Arabī employs here (terms like *khitāb*, *taʻrīf*, and *ilqā'*) are ones which he carefully discusses, in relation to their original Qur'anic contexts, in the translated selections from chapter **366 cited at n. 3 above.**

[434] The extensive examples which Ibn 'Arabī goes on to summarise here, mostly from earlier Sufi hagiography, include the story of the famous early Sufi Ibrahīm ibn Adham, out hunting in his earlier life as a prince, when he encounters a deer who tells him '*You weren't created for this!* Other equally famous cases of this sort of 'divine addressing' of a (future) saint which he mentions here include the following: '*If you were to seek Me, you would lose Me at the first step*' and '*You are My servant.*'

most of their states, and (even) appear to them in sensible (form) at certain times. They shouldn't make an effort (to hold on) to that or to avoid it, but rather should work to deepen their connection with that (source of inspiration) and to acquire the spiritual benefit (*fā'ida*) that comes from it. For that is what should be sought (*al-matlūb*).

So if (such a person) hears a (divine) address "**from behind the veil**" of their nafs, they should "**give heed, while He is witnessing**", and remember what they were hearing.[435] If that (divine) speaking requires a reply in accordance with the extent of your understanding, then respond as far as you understand. For if you are given (divine) *knowing* about that (proper response), that is "the Greatest Providence"....[436]

This allusion to the "Greatest Providence" is subsequently further elaborated in Chapter 315,[437] where Ibn 'Arabī explains more openly his own personal mission and the specific qualities his readers and serious students need in order to benefit from his teaching:

For we are not "messengers from God" until we fulfil our responsibility to convey these kinds of knowing by *communicating* them (*tablīgh*).[438] And we only mention what we do mention of them for those who have both true faith and intelligence (*al-mu'minīn al-'uqalā'*), who are constantly occupied with purifying their souls) together with God and who constantly oblige their souls to realise (*tahaqquq*) the humility of servanthood and needfulness for God in all of their states. Then (for such individuals) the Light of God is their inner vision (*basīra*), either through knowing (from God) or through faith and surrender to

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[435] For the wider significance of these Qur'anic expressions, as they are developed in 'Arabī's longer explanations of the distinctive spiritual qualities of the Mahdi's 'Helpers' in **chapter 366, see the translated selections cited at n. 3 above.**

[436] And if you are not at first granted such an understanding of that divine 'Addressing', Ibn 'Arabī hastens to add, then you should remember that experience and wait patiently until God reveals its intended meaning at the proper moment. In this particular context, the superlative form evidently alludes to the decisive spiritual importance of this event in each individual's larger process of spiritual growth and perfection, since—from Ibn 'Arabī's perspective—every moment and form of creation is in some way part of the same overall divine 'providence' (*'ināya*).

[437] III, 57-60, on the spiritual station of understanding 'the necessity of suffering' (*wujūb al-'idhāb*), which corresponds symbolically **(see notes 12 and 14 above)** to the explicitly and dramatically eschatological Qur'anic Sura *al-hashr* (Sura 59). The following excerpt is quoted from the bottom of p. 58 and top of p. 59.

[438] In the larger context here, it is clear that the specific 'kinds of knowing' (*'ulūm*) Ibn 'Arabī is referring to here are those which form the subject of this chapter, *the necessity of suffering*. He goes on to explain that most ordinary, unenlightened people find this reality virtually impossible to understand on an existential level, while these spiritual knowers 'have a vast capacity for this'.

what has come to them in the reports from God and His Books and Messengers. *For that (sort of active spiritual receptivity) is the Greatest Providence, the closest place (to God), the most perfect path and the greatest happiness.* May God bring us together with those who are of this description!

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Needless to say, some kind of providence has certainly continued to bring Ibn 'Arabī's writings and influence together with readers of that rare description down through many centuries. And passages such as those we have just quoted – which taken together give a marvellous, endlessly intriguing phenomenological description of what is involved in discovering and then actualising the divine "Guidance" (*hudā*, etc.), or in other words, of gradually becoming *al-mahdī* – together make up a great proportion of his *Meccan Illuminations.* So such readers, when they encounter in Chapter 366 the strange transition from the hadith descriptions of the Mahdi to the "Imam-Mahdi" (or simply the "Imam of the moment") and his requisite qualities exemplified by the figure of his "Helpers", would not likely be too puzzled. The subject of the chapter, after all, is "*the inner awareness of the spiritual stage* (*manzil*) of the Mahdi", not a history lesson given in advance. And demanding as these requirements might seem, the realisation of this spiritual stage, as Ibn 'Arabī describes it here, is surely the responsibility of anyone seeking right Guidance, whatever their circumstances may be. Indeed the realisation of that stage in itself *transforms* those outward circumstances, bringing about the "end" of earthbound, terrestrial "time" (*al-zamān*) for anyone who is even remotely aware of the realities and extent of the spiritual worlds.

Thus an attentive reader could not help being struck quite forcefully by the addition of a single key term in the title of Chapter 366 recorded at this point, compared with the version given at the beginning of the work. Instead of speaking simply of "the Mahdi at the end of time described by the Prophet", which sounds like a boring recapitulation of what was already given in the hadith on that subject, Ibn 'Arabī here adds – and thereby strongly highlights – the key Arabic term "*appearing, becoming manifest*" (*al-zāhir*) at the end of time. What is so strikingly emphasised in that *new* title is precisely the ongoing, perennial task of realising and actualising – of actually *making* "manifest" – that ever-present spiritual guidance. Whoever does so has "already" become an "Imam" and further source of spiritual guidance – and at the same time a pointed, unavoidable challenge, as he emphasises almost brutally throughout this chapter, to all those claiming wider public authority for their own imagined forms of guidance, interpretation and pseudo-"knowledge". (Particularly important in this regard are his detailed discussions at the end of the chapter on the severe limits of any sort of "disputation" or discussion with all those who are not properly prepared to benefit from the inspired knower's illuminations.) The "*mahdī*" in this very Qur'anic sense is a Reality that always exists – whatever names may be given to that Reality – and which is therefore always accessible to those who care to seek. The situation of that Reality is not only analogous to the equally mysterious role of the "Seals" of sainthood: in reality it may actually refer to the same spiritual Source, as Ibn 'Arabī strongly hints at several autobiographical passages in this chapter. For in this case, as with the mystery of the "Seals", it makes no sense to pose the question as referring "*either*" to some particular historical figure "*or*" to a trans-historical Reality: everything in Ibn 'Arabī's wider metaphysics of theophanies (*tajalliyāt*) – or of the "spiritual realities" (*rūhānīyāt*) and their recurrent

earthly "representatives" (*nā'ib*), where the primordial spiritual figures are concerned[439] – points to the fact that those Realities can only be known through their manifestations, whatever the plane of reality in question.

Now the nine distinctively characteristic qualities of the Imam-Mahdi outlined in detail in the central section of Chapter 366 all have to do either with the "reception" and comprehension of divine guidance (the first three qualities), or with the further "translation" of that guidance into effective action and responsible direction and guidance of others (the last six qualities discussed there). Far from being unique to a single Mahdi and his putative advisors, all nine of those spiritual qualities are clearly illustrated, at the very least, in what we all know of the lives and teachings of many of the prophets and saints, whatever the religious tradition and history in question. But what is practically important, for any serious reader – and surely only serious readers would ever reach this point deep in the *Futūhāt*– is the practical challenge of becoming and being an "*imām*", again in the universal, root sense of that term which Ibn 'Arabī carefully sets out here, not some particular imagined historical sense. While any adequate discussion of Ibn 'Arabī's compressed and evocative discussion of those distinctive spiritual characteristics – and of the related forms of "spiritual knowing" outlined in an extraordinary passage at the end of that chapter – would require a much longer study,[440] readers who return to those passages (or to our partial translations) will quickly discover that in fact those descriptions do turn out in many cases to describe gifts and abilities which are sometimes so familiar that we mistakenly fail even to perceive them as "spiritual", and thus to recognise the further responsibilities they actually entail.

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In that regard, it is noteworthy that in the remainder of the *Meccan Illuminations* Ibn 'Arabī subsequently mentions *al-mahdī* (in the broad, "generic" sense) only once in passing, but that he repeatedly returns to the question of the "lesser Imamate" or "vice-regency" (*al-imāmat al-sughrā*, or *al-khilāfat al-sughrā*) which is incumbent on each truly human being (*insān*), each time amplifying his earlier remarks. Thus, soon after this point, in Chapter 370, he discusses this question in terms clearly evoking his larger understanding of the cosmic spiritual hierarchy:[441]

> The *khilāfa* (responsibility of "vice-regency" or "standing-in" for God) is greater and lesser: for the greatest *khilāfa* is that than which there is no greater, which is the "greatest Imamate" over the world. The "lesser Imamate" is (a person's) *khilāfa* over their own self.[442] And as for whatever falls between those two

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[439] See detailed illustrations and analysis of this point, which is indispensable for understanding Ibn 'Arabī's subsequent discussions of our 'Imamate' and 'khilāfa' in the passages quoted below, which is to be found throughout Chodkiewicz's *The Seal of the Saints* (or in the original French source of that translation).

[440] See the further discussion of those tasks of contextualisation and 'realisation', as applied to Ibn 'Arabī and related Islamic thinkers, in our book *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation*.

[441] III, 408; this chapter in the *fasl al-manāzil* corresponds to the Sura of Ibrāhīm (Qur'an 14).

[442] Throughout the '*Meccan Illuminations*', Ibn 'Arabī normally uses the contrast of the 'greater' and lesser' (*kubrā*, *sughrā*) forms of a number of key Qur'anic symbolic expressions to convey the

(extremes), that covers everything that is "lesser" in relation to what lies above it, while that (particular level) is "greater" in relation to what is beneath it.

Echoing this short initial introduction of this theme, at the beginning of Chapter 404 in the following broad "Section" (*fasl al-munāzalāt*) of the *Futūhāt*, Ibn ʿArabī's explanation is far more explicit and all-inclusive:[443]

> God said: **Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds** (1:2), and He didn't say "Lord of Himself", because a thing isn't really "related" to itself. Now this (expression) is a divine admonition (*wasīya*) to His servants, inasmuch as He created them according to His Form ("according to the form of *al-Rahmān*, the All-Compassionate", in a famous hadith), and He gave to those among them to whom He gave it "the Greater Imamate"[444] and the lower world (*al-dunyā*) and all that lies between them (i.e., the *barzakh*, or boundless universe of the divine Imagination, *khiyāl*).
>
> So that is (the explanation for) the Prophet's saying: "Each one of you-all is a shepherd (or 'guardian,' *rāʿun*) and is responsible for his flock." Thus the highest of the shepherds-guardians is the "greater Imamate", and the lowest of them is the Imamate of (each) human being over his own actions; and what is between those two includes those who have the Imamate over their family and children and students and possessions.
>
> For there is no human being (*insān*) who was not created according to His Form, and therefore the (responsibility of) the Imamate extends to absolutely all human beings, and that status applies to every single (human being) insofar as they are Imam. For what (each person) possesses (their "kingdom", *mulk*) is more or less extensive, as we have established. But the Imam is responsible for safeguarding the states of his possessions at every instant.
>
> And this is the Imam who has truly realised the full extent of what God has granted them and entrusted to them.

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metaphysical relationships between larger cosmic 'realities' and the perception or experience of those same metaphysical realities from the individual human perspective. This particular technical language is one of the basic keys to his understanding of the spiritual symbolism of Islamic eschatology in particular: **see the Index and our translated selections from central eschatological chapters of the *Futūhāt* included in the volumes cited at n. 3 above.**

[443] IV, 5-6.

[444] The wider context here makes it clear that Ibn ʿArabī is alluding to the famous Qur'anic account (at 33:72) of human beings'—*insān*: thus the 'completely Human Being' (*insān kāmil*) which is for Ibn ʿArabī the universal 'Muhammadan Reality'—*unique*, primordial acceptance of the theomorphic divine 'Trust' (*al-amāna*) of the Spirit, which was rejected by 'the heavens and the earth'. (Readers even superficially familiar with Ibn ʿArabī will recognise the degree to which all of his thought and writing centres on the deeper understanding of that passage.)

*   *   *   *   *

Finally, in his immense final Chapter 560 (IV, 462–63) of "spiritual advice for both the seeker and the one who has arrived", Ibn 'Arabī repeats the same injunction in terms that are even clearer and more direct – but whose full import can only be evident to someone who has actually read through these *Illuminations* and assimilated all the teachings which lead up to this outwardly simple conclusion:

> You should uphold God's "limits"[445] with regard to yourself and whatever you possess, for you are responsible to God for that. So if you are a ruler (*sultān*), you have been designated for upholding God's limits regarding all He has entrusted to you. For (in the words of the famous hadith) "each one of you is a shepherd, and responsible for his flock," and (that responsibility) is nothing other than upholding God's limits regarding them.

> Therefore the lowest form of "right rulership" (*wilāya*) is your governance of your soul and your actions. So uphold God's limits respecting them until (you reach) the "greater *Khilāfa*" – *for* you are God's representative *(nā'ib)* in every situation regarding your soul/self (*nafs*) and what is above it (the Spirit)!

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[445] The familiar Qur'anic expression used here (*hudūd*) is of course to be understood in the greatly expanded sense which it takes on in Ibn 'Arabī's thought, throughout these 'Meccan Illuminations' and his other writings.

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY AND UNIVERSAL REVELATION: IBN ʿARABI'S
CONCEPTION OF ISLAMIC "LAW"

If there is a paradox (though not an ultimate contradiction) in the very notion of mystical *writing*, nowhere is that more evident than in Islam, where the paradigmatic spiritual figures of the early centuries—whether in Sufism or Shiite esotericism—are known not for their books, but rather through oral sayings and teachings handed down through many generations of disciples. And even the much later (and often apologetic) compilations of the classical Sufi literature (Makki, Kalabadhi, Qushayri, Sulami, etc.) are unanimous in their insistence that the "knowledge" underlying the mystical path is a science of experiential states, of forms of awareness that can only be attained through the combination of divine grace, individual practice and intention, and *suhba*, the companionship and guidance of a true master—not through their reflection in words, concepts and formal teachings. Hence in the case of Ibn ʿArabi the contrast is all the more striking between his monumental, virtually superhuman literary production[446] (with the vast culture and learning it presupposes) and the lives of many of his own masters and Sufi contemporaries, who were not infrequently poor, uncultured and relatively marginal with respect to the elites of his own society.[447] That problem is posed in its most extreme form in the case of his magnum opus, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*, which encompasses virtually every "science" or form of knowledge available to Islamic culture in that time, with particular emphasis on the traditional (and often far from "mystical") religious sciences (kalam, hadith, fiqh, etc.).

In the case of the *Futuhat*, however, that apparent paradox—along with many related and equally puzzling features of Ibn ʿArabi's writing more generally—is largely resolved once we recognize the full ambitions of that work and the remarkable range of its intended audience, matters that are no doubt intimately connected with Ibn ʿArabi's own self-conception of his special providential role as "Seal of the Muhammadan Saints."[448] (The historical reasons for the omission of these wider perspectives by most subsequent commentators, whether Islamic or Western, have been discussed

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[446]Osman Yahia's *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn ʿArabi*, the standard bibliographical reference, gives 846 works (although a number of these are apocryphal or duplications under different titles), and Ibn ʿArabi's own lists of his writings include almost 300 titles. **References in this article to *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*—which includes many of his shorter treatises either as chapters or parts of chapters—are to the four-volume edition of Cairo, 1329 A.H., giving volume, page and in some cases line numbers. Reference has also been given, when available, to the ongoing critical edition of Prof. Yahia, Cairo, 1972-present [[DOES THIS NEED TO BE REPEATED? SINCE THIS IS A BOOK, THE FIRST TIME IS SUFFICIENT, I BELIEVE** [abbreviated as "*OY* ed."].

[447]The most accessible illustration of this is in the biographical sections of his *Ruh al-Quds* and *al-Durrat al-Fakhira* included in the translation by R.W.J. Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia*. See also the case of his close and lifelong disciple in "Le *Kitab al-inbah ʿala tariq Allah* de ʿAbdallah Badr al-Habasi: un témoignage spirituel de Muhyi l-din Ibn ʿArabi," ed. and tr. by Prof. D. Gril (*Annales Islamologiques* XV, 1979). For Ibn ʿArabi, such relative "invisibility" is—barring a divine command to the contrary—one of the usual signs of the *malamiya*, the highest spiritual rank among the saints: see the extensive references from the *Futuhat* in Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints*, index s.v.

[448]See Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, chapters 8-10.

in a separate article.)[449] In short, the *Futuhat*, unlike most Sufi writing, is addressed not simply to a vast range of "practicing" Sufis,[450] from novices to the most experienced masters—although that is no doubt its primary audience—but also to those potentially open to that spiritual perspective among a much wider literate public composed mainly of religious scholars, the *'ulama'* and *fuqaha'* of his day. Unlike many of his predecessors, Ibn 'Arabi's aim in addressing this broader learned audience is not primarily an apologetic one of defending or explaining Sufism, but rather the far more ambitious and far-reaching one of "converting" practitioners of those ostensibly religious sciences to a deeper awareness of their true spiritual grounds and intentions.[451]

At this more public and "exoteric" level, then, the very act of writing on such questions, with the many risks that entails, is a self-consciously *political* gesture: for what is at stake is in fact nothing less than the very grounds and conception of spiritual authority in Islam—and the centuries of ongoing polemics surrounding Ibn 'Arabi's work, in many different Islamic societies, are sufficient testimony to the wider, if often inchoate, awareness of that fundamental issue.[452] As we shall see, for Ibn 'Arabi this essential "conversion" primarily involves neither a substitution nor a particular outward change in the accepted procedures of each of those traditional religious sciences, but rather a profound inner transformation in the perspective through which they are ordinarily viewed and applied. But what is entailed (and presupposed) by that inner shift in awareness and intention can easily be misunderstood, and nowhere were those real dangers and confusions more immediately evident than in the chiliastic and antinomian excesses so often historically associated with the recurrent "Mahdist" and messianic movements in Islam.[453]

For this reason, Ibn 'Arabi's discussion of the Mahdi and his "Helpers" in chapter 366 of the *Futuhat* brings out those sensitive issues of spiritual (and ultimately temporal) authority in the clearest possible fashion, while at the same time offering an ideal illustration of his usual procedures of

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[449]**"Ibn 'Arabi and His Interpreters," in three issues of the** *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, **vol. 106 (1986), no. 3 and 4 and vol. 107 (1987), no. 1 [[WILL BE IN THIS VOLUME, RIGHT?]].**

[450]"Sufi" is used here as a convenient but inadequate shorthand expression (corresponding to a profusion of more technical terms in Ibn 'Arabi's own writing) for all those readers conscious of their being on a spiritual path—a condition which, as Ibn 'Arabi repeatedly emphasizes, cannot be judged by any outwardly visible social and historical categories.

[451]This relative orientation of Ibn 'Arabi's work is especially clear if one compares it with the later Sufi writings of Ghazali—who demonstrates an outwardly similar concern for the "exoteric," formal teachings of Islam—and with the subsequent historical reactions to the two writers: see further references in notes 4 and 7.

[452]See the preliminary references in O. Yahia, *Histoire et classification de l'œuvre d'ibn 'Arabī*, I, pp. 114-135; E. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought* (Princeton, 1984), ch. 2; and our **study cited in n. 4 above [[WHICH IS IN THIS VOLUME]].**

[453]See the article "*al-Mahdi*," by W. Madelung, in *EI* (V, 1230-1238). While the issues and principles evoked by Ibn 'Arabi are humanly universal (and are clearly understood by him as such), for the sake of convenience this article remains within the historical and symbolic framework of Islam.

esoteric, multi-faceted writing.[454] This article, based on a number of related chapters in the *Futuhat*, is intended to provide a concise introduction to (I.) the distinctive features and principles underlying Ibn 'Arabi's esoteric writing throughout that work; (II.) the particular expression of those principles in the subject and structure of chapter 366; and (III.) the complex, interrelated questions of religio-legal authority and interpretation (*qiyas*, *ijtihad*, *taqlid*, etc.) that are developed at greater length here and in many other sections of the *Futuhat*.

I. Foundations of "Esoteric"[455] Writing in the *Futuhat*:

The initial reaction of readers of the *Futuhat*, no matter what their training and where they begin, is likely to include a certain confusion or even bewilderment in the face of the profusion and apparent disorder of the subjects treated, the immense literary and cultural background that is assumed, the frequent lack of any visible connection between the contents of a chapter and its title or opening verses, the allusive (indeed often completely enigmatic) and fragmentary nature of many discussions, and the constantly shifting perspectives from which Ibn 'Arabi tends to approach a given issue. These forbidding intrinsic obstacles, together with the sheer magnitude of the book itself and the lack of any comprehensive commentaries such as are available for the *Fusus*, no doubt help account for the relative lack of complete, representative translations and the often partial or misleading character of secondary accounts based on a few selected passages.[456] Such distinctive structural features have often been explained—whether admiringly or critically—in terms of Ibn 'Arabi's own repeated insistence on the "inspired" nature of his order and treatment of many subjects in the *Futuhat* (as well as in several of his other works).

However, quite apart from that problematic dimension of inspiration, relatively little attention has been paid to the fact that Ibn 'Arabi actually outlines in considerable detail a systematic and

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[454]A complete English translation and commentary of the relevant sections of chapter 366 (III, 327-340) are included in the translation *The Meccan Revelations*, volume one. In the notes here, references to ch. 366 are given both for the Arabic text of the *Futuhat* and the corresponding section number of our translation.

[455]The quotation marks here and in the title of this article indicate the technical use of this term to describe a common set of rhetorical methods and assumptions frequently shared by writers from the diverse intellectual traditions of Islamic philosophy, Sufism and esoteric Shiism which are amply illustrated in this article. To avoid some common misunderstandings, it should be stressed that (1) the essential feature of this sort of writing is not simply its focus on an "esoteric" reality or intention (whether spiritual or other), but rather the complex *interplay* (in writing, interpretation and reception) between that level of meaning and the relatively "exoteric" or public modes of understanding; (2) it is not opposed to a genuine "literalism," since for Ibn 'Arabi the spiritual meaning *is* precisely the literal one (and what are usually considered to be the "literal" meanings are themselves revealed to be "interpretations"); and (3) the level of "esoteric" understanding or intention does *not* involve "concealment" of something that could otherwise be plainly or unambiguously stated.

[456]See **the detailed discussion of this point in Part I of our *JAOS* article cited in n. 4 above [[THIS VOLUME]]**.

relatively coherent explanation for many of these characteristic stylistic and rhetorical procedures (as well as their deeper philosophic and spiritual presuppositions) at the very beginning of the *Futuhat*: that account is to be found in his long Introduction (*muqaddima*), a key section which he substantially expanded in his final recension of that work. While a detailed study of that Introduction must be reserved for a separate article, its implications for the structure (and intended reading) of the rest of the *Futuhat* are summarized in two key passages at its conclusion:[457]

> "As for the credo of the 'quintessence of the elite' (*khulasat al-khawass*) concerning God—may He be exalted!—that is a matter beyond this,[458] which we have dispersed throughout this book, because most (people's) intellects are veiled by their thoughts and fall short of perceiving this, because of their lack of (spiritual) purification (*tajrid*)."

> "And as for explicitly stating the credo of the 'quintessence (of the spiritual elite)', we did not separate it out in particular, because of its profundity and difficulty. Instead we have placed it dispersed throughout the chapters of this book, in full detail and clearly explained—but, as we have mentioned,[459] separated and scattered: so whoever God grants its understanding will recognize it and distinguish it from the rest. For that is the True Knowledge and Veracious Saying, and there is no aim beyond it.

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[457]The entire *muqaddima*, following the long *khutba* and *fihrist*, corresponds to I, 31-47 (representing final recension) and *OY* ed., I, 138-214. (For the earlier and later versions of the *Futuhat*, see Dr. Yahia's introduction to his critical edition, vol. I, pp. 23 ff.) A detailed study (including translation and commentary of relevant sections) of this Introduction, whose importance for the interpretation of the *Futuhat* could hardly be exaggerated, **is in preparation [[FOUND IN MECCAN REVELATIONS??]]**.

The first passage quoted here appears at the very end of the Introduction (I, 47; O.Y. ed., I, 213), while the second passage (I, 38; *OY* ed., I, 173) precedes an intervening section (see following note) added in the second recension. Although not included in the earliest version of the *Futuhat*, both passages summarize points explained in detail in the earlier core section discussed below **(n. 18).**

[458]I.e., beyond the "credo of the elite (*'aqidat al-khawass*) of the people of God," based on methods "between *nazar* and *kashf*" (*OY* ed., I, 187) outlined in the preceding section; this highest "credo" therefore apparently corresponds to that comprehensive spiritual "knowledge of the secrets" (*'ilm al-asrar*), discussed earlier in the Introduction **(cf. n. 17),** which is only realizable through inner "unveiling" (*kashf*).

[459]This phrase apparently refers to the much earlier statement (*OY* ed., I, 74; also added in the second recension) describing the Introduction as "the preliminary presentation of the divine, secret (forms of) knowledge (*'ulum ilahiya asrariya*) comprised within this book (as a whole)."

'The blind man and the seeing are alike' in it,[460] (for) it joins the furthest

things with the nearest, and brings together the lowest and the most high."

These statements clearly bring out three essential features, underlying the composition of the *Futuhat* as a whole, that are particularly relevant to Ibn 'Arabi's treatment of the central problem of spiritual authority, both in chapter 366 and elsewhere.

1. The first and most obvious point is the dispersion or scattering of the particular essential meanings intended for the "elite(s)" among his readers. Even on a purely intellectual level, without regard to the more profound questions of spiritual comprehension and preparedness also involved here, every serious student of Ibn 'Arabi quickly comes to realize to what extent his works (and more especially the *Futuhat*) constitute an immense and endlessly fascinating puzzle in which the intended meaning of an initially obscure symbolic detail or allusion is often to be found in the most remote and unexpected context—and in which some apparently familiar scriptural expression just as frequently receives a new and freshly illuminating spiritual interpretation.[461] On a deeper level, these statements are a further reminder both of the difficult practical conditions posed for those individuals who would claim to belong in some way to that "elite," and of the fundamental fact that a text like the *Futuhat*—as with virtually all the Islamic esoteric traditions—was always meant to be read primarily in the company of a master, with the guidance of his *oral* commentary and taking into account the specific capacities of each student.

2. The second point, and the principle underlying the elaborate use of "dispersed," esoteric writing by Ibn 'Arabi (and by many other pre-modern Muslim authors), is his constant recognition of the natural diversity and hierarchy of abilities to understand and realize the matters at issue here—and his corresponding awareness of the dangers and inevitable illusions and misunderstandings that arise whenever such questions are approached without that necessary preparation. In the *Futuhat*, this principle is explained in detail in the core of the Introduction, where he carefully distinguishes between three primary types of knowledge and the methods or sources appropriate to each: "intellectual" (*aqli*) knowledge, based on reasoning (*nazar*); the knowledge of "states" (*ahwal*),

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[460]Judging from the conclusion of this sentence, this phrase is apparently an intentionally paradoxical echo of the many Koranic assertions (using the same Arabic words) that "the blind man and the seeing are *not* alike" in their *perception* or awareness of God: as such, it would point to the relative or "illusory" nature of such distinctions from the comprehensive metaphysical perspective of the Truly Real (*al-Haqq*) and the Perfect Man. At the same time Ibn 'Arabi seems to be alluding to another fundamental point he first made in introducing the "credo of the common people" (*'aqidat al-'awamm*) earlier in this Introduction (*OY* ed., I, 154-162): namely, that the formal credo of the mystics and "men of God" is outwardly identical with that of the unreflective believer—given their common basis the words of the Koran—while they differ only in the degree of inward spiritual realization (*tahqiq*) of what is actually intended by those expressions.

[461]The study of the *Futuhat* (or a wider range of Ibn 'Arabi's writings in general) quickly brings out the limitations and partial perspectives of that learned tradition of philosophic commentaries on the *Fusus al-Hikam* which has usually been taken to represent "Ibn 'Arabi" both in Islam and in the modern West: see our review **article cited in n. 4 above [[IN THIS VOLUME]].**

known only by each individual's immediate experiencing (*dhawq*); and divinely bestowed knowledge of the (spiritual) "secrets" (*asrar*), "specific to the prophets and saints," which reaches "beyond the stage of intellect" and "encompasses and subsumes all the (other forms of) knowledge."[462]

Now the obvious problem in writing (or publicly speaking) of this last type of purely spiritual knowledge, as he goes on to explain at some length, is that the majority who do not share it naturally tend to respond in one of two ways: either they completely reject such statements, treating them as lies or the fantasies of a madman or heretic—in which case the speaker himself is endangered; or else they try to "understand" and apply them by unwittingly reducing them to the level of their more familiar rational and experiential knowledge—in which case the listeners are actually turned away from those truths and can easily become a danger to themselves or society. One possible (and historically popular) response to this situation was not to write at all, to speak only to a few chosen disciples with the appropriate "preparedness"—or else to write in such a way that only such rare individuals could grasp one's deeper intentions; that course may have guaranteed a certain security, but at the cost of relatively limited influence.

A far more difficult challenge, reflecting the much wider ambitions and achievements of the prophets,[463] was to write (or speak) in a way that could also simultaneously reach—and potentially touch and transform—the full range of guiding intellectual elites (i.e., the *'ulama'*), while avoiding the recurrent pitfalls we have just mentioned. In fact, Ibn 'Arabi's subsequent reputation (and the concomitant historical focus on his *Fusus al-Hikam*) have tended to obscure the full ambitions and scope of the *Futuhat* in this regard. For the characteristic rhetorical style of that work flows from a distinctive combination of dialectical "reasoning" (*nazar*) and allusions to the fruits of spiritual practice and "unveiling" (*kashf*)—as both are mirrored in the archetypes of the Koran and hadith— designed to awaken the spiritual sensibilities of readers versed in each of the traditional religious sciences, to lead them to question (and eventually transcend) the limited "reasoning" and presuppositions of those traditional disciplines.[464] Since the desired transformation or spiritual

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[462]I, 31-33.11; *OY* ed. I, 138-147 (already part of the earlier recension). (**See also our forthcoming study of the *muqaddima* mentioned in n. 13 above.)** Many of these same essential points, especially concerning the necessity to veil the *'ilm al-asrar*, are developed in more accessible summary form, using similar scriptural references, in his *K. al-Fana' fi al-Mushahada* (*Rasa'il Ibn 'Arabi*, Hyderabad, 1948, vol. I, no. 1), pp. 2-5, and translated by M. Valsan in *Le Livre de l'Extinction dans la Contemplation* (Paris, 1984), pp. 30-35.

[463]See the references at **n. 3 above on** the specific functions and responsibility implied by Ibn 'Arabi's self-conception as "seal of Muhammadan saints," to which he alludes in several important passages of **chapter 366 (sections I and II-6 of our translation).**

[464]Cf. his mention of the spiritual obstacle posed by the "veils of thoughts" in the statement quoted at **n. 12 above.**

An additional problem, accounting for the extreme difficulty of translating Ibn 'Arabi for modern audiences now unfamiliar with those sciences, is that this rhetorical procedure presupposes considerable acquaintance with the vocabulary and broader assumptions of each particular discipline (as illustrated in the case of fiqh below); the background explanation required for contemporary readers inevitably tends to obscure the play of allusions and ironic shifts in meaning that are a recurrent feature of Ibn 'Arabi's dialectical use of those disciplines.

"alchemy" is necessarily different for every individual, given the unique interplay of these different forms of knowledge in the actual process of spiritual realization (*tahqiq*), Ibn 'Arabi's language is often intentionally open and dialectic, puzzling (or outright provocative), and capable of multiple (and usually complementary) interpretations.[465] But at the same time such passages are often artfully interwoven, as in chapter 366, with more "exoteric" discussions that could have been taken almost verbatim from works on fiqh, kalam, etc., employing the vocabulary and types of reasoning ordinarily used in each of those religious disciplines.

3. The third distinctive feature mentioned above, and one of the most pervasive characteristics of Ibn 'Arabi's work more generally, is his special attitude of what we might call "spiritual literalism": i.e., his constant insistence on the ultimate coincidence (not simply in outward formulation) between the precise, revealed literal formulations of the Koran or hadith and their essential spiritual truth and intentions as realized and verified by the saints.[466] Reflecting this perspective is his usual favorable view of the unquestioning, implicit faith of the common believer, and his corresponding distrust of all contrived intellectualist "interpretations" (*ta'wil*)—a judgment which he extends to some of the basic presuppositions and procedures of the historical Islamic religious sciences (see section III below). This outlook is also expressed in the structure of many chapters in the *Futuhat*, which typically take their point of departure from a Koranic verse or hadith whose true spiritual meaning is then unfolded at great length—and often in initially unexpected directions.

II. The Case of the Mahdi's "Helpers"

Chapter 366 of the *Futuhat* provides a particularly striking illustration of all these typical features of Ibn 'Arabi's esoteric writing, since each reader is forced to provide the essential—and inherently problematic—connection between the initial, apparent subject (i.e., the traditional accounts of the Mahdi and his earthly accomplishment of justice and the divine commandments at the "end of time") and the profound reality of the corresponding spiritual stage which underlies the *perennial* spiritual authority of the accomplished saints, based on their uniquely inspired realization of the

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[465]If the commentator ignores these essential rhetorical and dialectical intentions and their presuppositions (as outlined in the Introduction to the *Futuhat*), it is easy to present an endless variety of apparently mutually contradictory pictures of "Ibn 'Arabi." Hence the two extreme—and, one would think, otherwise quite incompatible—historically recurrent portrayals of Ibn 'Arabi either as a "rationalizing" theosopher intent on reducing the mysteries of faith to an all-encompassing conceptual system, or as a sort of inspired "shaman" defying rational understanding and established socio-religious norms.

[466]An excellent short survey of the many manifestations of this principle, both in issues of Islamic law and spiritual interpretation of scripture more generally, is the article of M. Chodkiewicz, "Ibn 'Arabi: la Lettre et la Loi," pp. 27-42 in the *Actes du colloque mystique, culture et société*, ed. M. Meslin (Paris, 1983). (We are indebted to Mr. Chodkiewicz for first drawing our attention to the importance of chapter 366 and other chapters of the *Futuhat* discussed below.) To avoid a common misunderstanding, it should be stressed that Ibn 'Arabi repeatedly brings out the ways in which what are ordinarily taken to be the "literal" (i.e., apparently non-symbolic) meanings of Scripture inevitably assume their own—ultimately incoherent and self-contradictory—frameworks of interpretation.

Source and intended meanings expressed in the literal forms of the Koran and hadith.[467] Now the dangers of any open, written discussion of this subject are rather evident: on the individual, psychological level, unprepared readers could easily be tempted to "short-circuit" the implicit challenge to realize for themselves something of the spiritual stage in question (with the long and difficult efforts that would require) and instead focus—whether admiringly or with hostility—either on the more visible criticisms of the *fuqaha'* (and associated ruling authorities) or on the author's own apparent claims to some sort of superior inspired wisdom. And in the outward, social realm those temptations were reflected in a number of potential excesses, often historically associated with claims concerning the "Mahdi" or "Imam" (understood in a temporal, political sense) that were familiar to all of Ibn 'Arabi's contemporaries. The most obvious of these dangers were (1) the illusion of a millenarian transformation "transcending" all spiritual and temporal norms, whether that be expressed in a revolutionary messianism or in more private antinomian tendencies; and (2) the confusion of spiritual authority with mere worldly domination (*riyasa*), and the resulting use of Mahdist (or related Sufi) rhetoric as an ideology by persons in fact seeking personal power for various worldly ends.

Given the delicacy of this subject and the notoriety of these dangers, Ibn 'Arabi artfully arranged the structure of this chapter and the order of its topics so as ward off potentially hostile extericist critics (and inapt Sufi readers) while only gradually unfolding his deeper insights for those genuinely prepared to share that spiritual realization. Thus the chapter begins (III, 327-331) with extremely long and literal citations of hadith concerning the Mahdi and his encounters with the Antichrist (*Dajjal*), interspersed with only a few hints about the subject indicated in the title. Similarly the long concluding section (III, 338-340), just as in the other chapters from this division of the *Futuhat*, consists of a list of dozens of spiritual insights associated with this particular station, but usually mentioned in terms so enigmatic as to be virtually meaningless for someone without a profound acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabi's thought and writing, as well as the realities in question. Moreover, if we add to these features the location of this chapter far within the *Futuhat* itself (not to mention the difficulties of access to such a work in the pre-modern period), it is clear that under ordinary circumstances only serious, qualified and highly motivated readers would ever be likely to reach the more controversial middle section.

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[467]The particular importance of the spiritual stage (*manzil*) discussed in this chapter is further underlined by its qualification in the title (according to Ibn 'Arabi's *fihrist*, *OY* ed., I, 107) as "Muhammadan"—i.e., pertaining to the universal Source of all Revelation (the *haqiqa muhammadiya*) which encompasses the spiritual "realities" of all the other prophets and their revelations (cf. the illustration of this in the *Fusus al-Hikam*).

That special universal dimension of this subject is further illuminated in the following chapter 367 of the *Futuhat*, which contains the key autobiographical account of Ibn 'Arabi's own spiritual Ascension (*mi'raj*) leading to his culminating realization of the "Muhammadan Station" and the inner meaning of the (universal, noetic) "*Qur'an*." **See our comparative study of chapter 367 and related works, including the *K. al-Isra'*, in "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabi and the Mi'raj," in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 107 (1987) and vol. 108 (1988) [[THIS VOLUME]],** and the more complete translation and commentary of ch. **367 in *The Meccan Revelations*, volume one.**

In that central section (III, 332-337), on the other hand, Ibn 'Arabi speaks much more openly and directly, clearly underlining the perennial nature and importance of his deeper subject.[468] But in explaining his own understanding of this issue he again begins by recalling the rare and exceedingly difficult *preconditions* for the divine inspiration of the saints—matters developed much more fully in preceding chapters of the *Futuhat*—before turning to the problems raised by the "application" of that inspiration in judgment of more worldly matters. And even in the latter sections, his undisguised criticisms of the majority of jurists and their methodological presuppositions are formulated in such a way that the attentive reader is still constantly faced with the difficult practical and spiritual conditions for realizing that alternative perspective. As can be seen below (and throughout the *Futuhat*), those conditions are such that the reader who takes them seriously no doubt finds the focus of his attention turning from the possible shortcomings of others to more urgent and intimate concerns.

III. Problems of "Law" and Authority

Even the casual reader of chapter 366 is likely to be struck by Ibn 'Arabi's repeated critical contrast between the "true Muhammadan *Shar'*"—whether as that is applied by the Mahdi or realized by the saints and "people of (spiritual) unveiling"—and the historically developed systems of Islamic law maintained by the professional jurists (the *fuqaha'*) of his day. However the positive principles underlying that critique and the conclusions to be drawn from it are not nearly so clearly stated; indeed, if one looks only at the individual points of criticism, they could easily be mistaken as minor corrections of the existing legal schools on mere items of detail. In fact, the full scale of Ibn 'Arabi's disagreement and the very different paradigm governing his conception of the Sharia only emerge when one compares the many related discussions of these and related "legal" questions throughout the *Futuhat*. In this section, therefore, by reversing Ibn 'Arabi's usual procedure of dispersed writing discussed above and reassembling a few of his many scattered allusions to this subject, we shall attempt to present—albeit in highly simplified form—something of the inner coherence of his own understanding of the Sharia underlying his scattered criticisms of the *fuqaha'*.

To begin with, while the common translation of *shari'a* (or *shar'*) as (divine or revealed) "*Law*" does correspond to many of the assumptions of the Islamic jurists Ibn 'Arabi is addressing, it fails to convey the primary concerns and guiding insights in his own conception of the Sharia, both here and in other chapters: the term "law," as usually understood, both leaves out too much that is essential—especially the questions of worship, prayer, belief, and ethical and spiritual states and norms that are his central focus—and inevitably suggests a great many unavoidable worldly matters (e.g., questions of taxation, state organization and legislation, regulation of social and economic life) about which he has relatively little to say in the *Futuhat*.[469] (Ibn 'Arabi's relative silence about the more practically indispensable legal functions of fiqh, as we shall see, could therefore be interpreted

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[468]Thus, for example, he begins to refer to the "Imam of the Age," rather than simply to the Mahdi, and to the saints (*awliya'*) and the "people of unveiling" (*ahl al-kashf*), rather than to the Mahdi's Helpers, who are not even mentioned as such in this section.

[469]The primary focus of Ibn 'Arabi's concerns on the spiritual reality (*haqiqa*) underlying each "divine," revealed Sharia (cf. chapters 262-263, II, 562-3) is especially evident in his choice and treatment of subjects (prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, etc.) in the long earlier "legal" chapters of the *Futuhat* (ch. 68-72: I, 329-763).

in a number of ways.) In any case, his criticisms of the *fuqaha'* almost all turn on their relative neglect of the *spiritual* grounds and finality of revelation: hence his immediate aim in these critiques is primarily rhetorical—i.e., to turn the individual reader's attention toward that deeper spiritual reality and its demands—and not the practical possibility of some fundamental reform or replacement of the existing schools of law. Just as in his treatment of other Islamic sciences (especially *'ilm al-kalam*), Ibn 'Arabi's use of technical terms from fiqh or *usul* in this wider spiritual context typically involves a radical transformation of their usual meaning that is designed to bring out their "original" (or at least potential) spiritual intention. His guiding principles in these discussions can be summed up in the following five points:

l. The keystone of Ibn 'Arabi's criticism of the *fuqaha'* and his own understanding of the true spiritual "authorities" is of course the *presence of Muhammad*—in the sense of the universal "Muhammadan Reality" (*haqiqa muhammadiya*)—and of the *Qur'an* (again as the noetic Reality underlying the Koran and all other revelations). For it is this possibility of direct access to the Source of revelation, however rare and difficult that may be, that underlies his claims concerning the greater clarity and certainty of the saints' direct insight into the meaning and intention of the Sharia. Of course these same principles also form part of the very foundation of Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysical and cosmological system. But what is crucial here is that these are not just metaphysical concepts or indeterminate symbols, but a living spiritual reality whose contact and presence is repeatedly affirmed in chapter 366, both for Ibn 'Arabi himself (e.g., in his remarks on his special relation with the *Qur'an*)[470] and for the saints and "people of unveiling" more generally (at III, 335).

The true spiritual "authorities" are therefore those with immediate, living access to that reality, those who are "following a clear Proof."[471] Hence Ibn 'Arabi's repeated vehement assertions that "for us the only permissible *taqlid* in the Religion of God is the *taqlid* of the *living*"—i.e., of the saints who, as the true "heirs" of the Prophet, are the "people of remembrance" (21:7) and the true "people of the Koran and hadith," those who actually realize and safeguard (on earth) the universal Reality of the Muhammad and the eternal *Qur'an*.[472] As he was well aware, claims to such authority

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[470]See III, 334.29 ff. (**section II-6 of our translation) and** III, 329 (section I of our translation). In this regard, see also the important autobiographical accounts of Ibn 'Arabi's culminating realization of the "Station of Muhammad" and the comprehensive Reality of the *Qur'an* both in the following chapter (367) and in his earlier *K. al-Isra'* (both passages included in our forthcoming article in the ***JAOS* cited at n. 22 [[THIS VOLUME]]**) and further references in Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints*, chapters 4, 8 and 9.

[471]*'ala bayyina* (47:14; etc.): see Hakim, *al-Mu'jam al-Sufi*, pp. 229-230 for further references to the key role of this conception. The conditions of this special spiritual guidance are briefly explained in **Parts II-1 to II-3 and II-6 of our translation of chapter 366 (III, 332-334).**

[472]The first quotation here is from ch. 88 (II, 165); the contrast of the "living" (saints) and the spiritually "dead" jurists is an allusion to one of Ibn 'Arabi's favorite sayings from the famous Sufi Bastami (cf. ch. 29, *OY* ed. III, 241). For the saints as the *ahl al-dhikr* (Koran 21:7), who are also the true "people of hadith and the *Qur'an*," see ch. 88, II, 165 and ch. 69, I, 494—on both occasions in explicit contrast to the groundless claims of the *fuqaha' al-zaman*. Moreover, Ibn 'Arabi goes on to insist that "*taqlid*" of the saints (besides being subject to each person's choice and responsibility**: see point III-4 below)** is not really submission to those individuals themselves, but rather to *God's* commandment (*hukm*) as known through their inspired spiritual knowledge.   See also the further

(even if these principles are accepted) are not easy to verify or to arbitrate, and could easily give rise to any number of irresponsible and misleading pretensions.[473] We have already indicated the extreme care he took, in composing the *Futuhat*, to discourage those who might have been misled by such abuses—along with hostile critics who could use the threat of such dangers to discredit the methods and intentions of the "people of unveiling" more generally. But for the properly motivated and qualified reader, his scattered allusions to this reality and its implications are together more than sufficient to indicate the difficult practical steps required to realize this spiritual "stage" or at least to find a guide who has done so. The remaining points all flow from this central assumption of the living presence of the Prophet, but together they afford a clearer idea of the particular contours of this vision.

2. The second key point underlying Ibn 'Arabi's critique of the *fuqaha'*, as we have already mentioned, is his consistent focus on the ultimate *spiritual finality of the Sharia*—a point which again is only a particular expression of his more comprehensive understanding of man's destiny and role in creation. While not denying the obvious this-worldly functions shared by divine and political laws alike,[474] his own constant attention is on the universal spiritual *intentions* characterizing the Sharia of Muhammad, which ultimately underlie the revelations of all the other prophets as well. This fundamental distinction, assumed throughout chapter 366, is brought out most clearly in several key chapters where Ibn 'Arabi stresses the primordial aim of every revealed Sharia as a "Path" towards the Truth.[475] For him, that relationship is summed up in the Prophet's saying "I was sent to perfect the *makarim al-akhlaq*" (a phrase that he interprets in reference to man's obligation to take on the divine attributes, as enjoined in another famous hadith): "For the Sharia is like that, if

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attacks on *taqlid* as understood by the jurists elsewhere in ch. 69 (I, 392: noting the irony of the claims of the *fuqaha'* to impose their *taqlid* on others, which is the worst kind of "*ijtihad*" on the part of those who deny being mujtahids!); and in ch. 318 (III, 70: the "Imams" of the legal schools would be the first to deny this sort of *taqlid*).

[473]In fact, those obvious problems would be limited to a considerable extent by the severe **restrictions (cf. point III-4 below)**, some of them mentioned explicitly in ch. 366, which Ibn 'Arabi places even on the saint's right to discuss (much less impose on others) what is revealed to him in this state of inspiration.

[474]Cf. his statement at the beginning of chapter 339 (III, 151) that "the (general) aim of the path of the *shari'a* is the sensible happiness, and the *Haqiqa* is not its aim *fi al-'umum*," and his mention later in that chapter (III, 153) of the "general welfare" (*maslaha*) assured by every Sharia, both the "divine" ones brought by the prophetic messengers and "politico-philosophic" (*hikami siyasi*) laws established in all (other) societies by those he calls "warners" (*nudhara'*). But the principles and procedures required to ensure that sort of "sensible happiness" are clearly not his primary concern in the *Futuhat*.

[475]See especially chapter 339 (on "...the Kneeling of the Sharia before the *Haqiqa*..."), III, 150-154; ch. 66 ("True Knowledge of the Inner Secret of the Sharia...," introducing the long chapters on the prescribed forms of worship), I, 222-225; ch. 88 (on "...the Inner Secrets of the Principles of the Judgments of the *Shar'*,"), II, 162-166; and chapters 262-263 (on "true understanding" of the Sharia and *Haqiqa* and their inner relations), II, 561-563.

you didn't understand—or else you do not understand the Sharia." Indeed ultimately "there is nothing in the world but Sharia (i.e., the 'Path' to God)!"[476]

Thus the common concern underlying Ibn 'Arabi's many particular criticisms of the categories and methods of fiqh, when they are confused with the revealed "Path" of the Sharia, is the way that the legal preoccupations expressed in those guiding assumptions—which may in fact be necessary and inherent parts of any system of *laws* as such—inevitably tend to obscure the primary spiritual intentions of the original revelation. The best illustration of this tendency, to which he returns repeatedly in chapter 366 and throughout the *Futuhat*, is the misguided use of *qiyas* ("analogy") by the *fuqaha'* to create what for them is in effect another, purely human and arbitrary source of revelation (*shar'*) and spiritual authority alongside the Koran and hadith.[477]

3. An equally fundamental principle separating Ibn 'Arabi from the *fuqaha'* is his insistence that "the primordial (divine) judgment (*hukm al-asl*)"—i.e., prior to the explicit indications (*nass*) revealed in the Koran and hadith (or in the teachings of earlier prophets)—"is that there is *no* divinely imposed obligation (*taklif*), and that God created everything on earth for us." In other words, "there is no (divine) judgment concerning everything about which (the Koran and hadith) are silent except for this primordial *ibaha*."[478] For Ibn 'Arabi, there are really two sides to this principle of "*ibaha asliya*": quite apart from its sweeping negative consequences for the common legalistic conceptions of revelation, it reflects above all a comprehensively *positive*, "ontological" awareness of the divine Bounty and Mercy revealed in all of Being, a reality which is only fully perceived in the enlightened

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[476]Ch. 262 (II, 563.7-14); for the sources of the first hadith (on *makarim al-akhlaq*) and related sayings, see Wensinck, *Concordance*, II, 75. For Ibn 'Arabi's complex treatment in the *Futuhat* of the famous hadith enjoining "*takhalluq bi-akhlaq Allah*," which he calls "the basis of this Path" (II, 42, 267), see, e.g., I, 124, 216; II, 42, 54, 93-94, 126, 128, 153, 166, 232.

[477]The essential object of this criticism is not reasoning in general, but (a) its use to *extend* the realm of the Sharia far beyond what was actually revealed (cf. the **following point III-3);** and (b) the claim of *religious* authority for arbitrary "personal opinion" (*ra'y*) that underlies the abuse of *qiyas* by the jurists—and which he repeatedly contrasts with the inspired spiritual insight and certainty of the saints (cf**. point III-1 above).**

Ibn 'Arabi's vehement criticisms in ch. 366 and elsewhere (e.g., ch. 318, III, 68-71) of the jurists' effective consideration of *qiyas* as a religious equivalent of the Koran and hadith must be understood in the light of some essential qualifications concerning "our *madhhab* in this matter" that he provides at the beginning of ch. 88 (II, 163.1-16). There (1) he vigorously affirms the necessity and importance of *qiyas* (in the wider sense of "intellectual inquiry" or reflection, *nazar 'aqli*) for arriving at the basic principles of faith (Attributes of God, etc.) underlying the divine revelations (*shara'i*); (2) he admits its legal use in rare "cases of necessity where no explicit scriptural indication (*nass*) can be found;" and (3) he states that "although I do not profess *qiyas* for myself, I do allow someone to judge according to it whose *ijtihad* has led him to affirm it—whether he be wrong or right in doing so." However, he again insists (III, 165.7) that this latter usage must be exclusively personal: "I do not profess *qiyas*, and I absolutely do not accept *taqlid* following it at all."

[478]Both quotations are from chapter 88: II, 165.6 and 165.21-22; the terminology suggests an ironic allusion to the recurrent criticisms of Sufis (by the *'ulama'*) as "antinomians," *ibahiya*.

vision of the saints.[479] More particularly, in the context of arguments against the sharply opposed conceptions of the *fuqaha'*, Ibn 'Arabi repeatedly develops three favorite scriptural references to this principle: "**He did not place any undue restriction (haraj) upon you in Religion**" (22:78); "**We only sent you as a mercy for the worlds**" (21:107), a sign that Muhammad "wanted to *reduce* the difficulty of traveling on the Path"; and a long hadith in which the Prophet urges the faithful to "leave me alone (i.e., don't ask for any more divine commandments) as long as I leave you alone."[480]

The other side of this principle, and the crux of Ibn 'Arabi's disagreement with the *fuqaha'*, is obviously a severe limitation on the realm of divine *taklif* and—what is practically of greater importance—on the religious value of the accepted methods for pragmatically developing the literal materials of revelation (*shar'*) into the more comprehensive historical systems of Islamic law.[481] To begin with, the "*sunna*" of the Prophet, as Ibn 'Arabi understands it, does not extend to all his reported actions—since "that would be the ultimate extreme of *haraj*" (contrary to verses 22:78 and 21:107)—but only includes those which he *explicitly* proclaimed to be obligatory, i.e., "*only* the action through which he showed us something with which we (should) worship," such as the steps

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[479]See the illustrations of this key insight in key passages at the end of ch. 366 (III, 338-340**; Part III of our translation);** this is only one manifestation of the pervasive role of the divine "Mercy" (*rahma*) in every aspect of Ibn 'Arabi's thought (religious, cosmological, ontological, etc.).

[480]The first citation is from ch. 88, II, 165 and II, 163, where this verse is cited as a principle (i.e., opposing *tahjir*) for deciding between two apparently opposed scriptural indications. The second verse is commented in ch. 69 (I, 392.21), with regard to Ibn 'Arabi's denial of *taqlid* and corresponding stress on the existence of differences in interpretation of scripture as a divine "mercy" (allowing each person to judge for himself); the quotation concerning the Prophet's intentions is from ch. 339 (III, 151).

This particular hadith—cited in chapter 366 at III, 337 (section II-9 of our translation)—is mentioned by both Bukhari (*I'tisam*, 2) and Muslim (*Hajj*, 411), in response to a question as to whether the Hajj should be considered an annual obligation. As Ibn 'Arabi explains in chapter 262 "On the Inner Knowledge of the Sharia" (II, 561-562), the Sharia includes both "the precepts (*ahkam*) God prescribed of His own accord (*ibtida'an*)" and "what was prescribed at the request of the community," so that "if they had not requested it, then that (precept or commandment) would not have been sent down." Elsewhere (II, 162-166; ch. 88, "On the Inner Knowledge of the Secrets of the Principles of the Precepts of the *Shar'*"), Ibn 'Arabi points out the parallel between this hadith and the following Koranic injunction: "**O those who have faith, do not ask about things which, if they were revealed to you, would harm you. And if you ask about them when the Qur'an is being sent down, they will be revealed to you.... For a people before you did ask (such) things, and after that they began to disbelieve in them**" (5:101-102). Cf. also the related discussion in ch. 339 (III, 151).

[481]Again it is important to stress that Ibn 'Arabi's criticisms are of the assumptions that the "laws" thereby derived are themselves part of the truly divine "revelation" (*shar'*/*shari'a*) and share its essential *spiritual* intentions; that does not necessarily imply any particular judgment as to the practical necessity or appropriateness of such methods with regard to the aims of temporal laws and government. (See Conclusion below.)

of the ritual prayer.[482] Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the validity of "consensus" (*ijma'*) with regard to the Sharia is even more radically restrictive: by pointedly limiting it to the *unanimous* and *explicit* agreement of the Prophet's immediate Companions[483] (without even mentioning the pretensions of subsequent *'ulama'*) he again undermines the claims to exclusive spiritual authority of *any* particular sect or group, while establishing the bases for his own distinctively spiritual and irenic (because essentially individual) conception of *ijtihad* based on the Koran and hadith.

Finally, as already mentioned in the preceding section, Ibn 'Arabi's repeated denial of any intrinsic validity for *qiyas* and *ra'y* as means of individual insight into the intentions of revelation turns to bitter irony whenever he considers their further abuse in the jurists' vast and unwarranted extension of the revealed texts to comprise a multitude of "interpretations" which "God never intended"—an act of hybris which finds its ultimate expression in the their claims concerning *taqlid*.[484] Instead, for Ibn 'Arabi, the differing individual interpretations of scripture (and ultimately, the full variety of intimate beliefs more generally) are a natural, positive result of the profound divine intentions:

> "God made this difference (of legal judgment and its sources) a mercy for His servants and an accommodation (*ittisa'*) for them regarding the obligation of worship He imposed on them.   But the *fuqaha'* of our time unduly restricted (*haraju*) and narrowly limited the common people

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[482]Chapter 88 (II, 165.7-8); see also **the related references in n. 34.** The mention of "worship" or "devotion to God" (*ta'abbud*) as the (spiritual) object of these prescriptions and the concrete example of *salat* are not fortuitous: see the detailed illustration of Ibn 'Arabi's understanding and "application" of this spiritual method in the immense chapters 68-69 on ritual prayer and ablutions.

[483]Chapter 88, II, 164.31 ff. Ibn 'Arabi forcefully and explicitly points out that the reported *silence* of even a *single* Companion on a given point is enough to invalidate any claim to authoritative consensus—a restriction that effectively, and no doubt intentionally, limits the material or literal sources of revelation to the Koran and (certain) hadith.

[484]See Ibn 'Arabi's repeated criticisms of the *fuqaha'* for actually (albeit unconsciously) claiming the authoritative power to "make up" revelation throughout chapter 366 **(especially in the impassioned remarks in sections II-7 and II-9 of our translation**). Note also his bitter attacks on the unwarranted liberties of the jurists in ch. 231, II, 530-531: "There is nothing more harmful for the servant (of God) than *ta'wil*" (i.e., the *ra'y* or *qiyas* of the jurists), and "the most hidden (manifestation) of God's 'Ruse' and its densest veil is among the *muta'awwilun*, and especially if they are among the people of *ijtihad*" (i.e., in the sense claimed by the jurists). *Ta'wil*, in such contexts, is usually opposed to the divine "clear guidance" (*bayyina*: **see n. 26 above)** provided by the immediate spiritual inspiration of the saints, and the *muta'awwilun* in the broadest sense refer to all those who seek to "interpret" the divine word (Koran or hadith) in rationalizing ways that inevitably tend to be governed by their interests or limited preconceptions. (On the conscious, theoretical level, therefore, Ibn 'Arabi is usually referring to the Islamic jurists, theologians and philosophers.) An extreme illustration of this abusive "ta'wil" of the jurists, recounted in ch. 318 (III, 69-70), is the case of the complaisant faqih who assured the ruler of Aleppo, al-Malik al-Zahir, that he could perform the fast of Ramadan in whatever month he liked.

> who blindly follow the *'ulama'*...and this is one of the greatest calamities in Religion!"[485]

The positive alternative underlying this criticism leads us to the question of Ibn 'Arabi's distinctively individualistic conception of spiritual "*ijtihad*" and to the key role of the study of hadith which is one of its main practical presuppositions.

4. The essential motivation of Ibn 'Arabi's criticism of the assumptions underlying the religious paradigm of the *fuqaha'*, however, is not any sort of "liberation" from religious (or legal) constraints, but rather his consistent stress on the *individual's inalienable responsibility* in realizing the spiritual intentions of revelation, along with the *freedom* which is the prerequisite of that responsibility and the *diversity and openness* that are its inevitable consequences. All of these aspects are summed up in his characteristic understanding of the obligation of *ijtihad* as the ongoing "individual effort," in every area of each person's life, required to grasp and realize the deeper intentions of revelation. If this distinctive conception of "*ijtihad*" is only distantly related to the usual technical meaning of that term, it is—once again not surprisingly—intimately rooted in the usage of that verbal root in the Koran (22:78; etc.) and hadith.[486] For "the *ijtihad* the Prophet mentioned" (i.e., as opposed to that claimed by the *fuqaha'*), Ibn 'Arabi insists, "is *only* the (individual effort of) seeking the sign indicating the particular applicability of the (divine) judgment (as expressed in the Koran or hadith) to the actual question (one faces)—and *not* the prescription (*tashri'*) of a (new, merely human) judgment with regard to the case: for that is '*prescribing what is not with God's permission*' (42:21)!"[487]

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[485]Chapter 69, I, 392.14-21. Ibn 'Arabi also notes here the practical objection of the *fuqaha'* that his proposed tolerance of and openness to a variety of schools and interpretations "would lead to making a mockery of Religion," and remarks that, given the very different conceptions of "religion" (*al-din*) involved here, "this is the ultimate extreme of their ignorance!"

[486]In the Koranic verse (22:78) which Ibn 'Arabi takes (ch. 318, III, 69) as an expression of the individual obligation of *ijtihad*, that divine commandment is immediately followed by God's denial of any unnecessary burden (*haraj*) in (true) Religion **(see n. 35 above):** for Ibn 'Arabi, the relation of these two notions is clearly anything but coincidental.

For the numerous hadith on this subject, see Wensinck, *Concordance*, I, p. 390. Ibn 'Arabi's discussions of *ijtihad* refer with special frequency to the famous hadith insisting that the person who practices *ijtihad* will receive "two rewards if he hits the mark," but will *still* be rewarded even if he is mistaken: the relevance of this Prophetic saying to his tolerance of the inevitable mistakes and differences of opinion implied in his own conception of *ijtihad* should be clear. This particular hadith is cited, in varying forms, **by both Bukhari (*i'tisam*, 13, 20, 21) and Muslim (*aqdiya*, 15), as well as by Nisa'i, Darimi, Ibn Maja, and Ahmad b. Hanbal.**

[487]Chapter 318, III, 69.14-15. These remarks are repeated, in virtually identical terms, in ch. 88, II, 165; ch. 69, I, 392; and ch. 231 (II, 530-531), where Ibn 'Arabi reiterates that the proper role of *ijtihad* is in "seeking the sign (in a particular case) indicating the (applicability of) the judgment (from the Koran or hadith)," and "not in (artificially) extracting a (further extended) judgment from the (scriptural) report through *ta'wil*." In the rest of this passage (III, 69.15 ff.), the crucial "sign" (*dalil*) mentioned here is understood to be the "goal" or "end" contained in the literal form of the revealed

 Given Ibn 'Arabi's fundamental assumptions concerning the spiritual source and aims of revelation—and the fact that their specific domain is the intimate realm of the individual's spiritual consciousness (infinitely more complex than limited set of outward, "legal" matters ordinarily dealt with by the *fuqaha'*)—, this obligation to seek the intended inner meaning of the revealed scriptures is necessarily both universal and intrinsically individual in nature. Hence the requirements for its exercise are quite open: "If we know the language (of the Koran and hadith) and what (their) judgment requires, then we and the (so-called) 'imam' (of the legal schools) are on the same footing."[488] To be sure, this individual effort of understanding will often be incomplete or in error—since only the divine guidance (*bayyina*, etc.) afforded the accomplished saints can offer the assurance of absolute certainty[489]—but Ibn 'Arabi, relying on a famous hadith, repeatedly emphasizes the salutary role of this sort of *ijtihad* indicated by the Prophet's assurance of a divine recompense even in those cases where the person is mistaken and led astray by his carnal soul.[490]

This essentially individual spiritual responsibility—and the openness it presupposes—are further accentuated by the severe restrictions Ibn 'Arabi places on any attempts to "generalize" from the results of this effort of understanding or to impose its results on others, even on the part of the accomplished saints.[491] (The obviously radical "impracticality" of these restrictions, from the

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judgment, and the saints' true perception of this (spiritual) goal is forcefully contrasted with the artificial "interpretations" (*ta'wil* **gharib: cf. n. 39 above) and** "arbitrary opinion" **(*ra'y*: cf. n. 31)** of the *fuqaha'*. See also the similar vehement criticisms **throughout Parts II-7 and II-9 of our translation of chapter 366 [[REFERRING TO THIS, STILL, RIGHT?—THROUGHOUT THIS ARTICLE THERE WERE FOOTNOTES WITH THESE STYLE REFERENCS – THEY ARE SELF-REFERENCING, RIGHT?]].**

[488]Chapter 69, I, 494.26 ff.; note also Ibn 'Arabi's fascinating set of practical guidelines for deciding between apparently conflicting indications in the Koran and hadith, in ch. 88, II, 162-164. Here again (as in our earlier qualifying remarks concerning Ibn 'Arabi's critique of *qiyas* and *taqlid*, **nn. 32, 35, etc**.), it is clear that he is not criticizing the efforts of particular jurists *per se*, but rather their wider claims of spiritual validity and religious authority over *others* in general.

[489]See point III-1 above (**especially n. 26),** as well as all **of Parts II-1 through II-5 of our translation of chapter 366 (III, 332-334).** Cf. also the extensive related cross-references in Hakim, *al-Mu'jam al-Sufi*, pp. 1247-1252 (entry for *yaqin*).

[490]For the particular hadith in question, see references at **n. 41 above**. This hadith is the basis for an extraordinarily detailed spiritual analysis of such cases—applied primarily to the pretensions of the *fuqaha'*—in chapter 318 (III, 68-71: aptly entitled "The Station of the (Arbitrary) Abrogation of the Sharia, Both Muhammadan and Non-Muhammadan, By the Goals of the Carnal Soul") and in ch. 231 (II, 529-531), concerning the divine "Ruse," *makar*, exemplified in the case of the jurists' assumptions.

[491]It should be noted that the criteria contained in these restrictions—which constitute an interesting test for claims of "sainthood" more generally— would, if taken seriously, eliminate the vast majority of the more notorious "messianic" or "Mahdist" pretenders to divine inspiration, whether in Islam or elsewhere. (Cf. also the discussions of Ibn 'Arabi's wide-ranging criticism of *taqlid* in the preceding sections.)

standpoint of the establishment and functioning of any worldly system of law, again serve to emphasize that Ibn 'Arabi's primary concern is to awaken his readers to the full reality of *spiritual* authority and responsibility, not to support some particular practical alternative to existing legal arrangements.) One of the most striking of these restrictions, at the end of chapter 366, is the extraordinary limitation on right of the saints even to *dispute* (much less to use force!) with someone about religion, "unless specifically ordered to do so by a divine command (*ma'mūr*)."[492]

Equally important in this regard is his insistence (at III, 334) that the only *spiritually* authoritative "judge" (*hākim*) or ruler (*wāli*) is the one who has received the explicit divine command to do so, as well as the "sublime knowledge" implied by that rare and weighty responsibility. In stressing that those difficult conditions have only been fully fulfilled on earth (at least most recently) by Muhammad, and by the Mahdi yet to come—or on a spiritual plane, by those saints (*awliya'*) who are the Prophet's true "heirs" and the Mahdi's true guides and "helpers"—, Ibn 'Arabi points to the more fundamental and pervasive (albeit unconscious) ignorance "that is the root of all injustice in the holders of (temporal) authority." At the same time he suggests to the interested reader the very different nature (and potential source) of that *genuine*, spiritual knowledge "which necessarily and inevitably implies (the corresponding) action," a knowledge which is the ultimate subject of the *Futuhat* as a whole.[493]

A further manifestation of this same distinctive spiritual perspective is Ibn 'Arabi's famous (or in some quarters notorious) openness and sensitivity to *all* forms of "belief" (*'aqa'id*), a characteristic aspect of his religious and metaphysical thinking so central that it has been mentioned in virtually every general account of his thought.[494] However, commentators have—for fairly obvious reasons—less frequently drawn attention to a statement at the beginning of his chapter "on the

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[492]III, 340 **(Part III of our translation)**; similar remarks can be found in ch. 339, III, 152.14 ff. And even if the saint receives such an order, Ibn 'Arabi adds, "the choice (of whether to argue) is up to him."

[493]Both quotations from chapter 366, III, 333 **(Part II-4 of our translation).** Cf. the similar point made in chapter 69, I, 494, where he notes that "the *fuqaha'* of our time" are actually completely "ignorant of the *Qur'an* and Sunna—*even if they have memorized them* (i.e., their outward forms)!" The specifically *spiritual* concepts of "knowledge" and "ignorance" implied by such statements, again based on many indications in the Koran and hadith, are developed throughout Ibn 'Arabi's writing.

[494]To avoid misunderstanding, it should perhaps be added that the distinctive use of "belief" in this context, throughout Ibn 'Arabi's writing, refers to the total range of human forms of perception and comprehension of Being, in every age, not just the limited set of notions discussed by the *'ulama'* of certain religions. In addition to the passages from the *Fusus al-Hikam* and his poetry that are the primary basis for most of the standard secondary accounts (**references in our review article in the JAOS cited at n. 4 above), see** especially his illuminating description of the lofty station in Paradise reserved for the "knowers of God" (i.e., of the "comprehensive Name" *Allah*) among the prophets and saints—those who remain receptive to and absolute "servants" of *all* beliefs and all manifestations of the divine, rather than only to certain more restricted divine Names—in ch. 73, question 67 (II, 80-81).

inner knowledge of the Sharia" which is a natural consequence of these same principles, but whose implications, in practical terms, are perhaps even more radical:

> "The Sharia is the outward practice (*sunna*) brought by the (prophetic) messengers according to God's command and the practices (*sunan*) devised according to Path of proximity to God, as...in the saying of the Messenger: 'he who establishes a good practice (...)', in which he allowed us to devise (practices) that are good and mentioned the reward for the person who devises it and those who practice it."[495]

Quite apart from the wider practical perspectives suggested by the second half of this definition (where Ibn 'Arabi may be referring mainly to certain practices of the Sufis), nothing could indicate more clearly the profound philosophic differences separating this conception of the "Sharia" from the corresponding assumptions of the *fuqaha'*.

5. Finally, a crucial practical presupposition of Ibn 'Arabi's own understanding of the Sharia (within Islam) is his continual emphasis on the role of ongoing *individual study of hadith*—along with the Koran, of course—in providing the literal materials for the effort of "*ijtihad*" just described. Thus he repeatedly contrasts those "who truly know God's *shar'* among the *muhaddithun*" with "those *fuqaha'* who blindly follow the people of *ijtihad* (i.e., their "imams"), like the *fuqaha'* of our time, who do not know either the *Qur'an* or the *sunna*." For the "people of Remembrance," the true spiritual authorities mentioned in the Koran (21:7), are precisely "the people of the *Qur'an* and of hadith."[496] This advice was not just theoretical: Ibn 'Arabi's own massive reliance on hadith (and the

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[495]Chapter 262 (II, 562); the plurals reflect the subject of that chapter, which is all of the *shara'i'* in general. This statement must be understood in the context of Ibn 'Arabi's explanation, in the same passage, that the "Sharia" prescribes the appropriate means (*masarif*) for realizing the *makarim al-akhlaq* that are its ultimate aim (as explained in **section 2, notes 29-30 above).** The Koranic term (57:27) translated here as "devised" (*ubtudi'at*) strongly implies novelty and creative invention; as in the case of Ibn 'Arabi's use of *ibaha* (**n. 33 above), it** is no doubt intended as an ironic reproach of those *'ulama'*, who habitually denounced many of the basic practices of Sufism as *bid'a* or what they considered to be "unlawful" innovation. Thus in chapter 69 (I, 194), Ibn 'Arabi insists that it is really the unfounded religious claims of the *fuqaha'* (concerning *taqlid*, *qiyas*, etc.) that are the truly reprehensible *bid'a*—i.e., the *sunna sayyi'a* also mentioned in the hadith discussed here—a pretension "for which they have no excuse with God!"

For the hadith that begins *man sanna sunna hasana...*, and whose conclusion is briefly paraphrased here, see Wensinck, *Concordance*, II, 552. That hadith is recorded, with many variants, in **Muslim ('*ilm*, 15, etc.; *zakat*, 59), Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, Darimi and Ahmad b. Hanbal.**

[496]The first quotation is from chapter 69, I, 494; the second from ch. 88, II, 165. (For Ibn 'Arabi's distinctive understanding of the spiritual meaning of "knowledge" assumed here, see n. 48 above.) Chapter 318 (III, 68-71), almost entirely devoted to this theme of the fundamental importance of hadith (and their neglect by the *fuqaha'*), describes Ibn 'Arabi's personal encounters "both in the

Koran), although not adequately suggested in most available translations and secondary accounts of his work, is amply illustrated throughout the *Futuhat* and all his other writings. Of course this recommended reliance on hadith certainly does not imply any exclusive and unquestioning acceptance of the usual assumptions of *'ilm al-hadith* (e.g., as a sufficient method for determining the "truth" of a particular report), nor is it based on any naive illusion of a single "obvious" literal meaning that would somehow preclude all differences of interpretation and understanding. Instead it assumes the application of all those characteristic features of Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual outlook and method outlined under the preceding headings.[497]

East and the West (of the Islamic world)" with a long series of jurists who—despite the contrary advice of Abu Hanifa and Shafi'i, whose "school was hadith"—always refused to deny the opinions (*ra'y*) of their "imams" even when confronted with explicit hadith to the contrary; thus "the Sharia was abrogated by (their) desires, although the reports (concerning the Prophet) are to be found recorded in the sound books (of hadith)!" See also his recounting in the same chapter (III, 69) of two fascinating dream-visions likewise stressing the abandonment by the Community of the "pure and easy Path" provided by hadith for the "books of *ra'y*" of the jurists. For a suggestive study of some of the wider historical and sociological background of these disputes in Andalusia prior to Ibn 'Arabi, see D. Urvoy, *Le monde des ulémas andalous du V/XIe au VII/XIIIe siècle : Étude sociologique* (Genève, 1978).

[497]See especially the discussion of Ibn 'Arabi's distinctive "spiritual literalis**m" in section II above**; it should be added that his strong reliance on hadith does involve a notable *selectivity* in the choice and citation of sayings that also deserves further study. Ibn 'Arabi refers in a number of places to the special ability of the saints to recognize, with the aid of divine inspiration, the falsity of certain hadith with a sound *isnad* and the authenticity of other hadith judged to have a "weak" chain of transmission: see, e.g., chapter 29 (*OY* ed., III, 240-241) of the *Futuhat* and his *K. al-Fana' fi al-Mushahada* (*Rasa'il Ibn 'Arabi*, vol. I, no. 1, p. 4), also translated by M. Valsan in *Le livre de l'extinction dans la contemplation* (pp. 32-33). For a brief summary of Ibn 'Arabi's lifelong studies of hadith and his numerous books in that field (now mostly lost), see the Introduction to the translation of his famous selection of *hadith qudsi*, the *Mishkat al-Anwar*, by M. Valsan, *La niche des lumieres*.

The fundamental differences separating Ibn 'Arabi's perspective from that of the *Zahiri* legal school (as well as the other schools of Islamic law) are amply indicated above. However, Ibn 'Arabi was sometimes obliged to explain the essential difference of his outlook, given the practical or verbal coincidences sometimes resulting from his emphasis on hadith and outwardly similar criticisms of certain methods of fiqh (*qiyas*, etc.): see further references in the article of **M. Chodkiewicz cited at n. 20 above**. Goldziher's influential description of Ibn 'Arabi, in *The Zahiris: Their Doctrine and Their History*, translated by W. Behn (Leiden, 1971), pp. 169-171, as an "exponent of the *Zahiri* school" rests on such superficial resemblances. That passage does give a fascinating account of a dream-vision in which Ibn 'Arabi was informed of Ibn Hazm's great rank and authority as a *muhaddith*, although "I had never heard of Ibn Hazm's name before." See a similar illustration of his apparent ignorance of a basic Zahiri tenet (and of his characteristic reliance on hadith and direct inspiration) **at n. 54 below.**

Those distinctive traits are summed up in a key passage where, after reiterating that "my own school (*madhhab*) is hadith," Ibn 'Arabi goes on to suggest what one should do in case that still does not provide sufficient guidance:

> "Now you must know that if a human being *(al-insan)* renounces his (own personal) aims, takes a loathing to his carnal soul (*nafs*) and instead prefers his Lord, then God (*al-Haqq*) will give him a form of divine guidance in exchange for the form of his *nafs*...so that he walks in garments of Light; and (this form) is the Sharia of his prophet and the Message of his (prophetic) Messenger. Thus he receives from his Lord what contains his happiness—and some people see (this divine guidance) in the form of their prophet, while some see it in the form of their (spiritual) state."[498]

In the former case, he continues, "that (form) is the inner reality of that prophet and his spirit, or the form of an angel like him, (who) knows his Sharia from God.... And we ourselves have often received in this way the form of many things among the divinely revealed judgments (*ahkam shar'iya*) which we had not learned about from the *'ulama'* or from books."[499] But "if the form is not that of his prophet," he concludes, "then it still necessarily refers to his (spiritual) state or to the stage (i.e., the appropriate spiritual intention) of the *shar'* with regard to that moment and that (particular) situation in which he saw that vision...." And even in that instance, "apart from what is forbidden or enjoined (by the Sharia), there is no restriction (*tahjir*) on what he accepts from (that vision), whether with

[498]Chapter 318, III, 70.21 ff; the language used throughout this passage pointedly emphasizes the universality of this situation. The repeated use of "*his* prophet" or "the form of *his* messenger" also refers to Ibn 'Arabi's insistence, throughout the *Futuhat*, that the saints (and ultimately all individuals) are "following in the footsteps" of a certain prophet or prophets with whom they have a special spiritual affinity. (This understanding is also reflected, e.g., in his association of certain spiritual stages with Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad, etc. and in his description of certain Sufis as "*'isawi*," "*musawi*," etc.) See further references and explanations in Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints*, chapters 3-5 and Hakim, *Mu'jam al-Sufi*, pp. 1191-1201.

[499]The following personal illustration (III, 70.28-34) of this sort of knowledge revealed directly by the form of the Prophet that Ibn 'Arabi provides here is especially interesting because it concerns the "raising of the hands" (*raf' al-yadayn*) during the ritual prayer, something "which is not professed by a single person in our country" (i.e., Andalusia), and which he only later found described in several of the canonical hadith collections (Muslim, Malik, Tirmidhi, etc.). This is another indication, incidentally, that Ibn 'Arabi was quite unaware of this Zahiri tenet discussed by Goldziher, *The Zahiris, op. cit.*, p. 177, in an anecdote that also well illustrates the general ambiance of intolerance in at least part of Andalusia at this time.

regard to beliefs or other things—for God's Presence includes the totality of beliefs (*jami' al-'aqa'id*)."

IV. Conclusion

There should be no need to expand on the practical and intellectual dangers and distortions that would result if virtually any of the points discussed in the preceding section were taken in isolation or separated from their original context—especially if they were misrepresented as "alternative" theories of Islamic *law*, or taken as allusions to the recurrent temporal claims to be "Mahdi" (or "Imam," etc.). We have already pointed out (in sections I and II above) the complex practical measures that Ibn 'Arabi, following earlier Islamic writers, took to make sure that only the most determined and capable readers would piece together these scattered allusions and—what is far more important—the unifying intention and realization that connects them all. For the primary aim of each of these remarks, as we have seen, was certainly not an "attack" on "the Sharia" or even a "critique" of certain principles of fiqh (intended as a practical legal alternative or a new set of substitute beliefs), but rather an *inner* transformation in the reader's deepest assumptions and awareness as to what is meant by such terms.

That intended shift in insight, which is the constant aim of Ibn 'Arabi's elaborate rhetoric, is not really a change in "beliefs," but rather a *transformed awareness* of what the vast majority of his readers no doubt already believed. As he indicated in his Introduction to the *Futuhat* (section I above), the reality of the spiritual world (corresponding to the *'ilm al-asrar*) cannot be "explained" except to those who are already aware of it—and who can therefore already grasp it, without further explanation, as expressed in the simplest and most familiar religious symbols. Thus it is surely far from accidental that the very center of Ibn 'Arabi's revealing—and highly sensitive— description of the characteristics of the Mahdi's "Helpers" in chapter 366 (III, 334) is largely devoted to his description of a personal acquaintance, a *qadi* from Ceuta who so responsibly (and quite practically) exemplified these traits precisely in his own application and realization of the truly divine Law.

Finally, it should be evident by now that the transformation to which Ibn 'Arabi points, and which underlies his repeated criticisms of the majority of "unenlightened" *fuqaha'*, involves, among other things, a clearer recognition of the essential distinction between the spiritual and mundane aspects of man's being, between truth and belief, and between the corresponding aims of "laws" (in the broadest sense) and of true revelation—a distinction which in itself was subject to popular suspicion and misunderstanding in his (and perhaps in every) society. The fact that his characteristic style of esoteric writing enabled him to develop and communicate those insights in a responsible and effective manner, despite those apparently hostile historical circumstances, is a reminder of the potential contemporary relevance of this neglected form of writing so carefully illustrated in his discussion of the Mahdi's "Helpers."

Part Three: Historical Contexts

Ibn 'Arabi's Interpreters and the Akbari Tradition

"...*Except His Face*": The Political and Aesthetic Dimensions of Ibn 'Arabi's Legacy[500]

The aim of this brief survey is to examine the reception and the influences of Ibn 'Arabi's work in the past—both in the Islamic world in the seven centuries following his death, and in the West over the past century—in order to discover what that long and eventful history may suggest about the future of his legacy as his works continue to become more widely translated and accessible to much broader audiences in years to come. To anticipate its conclusions, a closer look at what we now know of that history reveals a remarkable continuity in the locus of Ibn 'Arabi's appeal and the nature of his primary audiences across all sorts of historical, cultural and religious boundaries. In this respect, the extraordinary breadth and continuity of Ibn 'Arabi's influence remains a striking historical mystery, in ways that closely parallel the equally far-reaching and surprisingly lasting influences of such Spanish near-contemporaries as Moses of Leon (the presumed compiler of the *Zohar*), Averroes and Maimonides. As the citation of such figures suggests, perhaps one of the essential roots of that mystery lies in the way the situation of 12th and 13th-century Spain already prefigured so many of the civilizational and religious conflicts, encounters, and possibilities that are such a predominant feature of global life at the dawn of the 21st century.

In any event, it is essential to note that there was nothing in the outward, visible aspect of Ibn 'Arabi's life and activities, during his own lifetime, that could possibly have suggested the extent and duration of his subsequent influences. He was not the founder of a Sufi tariqa or an outwardly charismatic "leader" surrounded by many influential disciples; nor—despite the important literary qualities of his poetry and other writing—was he an incomparable, world-class poet or mystical storyteller like Rumi, Attar, Hafez or so many other masters of that quintessential Islamic art. Indeed, his own writings were apparently little known at the time of his death, scattered in manuscript copies from the Maghreb to the East of the Islamic world, and composed in an extremely difficult Arabic, destined for a tiny elite of religious scholars and presupposing a rare mastery both of esoteric Sufi traditions and of all the complex religious and cosmological sciences of his time. And finally, his works make no secret of his unambiguously Sunni Muslim allegiances and presuppositions—a constant theological and rhetorical emphasis which makes his widespread later influences among both Shiite scholars and even non-Muslims all the more surprising.

Keeping in mind this apparently quite unpromising historical situation at the time of Ibn 'Arabi's own death, there can be little doubt that the extraordinary appeal and spread of his ideas in subsequent generations was due not simply to certain intrinsic features of his own thought, but also to new historical situations and their intellectual and spiritual demands which helped to highlight the relevance of the ideas articulated in his works. If we evoke some of the key figures in that process of transmission and development of his ideas here, it is only to help bring out the three essential dimensions that, taken together, can help to explain the mystery of the perennial appeal of Ibn 'Arabi's writing throughout later centuries: These are (a) the relevant unique features of Ibn 'Arabi's own ideas and their expression; (b) the particular, recurrent historical situations where their appeal—one might almost say, the "need" for them—was particularly evident; and (c) the corresponding audiences and interpreters who were particularly affected by that need and the appeal of those ideas.

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[500]The beginning of the title alludes to a famous Qur'anic verse (28:88, *"...every thing is perishing, except for His/its Face"*) which is frequently cited by Ibn 'Arabi.

To begin with the most visible, historical dimension of this process, the four centuries following Ibn 'Arabi's death were marked above all by the definitive creation of Islam as a truly "world" religion, no longer limited to or defined by the Arabic-speaking lands and social groups with which it could still largely be identified even in Ibn 'Arabi's own day. Most obviously, this remarkable historical transformation—which has only recently begun to be explored by local and regional historians—involved the spread and creative development of new forms of popular piety and devotional life centering on the proliferating Sufi tariqas and especially on popular devotion to the "saints" or *awliyā'*, developments which were transmitted throughout the vast Eastern *oikumene* opened up by the Mongol conquests through trade and new forms of poetic and devotional expression (originally in the New-Persian *koine* of that realm).   On the political level, the chaos and creative decentralization created by the combined Mongol and Crusader invasions—when the "*dār al-Islam*," in the political sense, almost disappeared in the decades immediately following Ibn 'Arabi's death—eventually led to the development of the three vast, multi-confessional empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Moguls, along with the even wider spread of Islamic faith, practice and cultural models throughout Central and Southeast Asia and much of Africa. This, then, was the essential historical backdrop to the period of the most creative, multi-faceted appropriation of Ibn 'Arabi's work and ideas throughout the Eastern Islamic world.

Within this new historical situation (already partially prefigured in the Andalusia of Ibn 'Arabi's own youth), we can identify essentially *four different contexts*—and four corresponding audiences and groups of "users"—where Ibn 'Arabi's ideas and writings found a fertile reception. (To anticipate our conclusions below, it would seem that today and in the future as well the appeal of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas is likely to continue to be divided among four comparable groups.)   In each of these cases, as one might expect, there is an immense gamut of appropriation and adaptation of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas, ranging from rote citation and outright plagiarism (rarely avowed) to remarkable heights of creativity and subtle inspiration.

(1) To begin with, the broadest range of uses and influences of Ibn 'Arabi's work was among those Muslims directly involved in practical spiritual life and guidance—for example, Sufi shaykhs, preachers, jurists, Qur'an commentators from all parts of the Islamic world—who found in his magnum opus, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya* ("The Meccan Illuminations"), a sort of all-encompassing encyclopedia of Islamic thought, especially in the domain of spiritual practice, and perhaps the most penetrating and profound of all commentaries on the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet.   As the recent researches of Michel Chodkiewicz, Denis Gril, and other younger scholars have shown, teachers and guides from every region and almost every school of Islamic thought quickly recognized the depth and inspiration of Ibn 'Arabi's insights and interpretations in this vast work and turned them to practical use in their own domains—generally without acknowledging the often somewhat "suspect" source of their borrowing and without being particularly concerned with the systematic philosophic or theological dimensions of the Shaykh's ideas. In this domain, the *indirect* influences, through repetition, popularization and simplification, soon came to predominate over the direct use and citation of Ibn 'Arabi's stubbornly difficult and challenging writings themselves. (One could compare this process to the equally widespread popularization of Avicenna's theological and philosophic language throughout later Islamic thought.)

The other three groups attracted to Ibn 'Arabi's writings and ideas are considerably easier to isolate, since in each case they tended to focus—at least in their own writings and borrowings—on his highly controversial, later book, the *Fusus al-Hikam* ("The Bezels of Wisdom"), and on the long series of philosophical commentaries which quickly grew up surrounding that work.   In all three of these

tendencies, there is a strong *political* dimension to the study and citation of Ibn 'Arabi, alongside the spiritual and intellectual processes of more creative and philosophic appropriation of his thought.

(2) One tendency, which already finds one of its most distinguished and influential exponents in Ibn 'Arabi's disciple and stepson, Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi, sought to develop on the basis of Ibn 'Arabi's writings what came to be by far the most elaborate Islamic "philosophy of religion" and religious life, a comprehensive metaphysics which offered an all-encompassing justification and explanation for the observed diversity of religious, philosophic, and spiritual "paths" to God—whether within the multiple sects and schools of later Islamic culture, or in the even wider, multi-confessional context of the Ottoman, Safavid and Mogul empires. (The key "Akbarian" leitmotifs in such writers are such familiar unifying themes as the Unicity of Being, the "Muhammadan Reality" and the "Complete Human Being" (*al-insān al-kāmil*), the degrees of divine Presence, the relations of prophecy and sainthood, and the relations of the One divine Reality to the multiple prophetic Revelations.) Here it is relatively easy to trace the lines of intellectual affiliation and inspiration leading from Qunawi on to the celebrated Persian poet Jami, or to such later philosophic masters as Mulla Sadra (in Safavid Iran), Shah Waliullah (in Mogul India), or Raneri (in Malaysia)—to mention only a few of the most famous and influential figures in this group.   If most of these writers were originally concerned with situations of religious conflict and diversity within the broader Muslim community, the extension of their insights to wider, *inter*-religious situations—as in many of their more recent Western interpreters—requires little more than a shift of emphasis and application.

(3) A second tendency and domain of influence involves the use of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas by creative writers (such as the Persian poets 'Iraqi and Jami) and religious scholars to provide commentaries and explanations for the aims and presuppositions of the incomparable mystical poets (Rumi, Ibn al-Farid, etc.) whose creations had such a profound effect in shaping the "Islam" of the vast regions and diverse peoples who were entering into the wider predominant Islamic civilization and culture (even if not always formally Muslim themselves) during this period.   Here this remarkable adaptation of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas (such key themes as the spiritual Ascension, the perpetually renewed Creation, and the perennial, essential links of each soul to Revelation) and earlier Sufi developments came to provide what one might very roughly compare to the multiple intellectual and political functions of artistic and literary "criticism" in the modern West. In particular, it is clear that this articulation and adaptation of Ibn 'Arabi's insights often served to provide an indispensable political or ideological "justification" for the activities of Muslim artists and poets as much as a direct creative inspiration in itself.   Here again, the widespread modern Western interest—among writers, poets, artists and psychologists—in Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of the "creative Imagination" can be understood as another direct adaptation of a familiar tendency in earlier Islamic uses of his writing.

(4) Finally, a third recurrent influence of Ibn 'Arabi's writings was in a vast tradition of polemic writings, extending down to heated political disputes in many parts of the Islamic world even in our own day, where the underlying issues at stake—when historians look at each case more closely— most often turned on the relative influence of groups connected with the growing Sufi orders and their related practices and socio-political demands. This particular theme of support for the "innovations" and intentions of earlier generations of Sufis, which is certainly implicit throughout Ibn 'Arabi's writings, took on heightened importance as it became applied to all the new social and religious movements and tendencies of subsequent centuries. In this polemic context, Ibn 'Arabi's writings provided an almost ready-made defense not only of the historical Sufi tariqas, but indeed of the diversity and creativity inherent in all spiritual life—a defense that has continued to be necessary (in the Islamic world as elsewhere) against the reductionist attacks and exclusivist claims common to

powerful social and political movements and their accompanying ideologies, whether or not explicitly "religious," in any age. In those controversial contexts, such central features of Ibn 'Arabi's thought as his uncompromising "spiritual realism," his universality, and his focus on the irreducible centrality of the individual spiritual relationship to God have continued to provide inspiration—and formidable rhetorical and theological ammunition—to those threatened by political, social or theological forms of totalitarian reductionism. (And if those challenges happen to be most evident in some areas of the Islamic world today, even a moment's reflection should be sufficient to remind us of the perennial temptation and universal attraction of such tendencies, in every religion and area of life.)

As a particularly dramatic illustration of this recurrent dimension of Ibn 'Arabi's influence, inherently both political and intellectual, we can mention the long literary tradition of books of philosophic "trials" or "adjudications" (*muhākamāt*), in the centuries following his death, of the competing claims of the rationalist philosophers, traditionalist theologians, and the practical mystics—the competing religious "paths" of '*aql*, *naql* and *kashf*. The interest of this long literary tradition, which originally grew out of real-life theological disputations in court or *madrasah* settings, lies less in the originality of the ideas expressed than in the particular (and yet perennial) political and social alternatives, the contrasting religious conceptions of human perfection and the ideal state, which are reflected in these controversies. It should not be surprising if the proponents of the necessity and preeminence of the path of *kashf*, of spiritual illumination and creative inspiration, throughout later Islamic thought, inevitably draw their arguments from the writings and ideas of Ibn 'Arabi, which they view as clarifying the proper balance and relationship between these three equally indispensable elements of human social, religious and spiritual life. This tradition of theological writing is itself the most overtly political expression of the more philosophic and aesthetic interests in Ibn 'Arabi's work discussed above, and many writers who contributed to those more creative elaborations of Ibn 'Arabi's influence (e.g., 'Iraqi, Jami, Mulla Sadra, Shah Waliullah) were also active in these controversies.

In fact, a closer examination of these controversial writings and the typical intellectual "representatives" of the different alternative perspectives at issue (i.e., '*aql*, *naql* and *kashf*: rationalism, religious traditionalism, and spiritual "unveiling") is an excellent way to approach the truly distinctive features of Ibn 'Arabi's own intellectual and rhetorical approach which can help to explain the mystery of his ongoing appeal and influence. To put it most directly, we could say that Ibn 'Arabi is inseparably a "religious *and* mystical philosopher" or a "mystic philosopher-theologian": to leave out any one of those elements would be to misrepresent completely his actual approach and outlook. What that means is already clearer when we contrast his outlook with the radically different approaches of two of his most vehement critics in the line of later controversies we have just mentioned: with the far-sighted, pragmatic rationalism of Ibn Khaldun, or the fiercely consistent "traditionalism" of an Ibn Taymiya. In making that contrast—at least for those familiar with either of those famous Islamic thinkers—it is immediately apparent that much more is involved here, whether socially, intellectually or spiritually, than the addition of a simple "mysticism" or another "mystical philosophy."

But the real complexity and distinctive subtlety of Ibn 'Arabi's thought best emerges when he is compared with such figures as al-Ghazali and (the martyred philosopher-mystic) Suhrawardi—both of them likewise "mystics" and "philosopher-theologians" deeply grounded in Islamic theologian. In this contrast, we can quickly grasp that what is unique in Ibn 'Arabi, in contrast with al-Ghazali, is the *explicit*, truly universal focus of his metaphysical framework and the *comprehensive* (and again universal) *spiritual realism* which flows from that metaphysical perspective. The appeal to Islamic

tradition and the depth of familiarity with that tradition is equally central in both figures, but one could say that Ibn ʻArabi renders explicit what largely remains implicit in Ghazali's writing—and therefore becomes accessible and potentially useful to readers of every spiritual tradition, not simply Muslims. With Suhrawardi's "illuminative wisdom" (*hikmat al-ishraq*), to take the other instructive contrast, the dimension of philosophic universality is at least as strongly emphasized—but in forms of expression and practice which are radically less visibly grounded in *the concrete details of Islamic revelation, tradition and spiritual practice*. The obvious, recurrent danger in this case (with Suhrawardi) is that his teaching can readily become reduced to simply another philosophic system, cut off from the roots of spiritual practice (and their own indispensable historical and social context) which Suhrawardi himself never ceases to stress as the essential precondition for grasping his own approach.

To sum up, what remains absolutely distinctive about Ibn ʻArabi's thought and writing—and truly unparalleled within Islamic culture—is his unique and (from his own perspective) indissoluble emphasis on the necessity and ultimate coincidence of true spiritual universality and the proper apprehension and practical realization of the most concrete details of the "Muhammadan" (i.e., the truly all-inclusive and universal) revelation: one cannot separate either of these dimensions of his thought and writing without radically falsifying his thought and intentions. And if one cannot articulate these two inseparable dimensions of his legacy without immediately raising a certain uneasiness among non-Muslim readers and auditors, that is precisely because we are not at all used to taking seriously what is involved in Ibn ʻArabi's distinctive understanding of "true spiritual universality" and "comprehensiveness." The deepening realization and understanding of Ibn ʻArabi's thought necessarily proceeds through an ongoing dialectic, a sort of ascending spiral moving between these two poles (at once practical and intellectual) of all his writing.

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Hopefully what has been mentioned above about the four primary dimensions of the reception and transmission of Ibn ʻArabi's thought in the Islamic world has also been sufficient to suggest the parameters of his influence in Western thought since the first translations of his work at the beginning of this century.[501]

In conclusion, if we may speak of the future of Ibn ʻArabi's legacy, it is only to draw attention to some of the lessons that can legitimately be drawn from that past we have so quickly surveyed here. To begin with those regions of the Islamic world where the ultimate questions of political and social life continue to be posed in terms drawn from Islamic tradition (which is an ever-increasing number of states in recent years), it is highly likely that the appeal of Ibn ʻArabi—and the appeal to his ideas and understandings of Islamic tradition—will continue to follow earlier models, suitably adopted to contemporary circumstances, both in the domains of politics and of what (for lack of a better term) we may call the "aesthetic" dimensions of existence. This is not so much because Ibn

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[501]For a general survey of the corresponding aspects of the influence of Ibn ʻArabi's thought in the West during the past century, see our article on **"La Réception d'Ibn al-ʻArabī dans le nouvel monde: voies visibles et voies cachées" (*istiqbāl al-shaykh al-akbar fī al-maghrib al-aqsā: al-turuq al-zāhir wa-l-bātin*) to appear (in French and Arabic) in the collective volume of proceedings of the *Mawsimiyyāt* de Marrakech (Morocco): International Colloquium on "Le legs intellectuel et spirituel du maĩtre Ibn ʻArabī" (May 1997) [[UNABLE TO FIND—PERHAPS MORRIS HAS A LINK….?]].**

'Arabi could easily be identified with any particular political or ideological tendency, but rather because there is simply no other Islamic thinker whose thought offers anything like the same combination of an acceptance of creativity and flexibility of interpretation combined with concrete, comprehensive faithfulness to the revealed historical Sources of that tradition. Ideologies and ideologues of whatever stripe, once they begin to question themselves and their true adherence to Islamic tradition, are almost inevitably forced to come to grips with Ibn 'Arabi. (Khomeini's revealing letter to Mikhail Gorbachev, with its emphasis on the fundamental role of Ibn 'Arabi and his Shiite interpreter Mulla Sadra in the understanding of Islam, was an extraordinary witness to this phenomenon, and surely not the last.)

Secondly—and still remaining for the moment within the limits of the traditional "Islamic" world—nothing is more striking in modernist forms of Islamist ideology and rhetoric, as well as in the concrete social lives of Muslims living in the vast cities of impoverished new nation states, than the disappearance of traditional "*adabiyat*," of the "Islamic humanities," the elaborate *aesthetic* forms of art, culture and social relations so central in every traditional Islamic culture—and the rhetorical substitution of a highly reductive, ostensibly "ethical" ideology which fails to conceal the new barbarism and raw relations of economic power, inequality and arbitrary rule endemic in such situations. To the extent that this widespread phenomenon—already familiar in the evolution of fascist and communist responses to similar socio-economic circumstances in Europe and Latin America—eventually leads toward the reconstruction of a more balanced, humanly satisfying way of life that gives full weight to the "invisible," aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of our human being, Muslims attempting to justify (in political and theological terms) the reality and importance of those aesthetic concerns will inevitably be obliged to turn to the writings and teachings of Ibn 'Arabi, which are incomparably rich in this regard.

Given the extraordinary extent to which all of Ibn 'Arabi's writings are inextricably embedded in their Islamic scriptural and cultural matrix, it is difficult to predict the direction of his influence beyond the Islamic world in years to come. One would think, at first glance, that the very attempt to "translate" his ideas and inspirations into another cultural and religious context would, as with so many other philosophers and thinkers, would quickly deteriorate into a vague, eclectic gesture once those ideas become separated from their Islamic roots. However, the remarkable degree and sustained duration of contemporary Western interest in his writings and teachings already suggests that something else, beyond the history of ideas and concepts, may be involved here.

To begin with, on the level of *spiritual practice* and "*practical spirituality*," as interested seekers and practitioners from many religious backgrounds explore and discover the commonalities of practice and experience underlying less familiar traditions, Ibn 'Arabi's works—and more particularly his massive *Futuhat*—remain a uniquely rich and comprehensive encyclopedia of the accomplishments and approaches of many branches of Islamic tradition. The phenomenal wave of recent translations and studies drawing from the *Futuhat* suggest that there is much that can be fruitfully communicated to interested seekers approaching Ibn 'Arabi from other traditions and religious backgrounds. The exploration of his writings from this perspective of practical spirituality is only in its earliest stages, and it offers rich prospects for spiritual rediscoveries and the sort of true communication and communion that is based on a shared ground of common spiritual experience.

If we can project forward from past historical experience, there are a least two other domains in which the appeal and development of Ibn 'Arabi's heritage outside the Islamic world is also likely to grow in coming decades. In both those cases (as in the Islamic past), that potential interest in his work is likely to arise not from the study of Ibn 'Arabi's writings themselves, but rather from historical situations where the "need" for something like the Shaykh's ideas and conceptions will

become increasingly apparent to people from many religious and cultural backgrounds. The first point has to do with Ibn 'Arabi's profoundly rooted explanation of the *inevitability* and *essential good* which is embodied and expressed in the *diversity* of human understandings and expressions of our spiritual nature (including, but by no means limited to, the diversities of what we arbitrarily call "religious" life and activity). The ultimate fruit—and practical challenge!—of Ibn 'Arabi's insight here is a *true mutual understanding* which goes far beyond what we ordinarily think of as "tolerance." This is an insight and perspective which is very hard for anyone to actually realize, and which is scarcely emphasized in the most visible representatives of any of the monotheistic religions, but which lies at the practical and metaphysical center of Ibn 'Arabi's worldview. It should be clear how world-historical developments will increasingly oblige people of every religious background to at least contemplate what Ibn 'Arabi has to teach in this regard.

The second domain in which Ibn 'Arabi's ideas are likely to have an increasing appeal is in some ways a wider practical extension of the point we have just made. The unprecedented global technological transformations in the human situation through which we are living, and their still largely unpredictable cultural and political consequences, have so far had as their universal consequences (a) a severing of essential relations with the natural world and natural orders which were presupposed in the ritual and symbolism of every traditional religion; (b) a worldwide "homogenization" and reduction of the traditionally rich and diverse local forms of social and cultural life; and (c) a strong corresponding political and ideological tendency to reduce the reality of human beings to a relatively narrow set of "social" and "ethical" needs—whether that is expressed in overt forms of totalitarianism or in more subtle forms of socio-economic conditioning. Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of human beings and their place in the universe (along with any number of other wisdom traditions, to be sure) would suggest that each of these three global tendencies cannot ultimately be sustained, and that theomorphic beings will inevitably resist, revolt and creatively move beyond those recent historical developments in one way or another. To the extent that such creative reactions do develop, growing numbers of people (and not only Muslims) are likely to continue to find inspiration and justification for their intuitions—and their personal creative revelations—in what Ibn 'Arabi has to teach about spiritual necessity and complementarity of these invisible, "aesthetic" dimensions of human being.

Ibn 'Arabi and His Interpreters

PART I: RECENT FRENCH [and other] [502] TRANSLATIONS

Part I of this review article introduces a number of recent translations and related studies of works by the great Islamic mystical thinker Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) that together illustrate the many representative facets of his thought, writing, and integration of earlier Islamic traditions. Parts II and III outline some of the main lines of interpretation and influence that marked the reception of his thought by subsequent Islamic writers in a wide range of disciplines and historical settings, again based on a survey of recent publications (primarily translations) in several languages.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars writing (or teaching) about the elaborate disciplines of later Islamic thought—philosophy, kalam, theoretical Sufism, etc.—inevitably encounter a dilemma that must be shared by 'Orientalists' studying other similar traditions: in the absence of an adequate body of appropriate translations, they can either assume an intimate acquaintance with the texts and traditions in question, in which case their audience is effectively limited to a handful of colleagues with the requisite philological training; or they can undertake the difficult task of explanation and abstraction for a hypothetical 'general' audience, an effort whose intrinsic limitations are evident in even the best of the secondary literature on these subjects. This dilemma is all the more frustrating when one recognizes that the interests and capacities required for appreciating the deeper intellectual and spiritual dimensions of those traditions, if only sufficient translations were available, are fortunately much more common than the vocation and specialized training required to decipher them in their original language and cultural setting. In this context, the recent appearance of more than a dozen translations of works by the famous Islamic mystic Ibn 'Arabi (d. 63811240) and later Sufis of his school is a remarkable phenomenon; these books—and others promised by the same scholars— may open the way not only to a wider appreciation and understanding of the 'Greatest Master' (*al-Shaykh al-Akbar*, as he is traditionally known) and his teachings, but also for substantially improved access to the various Islamic spiritual and intellectual traditions that are integrated in his work.

The purpose of this review article is therefore twofold. First, as is customary, we wish to draw the attention of interested specialists to this large body of new publications and to foreign scholars (some young and not yet widely known) working in this field.[503] But secondly, given the potentially

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[502] Explain addition of 25 years' of related books and reviews ….

[503] We have also made every effort to mention the recent English-language translations (and some important Arabic publications) in the field, either in the text or footnotes, but have avoided any detailed comments so as not to preclude the full-scale reviews each of those works deserves. Although it falls outside the limited scope of this article, we must also at least mention the recent appearance of Prof. Su'ād al-Hakim's *al-Mu'jam al-Sūfī: al-Hikma fī Hudūd al-Kalima* (already cited frequently above) which is truly a milestone in the study of Ibn 'Arabi—certainly the greatest achievement since Osman Yahia's bio-bibliography **(n. 3 below)**—and will be an indispensable tool for every serious student and translator of the Shaykh from now on. This monumental work (1311 pp.) provides (in addition to the Qur'anic and lexical background) definitions and citations, drawn

wider interest of the subject,[504] we shall also try to provide the non-specialist with some basic background for approaching these translations.

Due to the great number and diversity of the works to be covered, this article has been divided into several parts. Part I is devoted to the translations of Ibn 'Arabi's own writings, preceded by a brief introduction to the complexities facing all students and interpreters of the Shaykh. Part II, to appear in two future issues, will focus on the historical trends and influences illustrated by the recent translations of works by Ibn 'Arabi's later followers, commentators, and critics (as well as certain 'apocrypha' widely attributed to him). However, as we shall see, most of those historical tendencies in interpretation are already reflected in the approaches of contemporary scholars.

PART I

Students of lbn 'Arabi, whether specialists or beginners, face four daunting obstacles to an integrated and comprehensive appreciation of his work: (1) the sheer volume and variety of his writings, possibly unparalleled in Islamic civilization;[505] (2) the extreme diversity of symbols, allusions, rhetorical forms, and subjects which are brought together, often in radically new contexts, in his works; (3) his distinctive personal 'inspired' and (most often) non-linear writing style, with its complex parallels to the Qur'an itself; and (4) his presumption, in most of his works (including all the most famous ones), of a specialized audience with a high degree of spiritual development and immersion in the practice (and vocabulary) of the Sufi path. These difficulties, which readers will find amply illustrated in the translations mentioned below, have often given rise to impressions-- whether among Ibn 'Arabi's historical critics or in modern secondary literature--reminiscent of Rumi's fable of the blind men and the elephant.[506] To transcend these initial obstacles and discover

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from the *Futūhāt* and 77 other works by Ibn 'Arabi, illustrating some 706 of his key technical terms. (The actual number of terms discussed, given the additional cross-references, synonyms, and related roots, is in the thousands.)

[504]It is a significant and interesting fact (**especially for non-Islamicist readers of this Journal)** that available Western-language studies of Ibn 'Arabi based on a comparison of his ideas with cognate traditions of Hindu, Neoplatonic, Christian, Buddhist, and even Taoist mystical thought are perhaps more numerous and more accessible than works presenting him primarily in the context of his own Islamic traditions and sources.

[505] The standard bibliographical reference work, Osman Yahia's two-volume *Histoire et Classification de l'Oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi* (cited many times above), mentions some 846 titles; even if a number of these are apocryphal, excerpts from larger works, or duplicate titles, Ibn 'Arabi's own personal lists of his writings (the *Fihris* and *Ijāza* discussed by Yahia), composed for disciples late in his life, each contain nearly 250 works. The sheer number of these writings should not obscure the comprehensive and authoritative nature of lbn 'Arabi's *al-Futūhāt at al-Makkīya* ('The Meccan Inspirations') which was composed and added to throughout the last 30 years of his life, and which covers the full range of subjects and disciplines treated in his many other works.

[506] One should also not minimize the extent to which these difficulties reflect certain rhetorical features of Ibn 'Arabi's works that may have been consciously intended either to dissuade unqualified readers or—more positively--to induce a state of *hayra* ('bewilderment') leading to the

the unifying vision and intention in Ibn 'Arabi's works requires extraordinary efforts and abilities on the part of both the reader and the translator; for the translator—if he or she is seriously trying to communicate with the non-specialist—must also act as commentator and guide through this labyrinth of symbols.

One traditional response to these problems was to focus on a single 'representative' text and interpretive perspective, most often the philosophical, conceptual analysis of Ibn 'Arabi's famous *Fusūs al-Hikam* ('Bezels of Wisdom'). This approach, initiated by Ibn 'Arabi's son-in-law and close disciple Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī and carried out in a line of dozens of extensive commentaries down to the present day,[507] is now readily accessible in English is through the superb study by Toshihiko Izutsu and a complete translation of the *Fusūs* by R. W. J. Austin.[508] These two works, because of their comprehensiveness, maturity and faithful reflection of a long tradition of commentary, provide an ideal starting point for the study of Ibn 'Arabi. However, relying solely on the *Fusūs*—or more specifically, on the scholastic tradition of commentary focusing primarily on the systematic

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transcendence of established mental categories and judgments, as with the *koan*-like *shatahāt* ('ecstatic paradoxes') favored by certain famous Sufis. In any case, the bizarre epithets one sometimes finds applied to lbn 'Arabi, whether in Islamic or modern Western sources—e.g., 'incoherent,' 'pantheist,' 'heretic, 'monist,' 'madman,' etc.—are understandable less as reasoned judgments about the whole of his work than as reactions to the difficult challenge of unifying and integrating such diverse and challenging materials. One of the great advantages of these new translations is that interested readers can at last begin to form their own judgments on the basis of a more representative sample of his writings.

[507] This process and references to Qūnawī, Kāshānī, and other important figures will be discussed in Part II. See in particular, in O. Yahia, *Histoire et Classification, op. cit*., the list of 120 commentaries on the *Fusūs* (Vol. I, pp.241-56) and the list of some 64 critics and defenders of the *Fusūs* (I, 114-35); neither listing is to be taken as exhaustive of the available sources in this regard.

[508] Tr. R. W. J. Austin, *The Bezels of Wisdom*; another complete English translation, *The Seals of Wisdom,* tr. A. 'Abd al-Rahmān at-Tarjumāna (Norwich, UK, 1981), is somewhat more readable, but unfortunately inaccurate in many places. Both translations should be supplemented, where possible, by the partial translation of T. Burckhardt (English tr. from the French by A. Culme-Seymour), *The Wisdom of the Prophets* (Aldsworth, UK, 1975), which contains more of the commentary and reference to the underlying Arabic that is often needed to follow the actual details of Ibn 'Arabi's arguments. However, the Burckhardt translation includes only 9 full chapters (out of 27) and does not have Ibn 'Arabi's very important Introduction to the *Fusūs.*

The recent publication of a new, revised one-volume edition of Toshihiko Izutsu's *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts,* (Berkley, 1984), whose title is slightly different than the original two-volume edition (Tokyo, 1967), should help make more accessible this classic study of Ibn 'Arabi's 'philosophic' thought. For those unfamiliar with this work, it should be stressed that Part I of Izutsu's book is an entirely independent study of the *Fusūs,* relying especially on the famous commentary of 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī **[see Part II-A of this review article],** separate from the relatively shorter Taoist and comparative sections; the section on lbn 'Arabi is not only clear and reliable, but also contains in total helpful translations of perhaps 15% of the *Fusūs.*

metaphysical underpinnings of Ibn 'Arabi's thought—ultimately gives a one-sided and highly misleading image of the Shaykh's writings, his historical influence, and his own character and personality.

Two other aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's work are at least as essential to an adequate, integrated understanding of his writings (including the *Fusūs*): they are his concern with the practice and methods of Sufism, his lifelong activity as teacher and spiritual guide, from Andalusia to Anatolia; and his consistent focus on the Qur'an and teaching of the Prophet Muhammad as the source and context of all his work. These two interrelated aspects, which underlie Ibn 'Arabi's conception of his own unique role as the 'Seal of the Muhammad an Sainthood' (*khatm al-walāya al-muhammadīya*) and help account for his subsequent veneration as the 'Greatest Master' among a wide range of Islamic schools and spiritual paths, may well have been taken for granted in the traditional Islamic teaching context (including the commentators of the *Fusūs*); but their centrality—which is most marked in the *Futūhāt* – is not at all reflected in the available English sources.[509]

The point is not a minor one. Many of the standard criticisms and misunderstandings of Ibn 'Arabi's work (e.g., 'incoherence,' 'repetition,' 'lack of focus' or 'order,' 'contradiction,' 'extravagance,' etc.) arise from misconceptions of his intention as 'applying' a pre-conceived doctrine or philosophical interpretation to traditional materials, disciplines, etc.[510] For the unifying intentions and actual rhetorical functions of his writings only become evident when they are viewed in their original perspective of practice and realization; the same is true if one is to appreciate the depths of his treatment of the Qur'an, hadith, and Islamic rites and practices. Since the actual integration of these interpretive aspects of 'theory' and practice only becomes apparent through extensive reading and considerable familiarity with Ibn 'Arabi's writings (especially the *Futūhāt*) and their cultural context,

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[509] This is in no way intended as a criticism of the modern authors in question, who most often are the most conscious of the limitations of their particular studies, in view of their direct contact with Ibn 'Arabi's writings. Unfortunately, most readers—including many authors of secondary literature and translators from Western languages back into Arabic—lacking adequate firsthand acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabi's actual writings have naturally tended to take the limited perspectives, interests, and methods of presentation found in such interpretive studies to be representative of the Shaykh's work as a whole. The resulting distortions have been especially remarkable where modern Muslim writers have derived their image of Ibn 'Arabi from accounts and selections intended to 'introduce' him to a non-Islamic audience **(see n. 21).**

[510] Unfortunately, there is still no introductory study adequately presenting the essential 'rhetorical' aspect of Ibn 'Arabi's writings, i.e., the way he unites many methods, styles, and traditional subjects in view of certain recurrent spiritual intentions—a lack that is not too surprising, given the cultural background, profound knowledge of Arabic, and insight that task would require. However, the best illustration of the needed sensitivity to that crucial dimension of Ibn 'Arabi's writing, usually phrased in terms of comments on 'Sufism' in general, is to be found in the numerous collections of essays by F. Schuon on Islamic subjects; see, among many others, *Le Soufisme. Voile et Quintessence* (Paris, 1980) and *Approches du Phénomène Religieux* (Paris,1984), which has been translated as *In the Face of the Absolute* (Bloomington, Indiana, USA, 1989). However, those reflections do generally presuppose a great familiarity with both the writings of Ibn 'Arabi and the broader Sufi traditions of which they are a part.

one of the most important contributions of the new translations discussed below is the way they bring out more forcefully these essential and too often neglected aspects of his work.

The translations are mentioned here roughly in order of their accessibility and importance (in terms of representativeness and scope of issues treated) for non-specialists approaching Ibn 'Arabi's writings, other than the *Fusūs al-Hikam*, for the first time. In addition, readers familiar with the standards and procedures of American or German scholarly publishing should be cautioned that most of these books are marked by a relative lack of indexes, bibliography, adequate proofreading, and scholarly peer review, features which—whether due to considerations of economy or tradition—are not limited to this particular area of French publishing. Hopefully, a growing awareness of the obstacles this poses for readers unfamiliar with the original Arabic will encourage greater attention to these matters in the future.[511] For those interested in consulting the Arabic originals, each translation has been identified by its number in O. Yahia's '*répertoire général*,' the standard bibliographical reference for Ibn 'Arabi's writings.[512]

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[511] Due to the relative abundance of translated material (at least compared with most areas of Islamic studies), writers on Ibn 'Arabi hopefully will soon begin to give increasing thought to the ongoing, cumulative nature of their work and to their responsibilities to a wider interested public. One sign of this interest (in addition to the sheer volume of recent writing) is the recent organization of the 'Muhyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī Society' in Oxford, England, and their publication (since 1982) of a biannual *Journal,* which may serve as one means of communication and coordination in this field. In any case, readers attempting to compare two or more translations will quickly recognize the need for full indexes of Qur'an and hadith (including Ibn 'Arabi's typical use of important allusions, as well as direct literal citations) and of technical terminology keyed to the underlying Arabic expressions, given the inevitable variations in choice of equivalents by many translators. Likewise, given the practical impossibility of reading all relevant works on Ibn 'Arabi, it is important that translations (and especially notes and commentary) reflect the input of other qualified scholars in the field— something that was clearly not the case with several of the works reviewed here.

[512] **See n. 3 above**. Readers unfamiliar with Prof. Yahia's work should be warned that many of Ibn 'Arabi's writings were known under multiple titles, even in his own lifetime, and that the titles frequently are only vaguely or symbolically related to the primary subjects of the works in question. This helps explain why translators—adding to the confusion—have not infrequently chosen to use their own, more representative titles. As a result, Dr. Yahia's description of the contents of works he was not able to examine directly, where based on indications in their manuscript titles, are not always completely accurate. In addition, the work is by no means complete even in its citation of earlier translations; a corrected and updated list can be found in the two-part "Ibn 'Arabi: A Handlist of Printed Materials" by Martin Notcutt (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 3, 1984 and 4, 1984).

For translations from the *Futūhāt* **(OY, No.135→REFERRING TO HIS HISTOIRE ET CLASSIFICATION, RIGHT?)**, given the vast extent of that work, we have cited the chapter number (same in all editions) and the volume and pages according to the standard 4-volume 1329 Cairo edition, frequently reprinted in Beirut (Dār Sādir) and elsewhere, and followed in Prof. al-Hakīm's lexicon of Ibn 'Arab's technical vocabulary **(n. 1 above).** Osman Yahia's new, scientific edition of the *Futūhāt*, with

I. The new translation of M. Asin Palacios' classic study, *L 'Islam christianisé: Étude sur le Soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi de Murcie* [Tr. B. Durant. Pp. 379. Paris: Guy Tredaniel / Editions de la Maisnie. 1982.], despite the age of the original (1931) and the evident limitations of the approach suggested by its title, still remains the best available introduction to Ibn 'Arabi's own life and spiritual practice, and to those crucial practical and experiential aspects of his work which were shared with earlier Sufism (and ultimately with mystics of many religious traditions). As such, it provides an indispensable complement to the metaphysical, 'theoretical' aspect emphasized in the *Fusūs al-Hikam* and the studies of Izutsu and most other available sources in English. The fruit of decades of study and reflection on Ibn 'Arabi's work[513] (and the often unavowed inspiration of many subsequent studies), Asin's work contains almost as many pages of translation and as wide a range of topics as all the other translations reviewed below, taken together. The volume is divided into what can be regarded as three distinct books: (a) a detailed biography of Ibn 'Arabi, based on his own autobiographical remarks throughout the *Futūhāt* (pp.23-90); (b) an anthology of representative excerpts, focusing on the Shaykh's spiritual method and experience, from a number of key works (pp. 209-378); and (c) a comparative study of Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual method and 'psychology,' to a great extent typical of Sufism more generally, which must be approached with considerable caution (pp. 91-208).

The biographical section, while by no means exhausting the references available in the *Futūhāt* (and other works),[514] does give an indispensable self-portrait of the Shaykh and his dramatic personality—a portrait that not only offers a vivid sense of Ibn 'Arabi as a 'practicing' Sufi, but also may suggest some of the underlying reasons for the ongoing hostility and suspicion his works encountered, both during and especially after his lifetime, among certain groups of less spiritually-

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extensive and invaluable indexes, has not yet reached the end of Volume I of the older 4-volume editions, and was therefore not used for any of the translations reviewed here.

[513] We may mention in particular the (abridged) English translation of his *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, tr. H. Sutherland, which retains its usefulness as the most elaborate available study of lbn 'Arabi's eschatology and its sources in Islamic tradition, even if it is now outdated as far as the question of influences on Dante is concerned.

[514] It should be noted that Asin's references are to the older, Bulaq lithographed edition of the *Futūhāt,* also in four volumes, but with an entirely different pagination from the more accessible printed edition most often cited in more modern works on Ibn 'Arabi (Cairo, 1329: cf. n. 10 above). Islamicists should be able to decipher the transliteration of references, proper names, etc., which— since the translator clearly was unfamiliar with the underlying Arabic—has sometimes taken some peculiar turns here in the transition from Spanish to French (e.g., al-Mariq alMohadam for al-Mālik al-Mu'azzam).

The influence of Asin Palacios' biographical selections in this work (and the pervasiveness of the phenomena alluded to in n. 7 above) is illustrated by the frequency with which its partial Arabic translation by Prof. 'A. Badawi, *Ibn 'Arabi: Hayātuhu wa Madhhabuhu* (Cairo, 1965) is now cited in contemporary Arabic discussions of Ibn 'Arabi, instead of references to the corresponding passages from the *Futūhāt* itself.

minded theologians, lawyers, and philosophers.[515] This portrait of Ibn 'Arabi and his Sufi milieu is perfectly complemented by the descriptions of his own spiritually masters and companions in the biographical sections of his *Rūh al-Quds* and *al-Durrat al-Fākhira*, now readily available in Austin's English translation.[516] In addition, Asin's quotations (pp. 79-85) of some of Ibn 'Arabi's own descriptions of his distinctive, 'inspired' method of composition in virtually all of his works, and of the way the *Fusūs* and *Futūhāt* were meant to be read, should be required reading for anyone who sets out to study those writings.[517]

Probably the most valuable aspect of the work are Asin's translations from six different treatises by Ibn 'Arabi (plus another work now attributed to a later Turkish author) focusing on the Shaykh's spiritual advice and his own discussions—often illuminated by accounts of his personal experience— of stages and conditions of the Sufi path. These selections, although systematically leaving out the more difficult metaphysical and cosmological passages, are representative of a central and still virtually unstudied dimension of Ibn 'Arabi's work that is elaborated, for example, in hundreds of pages of the *Futūhāt*. Three of the selections are concerned primarily with what may be broadly called the *adab* aspect of Sufism, 'rules' or advice concerning spiritual practice and method. The treatise on '*The Essence of What is Indispensable for the Seeker*' (O.Y., No 352) has since become available in a complete English translation.[518]   In clear and straight-forward terms, it gives an excellent idea of what Ibn 'Arabi would have presupposed as the very minimal conditions for most readers of his works. The '*Firm Rule Concerning the Conditions Necessary for the People of God's Path*' (*K al-'Amr al-Muhkam*, O.Y. 28) is a considerably more advanced work, including fascinating advice to spiritual guides on the types of language and teaching they should offer to different audiences and types of students—remarks which could be usefully applied to the interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's own writings. The brief passages from the *K. al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhīya* (O.Y. 716), while not really representative of that major work as a whole,[519] include brief but pointed remarks, for both

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[515] See Part II for further references to this problem. These historical phenomena are otherwise almost impossible to comprehend if one approaches the problem from a 'doctrinal,' purely conceptual study of his writings.

[516] *Sufis of Andalusia,* tr. R. W. J. Austin. Austin's version in turn has also been translated into French, by G. Leconte, *Les Soufis d'Andalousie,* (Paris, 1995 reprint), but without the indexes and helpful bibliography provided in the original English version. Although Asin does not usually quote from the *Rūh al-Quds*, he does give frequent references to the corresponding biographical entries, which can be easily matched with Austin's translation.

[517] Given the diversity and distinctiveness of Ibn 'Arabi's style of writing, even in comparison with other forms of Sufi literature, a comprehensive study of his methods of writing and rhetorical techniques, in the larger context of his spiritual method—based on the many indications scattered through the *Futūhāt* is surely one of the great needs in this field. (**See also n. 8 above.)**

[518] 'Instructions to a Postulant,' tr. Arthur Jeffery, ~~pp. 640-55~~ in his *A Reader on Islam*, (Salem, N.H., 1987 reprint of 1962 edition).

[519] See the edition, and especially the long German introduction (pp. 1-162), of H. S. Nyberg's *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-'Arabi.* which gives a detailed analysis of some of the metaphysical concepts of this and related early works. It would appear that the relative accessibility of Nyberg's pioneering study of Ibn 'Arabi's supposed 'theosophical system' (pp. 29-160)—an account which

novices and more advanced seekers, that should be extremely interesting to students of the practical and socio-historical side of Sufism. Such students will find that frequently Ibn 'Arabi's suggestions—e.g., on questions of *samā'* ('audition' of spiritual music), or the inadvisability of frequent traveling, etc.—are often contrary either to popularly accepted images of Sufism or to common Sufi practice in later periods and other regions of the Islamic world.

The other three selections are primarily concerned with the phenomenology and (in the broadest possible sense) 'psychology' of the spiritual path, subjects which in Ibn 'Arabi's writings—unlike some of the earlier, 'classical' Sufi literature in this area—are usually closely integrated with his mystical theology, metaphysics, etc. The briefest treatise, the *R.. al-Anwār* (O.Y. 33), while explicitly concerned with the phenomena experienced during *khalwa,* or spiritual retreat, is also a concise survey of some key stages of the spiritual path, and has often been commented on in that context.[520] Ibn 'Arabi's much longer *Mawāqi' al-Nujūm* (O.Y. 443), summarized and partially translated here, covers an extraordinary range of spiritual phenomena and insights in a relatively accessible form,[521] and was even more widely read and studied by later Sufis. The culminating selection (pp. 337-78) is made up of long passages selected from chapter 78 of the *Futūhāt,* on divine and human love; his subtle analysis of that immense theme—although its overall role is by no means as predominant in Ibn 'Arabi's work as with the famous Sufi poets, for example—is perhaps unsurpassed in Islamic mystical literature.[522]

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gives no inkling, e.g., of the practical spiritual dimensions represented by Asin's selections from the *Tadbīrāt*—may help explain the predominance of this aspect in subsequent Western secondary literature and popular conceptions of the Shaykh, since Nyberg's work was one of the very first scholarly studies available in a Western language **(See n. 7 above**).

[520] This work has also recently been translated into English, under the descriptive title *Journey to the Lord of Power*, tr. R. T. Harris, along with important short selections from the commentary by 'Abd al-Karīm Jīlī, a key later interpreter to be discussed in Part II-A of this review article). O. Yahia (I, p.162) mentions seven alternative titles and, together with Brockelmann, almost 50 manuscripts of this treatise. The full translation of the standard title would be 'The Lights Concerning the Mysteries (or Secrets) Bestowed on One Who is in Spiritual Retreat *(khalwa).*' See also the translation and extensive commentary on this work—drawing especially on Jīlī's commentary and corresponding passages from the *Futūhāt* (chapters 167 and 367)—in Chodkiewicz's *The Seal of the Saints*, chapter 10, pp. 147-182. [This major new authoritative study of Ibn 'Arabi's conception of prophecy and sainthood, based on a thorough study of the *Futūhāt* and many other key writings, appeared too recently to be included in this review article.]

[521] The subject of this work, which has little to do with astrology of any sort, is better indicated by the alternative title (O. Yahia, II, p.375) *K. Sirr al-Asrār wa muntahā 'ilm al-abrār...*; according to Yahia, it was also commented on by 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (also discussed in Part II-A of this review article).

[522] Long quotations from the same chapter (78) are also available in the English translation (by R. Mannheim) of H. Corbin's *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (Princeton, 1969), and subsequently republished, with a new preface by H. Bloom, under the title '*Alone With the Alone*' (Princeton, 1998), especially in the notes to the chapter on the 'dialectic of love.' Asin's selections— roughly 10-15% of the original chapter (= *Futūhāt*, II, pp. 320-62), although not indicated as such in

The central, analytical section of Asin's book is undoubtedly the most dated and problematic, given his avowed intention of 'explaining' Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual method by reference to Christian mystical precursors (a procedure which may also reflect his own problematic situation in Catholic Spain at the time he was writing). However, it is not too difficult for an attentive reader to transform that apparently historicist perspective into a more appropriate comparative one, thereby bringing out the deeper universality of the underlying phenomena. And for more specialized readers with access to the Arabic texts frequently cited, Asin's detailed references (mainly to works other than the *Futūhāt*) represent the fruits of years of research that would be difficult to duplicate. More dangerous than the explicit historicist perspective, however, is his repeated use of alien and inappropriate interpretive categories—e.g., 'pantheist,' 'monist,' 'theology,' 'heterodox/orthodox,' etc.—which, although possibly understandable in terms of Asin's originally intended audience, cannot but mislead those lacking any firsthand acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabi's works. Surely nothing has done more to prevent serious study and understanding of Ibn 'Arabi than the virtually universal repetition of such formulae in modern secondary literature by authors who (unlike Asin) have had no inkling of their inappropriateness and limitations.[523] Finally, readers must be cautioned that the author here—as in his *Islam and the Divine Comedy*—has offered only the evidence that illustrates his title-thesis. As a result, not surprisingly, one comes away with little sense of the overwhelming role of Qur'an and hadith in all of Ibn 'Arabi's writings, in his own self-image (as the 'Seal of Muham-madan Sainthood'), or in his later massive influence throughout the Islamic world. Fortunately, however, the translations discussed below offer a much more balanced impression of that central aspect of his work.

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this translation—leave out the complex metaphysical-theological discussions that form the greater body of the chapter; his selection makes for easier reading, but is not wholly representative as a result.

The four opening pages (pp. 333-36) are taken from unidentified sections of the *Futūhāt*, dealing with the important difference between the 'Sufis' and the 'Malāmatīya' (or *malāmīya*, the foremost of whom being the Prophet Muhammad), in Ibn 'Arabi's distinctive usage of that term: this subject and related spiritual 'ranks' and functions are discussed in detail in chapter 73 (beginning of vol. II) of the *Futūhāt*. [See the more detailed exposition of this key subject in Chodkiewicz's *The Seal of the Saints*, **n. 19 above.**]

[523]The most glaring instance, almost inescapable in secondary literature referring to Ibn 'Arabi, is the formula '*wahdat al-wujūd*' (roughly translatable as the 'transcendent Unity of Being')—a phrase we have not located anywhere in Ibn 'Arabi's own writings (but see the remarks on later Muslim figures like Balyānī and the school of Ibn Sab'**īn in Part II).** Such formulae may have a certain usefulness as a sort of 'shorthand' when used by specialists well acquainted with their intended references (and intrinsic limitations), but their use for a wider audience inevitably ends up conveying something quite different from what was originally intended—a difficulty that is especially compounded in the case of Muslim (or more secular) readers entirely unaware of the complex Christian theological issues and personal commitments that underlie the use of these and other theological categories and judgments in this section of Asin's work (or, to take an even more influential case, in the writings of L. Massignon). The most effective antidote to such stereotypes seems to be extended contact with the Shaykh's actual writings themselves.

II. Despite its brevity, this translation of Ibn 'Arabi's *K al-Fanā' fī al-Mushāhada* (O.Y. 125), *Le Livre de l'Extinction dans la Contemplation,*[524] offers a remarkable introduction to some of the central and recurrent concerns of all his writing.[525] Above all, Ibn 'Arabi explicitly stresses throughout this treatise—what is often only implicitly assumed elsewhere—the decisive importance of the appropriate spiritual realization *(tahqīq)* for a true awareness of each of the classical Sufi topics he discusses: the consciousness of divine Unicity *(ahadīya)* and the illusions of 'unification' *(ittihād)*; the necessity of carefully crafting one's speech and action when discussing the realities of spiritual 'unveiling' *(kashf)* in the midst of those who are unaware of them;[526] the functions of *himma* ('inner intention') and especially its highest spiritual degrees, culminating in the pure devotion *(ikhlās)* of the *muhaqqiqūn;* the essential differences between the revealed Religion *(dīn)* of the Prophet (and earlier prophets) and the diverse teachings instituted by non-prophetic sages (the *hukamā');*[527] and the contrast between the Sufi and both literalist and rationalist understandings of the realities of Faith *(īmān),* epitomized in the famous hadith on '*Ihsān'* ('*to worship God as though you saw him...'*)

The density of Ibn 'Arabi's allusions in this text and the concision of his treatment here of subjects developed at great length elsewhere (especially in the *Futūhāt)* offer a difficult challenge to any commentator, so that the late translator's annotation in this instance is something of a model in its genre. Not only have most of the Qur'anic and hadith references been clearly identified and commented on,[528] but the Shaykh's technical terminology (usually with the Arabic terms given in

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[524] Tr. Michel Valsan, **pp. 57 (translation pp. 25-50).**

[525] The concision and clarity of this work, which recommend it for teaching and oral exposition, may also explain its place at the very beginning of the widely reprinted Hyderabad (1948) edition of the *Rasā'il Ibn al-'Arabi*, pp 2-9. A new English translation, with more complete commentary, would be a welcome service for beginning students approaching this field.

[526] This fundamental rhetorical and interpretive dimension of 'esotericism' in Ibn 'Arabi's writings—underlying such crucial problems as the interpretation of his cosmological symbolism, his understanding of Islamic tradition, the relation of his different writings and their intended audiences, etc.—is still virtually untouched in the available scholarly discussions of his work (**see notes 8 and 15 above).**

[527] The fundamental contrast between the relative effectiveness and limitations of *'aql* (unaided 'reason,' in this context) and *kashf* ('illumination' or spiritual 'discovery' based on the deepening of scriptural indications and prescriptions) is one of the recurrent themes of the *Futūhāt*, especially, bearing on virtually all the topics Ibn 'Arabi discusses—most notably, his understanding of spiritual practice or method, and the central role of the interiorization of the *shar'*, the 'revealed Path' of the Prophet. The implications of these discussions, while impossible to summarize here, are certainly different from what one might gather simply from the analysis of the *Fusūs* and its philosophic commentaries taken by themselves.

[528] One of the major difficulties with most available translations of Ibn 'Arabi (including those of the *Fusūs*, n. 6 above), is the inadequate discussion of allusions (as well as direct quotations) to the Qur'an and hadith, without which large parts of the texts are frequently incomprehensible or at least quite puzzling. Even simple page or verse references (without full, appropriate retranslations and often elaborate contextual explanations) are often of little use to those 'without a serious

parentheses) has been carefully explained wherever necessary, often with references demonstrating a profound acquaintance with the *Futūhāt.* Above all, the commentary is clearly thought out and consistently directed toward the reader's understanding of the text itself; that sort of disciplined pedagogical unity and intelligence is a rare phenomenon not only in translations of Ibn 'Arabi, but in writing on Islamic spirituality in general.[529]

According to the editor's note, this is only the first in a series of republications of the late Mr. Valsan's many scattered translations from Ibn 'Arabi (including some eleven shorter chapters of the *Futūhāt,* as well as many of the treatises included in the Hyderabad edition of the *Rasa'il*) which originally appeared in the journal *Études traditionnelles,*[530] and which together constitute perhaps the largest body of translations of Ibn 'Arabi (apart from the *Fusūs*) available in any Western language. While not devoid of mistakes and occasional disputable interpretations, these translations and their accompanying annotation and commentary are of a quality considerably above the average in this field, and their republication would be a most valuable contribution to all students of Ibn 'Arabi, and of Sufism and Islamic spirituality more generally.

III. *La Niche des Lumières* [Tr. Mumammad Valsan (son of preceding translator). Pp. 156. Paris: Les Editions de l'Oeuvre. 1983.], a translation of Ibn 'Arabi's personal collection of 101 *hadīth qudsī*

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knowledge of classical Arabic, ready access to the hadith collections, and a thorough acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabi's often technical use (building on earlier Sufi authors) of those traditional sources. This sort of apparatus—essential for most modern readers, including many Muslims—corresponds to a background and preparation Ibn 'Arabi took for granted among most of his intended audience; obviously the impression or rhetorical effect is radically different in the two cases. **(See also notes 4, 8, and 15 above.)**

[529] In this reprinted version, the editor has also added an index of Arabic technical terms (though not of their French equivalents), which is very useful in this case since the translator has given the underlying Arabic expression in parentheses in most places where a translation alone might well be inadequate. Although this procedure does make for a cluttered and perhaps less immediately 'readable' translation, it is probably essential for any more serious study of Ibn 'Arabi, especially by non-Arabists, given the lack of a directly equivalent technical vocabulary in non-Islamic languages. (The situation is no different than with translations of philosophic or spiritual texts from Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, etc.) The need for common reference to the Arabic is compounded when, as is now the case, students are faced with versions of Ibn 'Arabi's works by a dozen or more translators working in different languages.

[530] A full bibliography of those translations is given in a recent collection entitled *L'Islam et la Fonction de René Guenon*, pp. 194-96; the bibliography also lists the same author's many translations of chapters from al-Kāshānī's commentary on the Qur'an, often (falsely) attributed to Ibn 'Arabi **(see Part II-A of this review** article). The same collection also includes the author's translations of a key part of the Foreword to the *Futūhāt* (pp. 180-91) and of chapter 20, on the 'knowledge of Jesus' (pp. 73-82); unfortunately, the apparatus in these latter two cases is more oriented to the author's specifically Guenonian preoccupations, amply illustrated in the remaining articles of this collection.

entitled *Mishkat a1-Anwār* (O.Y. 480 and 11),[531] is marked by a simplicity, directness, and accessibility that makes it not only an indispensable reference for students of Ibn 'Arabi, but also an excellent introduction to this fundamental and frequently misunderstood aspect of Islamic devotional and spiritual life. Its usefulness for students—given the deceptive 'simplicity' of the Arabic of so many hadith—is further enhanced by the addition of a facing, fully voweled Arabic text. The translator's brief but dense introduction (pp. 7-14) focuses on Ibn 'Arabi as a *muhaddith*, mentioning his teachers in that domain, his favorite sources, and a number of other personal hadith collections of his (most now lost) referred to in his writings. However, this information, while important, does not even begin to convey the fundamental importance of hadith as sources for all of the Shaykh's work. Those who study attentively even these few examples, though, will soon recognize to what a great extent works such as the *Fusūs* and *Futūhāt* are in fact woven out of extensive reflection and commentary on these and other hadith, which function much like musical leitmotifs.[532] For the most part the ethical and spiritual intentions of these hadith (which frequently recall portions of the Gospels) are readily apparent, and eschatological themes are particularly predominant.[533]

As Ibn 'Arabi explains in his introduction (p.16), this collection consists of three parts (of 40, 40, and 21 hadith, respectively, the first group with their full *isnād* going back to the Prophet (who relates them from God or via Gabriel), while the second *arba'ūn* are related directly from God. (The translator has added an interesting appendix, pp. 145-51, from an 18th-century Maghrebi Sufi

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[531] The full title—in this version; O. Yahia (II, 390) mentions eight other titles from other manuscripts—is 'The Niche of Lights Concerning the Reports (*akhbār*) Related From God.' (This book, incidentally; is quite distinct from a famous and frequently translated Sufi work by al-Ghazali whose title begins with the same words.)

[532] See the extensive indexes of hadith references in each volume of O. Yahia's new, ongoing edition of *al-Futūhāt al Makkīya*, and the selective discussion of 44 of the most important of these (*not* included in the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*) at the end of Hakīm's *al-Mu'jam al-Sūfī* (n. 2 above), pp.1257-69. The importance of this element in Ibn 'Arabi's writings underlies and exemplifies his claim to be the 'Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood' (i.e., among other things, the exemplary interpreter of the inner meaning of the words and teachings of the Prophet), and helps to explain—far more than his difficult metaphysical doctrines—the extent of his widespread veneration in the Islamic world as the 'greatest Shaykh.' Unfortunately, most available studies of Islam (and of hadith in particular) fail to convey the central importance of selected hadith (many of which are often literally inseparable from the Qur'an in popular consciousness) in the religious experience of people from all Islamic regions, sects, and periods. This spiritual dimension, quite distinct from the 'professional' use of hadith in specialized legal and theological contexts that has been the object of much modern historical research, is the main focus of lbn 'Arabi's interest in and pedagogical use of hadith.

[533] Especially interesting in that regard is the *hadīth al-mawāqif* (the 'stations' of the Resurrection), here broken into several shorter parts in the last two sections of this text, which actually makes up much of chapters 64-65 of the *Futūhāt,* on the stages of the Resurrection and the states of the blessed in Paradise. Unfortunately, the lack of any index—although it would admittedly have been a great deal of work—somewhat limits the usefulness of this translation as a reference (with regard to other writings of Ibn 'Arabi) for those who are not able to memorize its contents.

writer, concerning the distinctions which were necessarily drawn between these widely recognized 'divine sayings' and the words of the Qur'an itself.) It may be pointed out, given the widespread prejudices to the contrary (at least in modern secondary literature), that the great majority of the hadith collected here, including all of those in the first part, are taken from the standard canonical Sunni recensions, and were not 'invented' by later Sufi tradition. This essential point is further emphasized and elaborately demonstrated in W. A. Graham's *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*,[534] a pioneering work (apparently unknown to Mr. Valsan) which took Ibn 'Arabi's collection as one of its points of departure, and which contains English translations of those hadith from the *Mishkāt* that are also included in the standard Sunni collections.

IV. Stephane Ruspoli's translation of chapter 167 of the *Futūhāt, L'alchimie du bonheur parfait* [Tr. S. Ruspoli. Pp.151. Paris: Berg International (collection 'L'île verte'). 1981.] is certainly the most ambitious and pioneering effort among the studies reviewed here, since it is the first complete Western translation[535] of a long chapter of the *Futūhāt* (14 pages of Arabic text, or roughly 5% of the book)—one of its most complex and allusive passages, and one whose elucidation and understanding inevitably requires references to many other sections of that immense work The narrative framework of that chapter is the quest for spiritual perfection undertaken by two friends, a 'follower of Muhammad' (with all that implies for Ibn 'Arabi) and an ambitious 'theoretician' (part *mutakallim*, part philosopher) who relies exclusively on his own theological and cosmological reasonings.[536] The contrast of their very different paths and experiences, in the context of the

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[534] The Hague, 1977. Prof. Graham's work is by no means exhaustive of the *hadīth qudsī* included in the canonical collections; a recent collective survey of the classical 'Six Books,' *al-Ahādīth al-Qudsīya,* (Cairo: Wizārat al-Awqāf, 1400/1980) [[UNABLE TO FIND, BUT THERE WERE PLENTY OF OTHER EDITIONS, WHICH ONE?]], cites in full some 400 examples, including full references to the original sources. Many of these other *hadīth qudsī,* not included in the *Mishkāt al-Anwār,* are likewise repeatedly cited and interpreted throughout Ibn 'Arabi's works (e.g., the hadith of the *'sūq al-janna,'* pp. 470ff. in the above-mentioned survey, which is at the heart of his eschatological discussions in the *Futūhāt).*

[535] The problems posed by complete translations of extensive sections from the *Futūhāt* (as opposed to translating only short, self-contained chapters or selected passages, as in Asin Palacios' book above) are basically twofold: (1) what to do with phrases one doesn't really understand, but whose 'key' is probably given somewhere else in that massive work (which might take a decade to read and annotate in its entirety); and (2) what to do where, as is often the case, adequate explanation of a single allusion may require whole pages of commentary drawn from other chapters or works by Ibn 'Arabi? It is no doubt the presence of many substantial commentaries, substantially eliminating those two great obstacles, that helps explain the centuries-long focus of academic interest on the *Fusūs al-Hikam.*

[536] This symbolic expression of a recurrent theme in the *Futūhāt,* the contrast between the two paths of *kashf* and *'aql* and their relative efficacity (see also n. 24 above), raises a number of difficult problems for modern readers and interpreters, and perhaps calls into question the adequacy of some of the traditional approaches to the *Fusūs.* At the very least, this attitude was not without its

traditional stages of the Prophet's spiritual ascension (*mi'raj*), enables Ibn 'Arabi to allude to many of his most essential spiritual insights and realizations while continually reminding the reader of their practical and personal presuppositions.

However, just as in Ibn 'Arabi's other works using the *Mi'raj* framework (especially the long chapter 367 of the *Futūhāt*, recounting the Shaykh's own personal *mi'raj*, and his early, highly autobiographical *K. al-1srā'*),[537] the variety of subjects and symbols brought into play in this chapter is so great that an adequate commentary—which the translator has promised for a future volume— would have to be many times longer than the actual translation. In the interim, this version does provide illuminating and essential notes at many points,[538] and readers acquainted with the *Fusūs*, for example, will recognize discussions of many of the same questions of metaphysics and mystical theology. Moreover, the discussions of cosmology and principles of created being in the concluding sections also form an excellent complement to the equally condensed presentations of those matters in the works translated by D. Gril and M. Gloton discussed immediately below. However, even allowing for the serious challenges posed by this chapter, the quality of the translation and commentary alike show evidence of a certain haste that will limit its usefulness for the general reader, and may even give a misimpression of confusion or disorder that does not truly reflect the Arabic original.

V. The two recent studies dealt with in this section are likely to prove less accessible for those approaching Ibn 'Arabī for the first time. Both of them, in highly condensed and symbolic language, touch on limited aspects of a complex symbolic framework of cosmology, cosmogony, and metaphysical concepts (the *Insān Kāmil*, 'Muhammadan Reality', etc.) which—in its twofold interrelations with the traditional sources of the Qur'an and hadith, on the one hand, and their spiritual realization and verification on the other—underlies virtually all of Ibn 'Arabī's writing. Unfortunately, there is really no single work to which non-specialists can refer for the indispensable 'keys' (or even adequate clues) for fully deciphering these and many similar symbolic treatises of Ibn 'Arabi.[539] But even if these texts cannot really be 'understood' in isolation,[540] they do offer

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repercussions in the later attacks on Ibn 'Arabi's works and his Sufi defenders by certain theologians and philosophers (**see Part II-A of this review article below).**

[537] Chapter 367 = *Futūhāt* III, 340-54; *K. al-Isrā'…*(**RG**, No.313) = *Rasā'il Ibn al-'Arabī* (Hyderabad, 1948), Pt. I, 13th treatise (pp.1-92). An extensive summary of the hadith and Qur'anic sources and symbolism used in these chapters, as well as a broad outline (without interpretation) of each of them, can be found in Asin Palacios' *Islam and the Divine Comedy* (**full ref. at n. 11 above—OR IN BIBLIOGRAPHY—OF COURSE).**

[538] The usefulness of Dr. Ruspoli's notes and the advance they represent can be measured against an earlier, partial translation of this same chapter by G. Anawati, '*L'Alchimie du Bonheur, d'Ibn 'Arabi,*' pp. 353-86 in the *Revue de Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire, Mélanges 6* (Cairo. 1959-61).

[539] In Western languages, the best introduction is certainly the study of the *Fusūs al-Hikam* by T. Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism* **(see n. 6 above),** to be supplemented by the German introduction to H S. Nyberg's *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn 'Arabi* **(n. 17 above).** The broadest and most useful reference, for

representative cases of important stylistic and rhetorical aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's work which we have not already encountered.

M. Gloton's translation of the *Shajarat al-Kawn* (O.Y. 660), *L'Arbre du Monde* [Tr. Maurice Gloton. Pp.230. Paris: Les Deux Oceans. 1982.], previously translated into English by Arthur Jeffery,[541] is perhaps most noteworthy for its extensive commentary and additional references (the actual translation covering only pp. 48-108). That explanatory material includes not only long passages from the Qur'an and hadith (e.g., those underlying the notion of the 'Muhammadan Reality'), Jurjānī's classical definitions of Sufi technical terms, and sections of the *Fuṣūs* not otherwise available in French, but also certain previously untranslated parts of the *Futūḥāt*—the most important being chapter 63, on the *barzakh* (both the intermediate, 'imaginal' level of reality, and the intermediate eschatological state loosely resembling 'purgatory').[542] Ibn 'Arabī's work itself is divided into three main parts:[543] a brief cosmological outline of the 'Tree of Being' using primarily Qur'anic symbolism (pp.49-62); a discussion of the levels and aspects of this cosmic whole (including its microcosmic correspondences) in terms of the 'Muhammadan Reality' (pp.63-92); and a symbolic recounting, in this cosmic context, of the archetypal spiritual ascension of the Prophet (pp.93-106), somewhat shorter than the version in the chapter from the *Futūḥāt* translated by Dr. Ruspoli above. While the extensive added references here illuminate the many individual terms and symbols of the

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those able to read Ibn 'Arabi in Arabic, is now no doubt the 'Sufi lexicon' of Hakim, *Al-Mu'jam al-sūfī*, under the appropriate headings, see, e.g., the entry for *al-Insān al-kāmil* (entry no. 66, pp. 158ff.) and its forty synonyms in Ibn 'Arabi's technical terminology for that key term alone.

[540] Nor can it be assumed that such brief symbolic writings were always meant to be 'understood' in a systematic sense; depending on the case, one 'An hypothesize a number of aesthetic, pedagogical, or even socio-political explanations of certain of these puzzling treatises. It is worth noting, in this connection, that Ibn 'Arabi often praises the condition of *hayra,* of one's ego being 'at a loss'—and thus more receptive to the spiritual Truth—in comparison with the (relatively) superficial and schematic Sort of understanding normally sought by the unenlightened *'aql*.

[541] [Since the publication of this review article, a number of scholars have raised convincing doubts about the attribution of this work (*not* listed in Ibn 'Arabī's own lists of his writings) directly to him, seeing in it an exemplar of the more systematic, didactic metaphysical approach typical of many of the Shaykh's later interpreters.] *'Ibn Al-'Arabī's Shajarat al-Kawn,'* in *Studia Islamica* 10 and 11; recently reprinted in book form (Lahore, 1980). The annotation in Jeffery's version is not as useful nor as complete as that in this new French translation, but his translation itself seems more readable, perhaps partly because it has not been so systematically subdivided.

[542] We must note the commendable provision of a detailed Index/glossary (covering both Arabic terms and their French equivalents here) and a helpful introductory bibliography. In general, while the wealth of references offered by Mr. Gloton may be redundant and possibly even annoying to scholars already having such background, it should surely be of service to students approaching this work for the first time.

[543] Our description here does not correspond exactly to the translator's own far more elaborate system of sections and subdivisions—a useful device which may have been carried too far in this case.

discussion, neither they nor the translator's introduction really provide the commentary that would be necessary to make sense of this work as a whole.

Prof. D. Gril's translation of the *R. al-ittihād al-kawnī* (O.Y. 319), *Le Livre de l'arbre et les Quatre Oiseaux* [Tr. Denis Gril. Pp. 73. Paris: Les Deux Oceans. **1996**] is as concise and exact as the preceding work is prolix; the poetry and symbolic prose of this early text demand such acquaintance with Ibn 'Arabi and careful attention to the Arabic that a translation in the full sense is virtually impossible.[544] However, this study does serve to point out both the central importance of Arabic poetry and poetic expression in all of the Shaykh's writings[545] and the terrible difficulties facing translators who would try to do justice to its meaning (not to mention the form). This is all the more important in that often the most striking and historically controversial formulations of the Shaykh's thought—here, for example, his consistent use here of the first person singular when discussing the different aspects of the 'Perfect Human Being'—are frequently expressed in his poetry, although one is seldom quite sure how much weight should be given the rhetorical dimension of dramatic or poetic license. Perhaps even more important, this work helps draw our attention to the many aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's character and expression which are profoundly and essentially 'Arab' in a way that was often neglected already very early in his transmission to the Eastern Islamic world.[546]

The subject of the treatise ('*addressed to myself*,' Ibn 'Arabi says), the cosmic unity of divine Manifestation in the *Insān al-Kāmil*, is aptly described by the long Arabic title, loosely translatable as '*Epistle on the unification of manifest being at the level of immediate vision of the presence of the Tree of Humanity and the four spiritual birds*,' where the tree (as in *Shajarat al-Kawn*) symbolizes the 'universal Human Being' and the four birds symbolize the four inseparable principial aspects of manifest existence—the Intellect, Universal Soul, universal Body, and 'Dust' (*haba'*) or Prime Matter—which are discussed in dozens of the Shaykh's treatises on cosmology and cosmogony. One point worth noting is Ibn 'Arabī's vigorous defense (pp. 69-70) of the equal and essential role of the principle of 'universal Body' in the manifestation of the world, a key aspect of his theology/philosophy of *tajalliyāt*[547] that brings out its dramatic contrast with the more 'dualistic'

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[544] This study first appeared (in substantially the same form as reprinted here), along with a full critical edition of the Arabic text, in the *Annales Islamologiques* 17, 1981.

[545] **COMPLETE from original!**

[546] **See Part II for the** relative emphasis in the non-Arabic Islamic world on the *Fusūs al-Hikam* and the conceptual, philosophic understanding of the Shaykh's writings. In addition to the role of Arabic poetry and other rhetorical and aesthetic tendencies in Ibn 'Arabī's writings (see n. 11 above), one may also note his distinctive 'etymological' form of Qur'anic interpretation (amply illustrated in the *Fusūs*)—thinking, or at least presenting his thought, through the association and analysis of Arabic verbal roots and derived forms—and his analogous emphasis on the importance of small details of the 'literal,' outward aspect of the *sharī'a* and revelation to a degree which is perhaps more broadly typical of later Arab forms of Sufism.

[547] T. Izutsu, *op. cit.* **(n. 6 above),** gives an especially clear account of this central dimension of Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics. See also the important discussion of the basic differences between Ibn 'Arabi's outlook and the monistic system of Ibn Sab'īn and his followers, in Chodkiewicz' introduction and commentary of Balyānī's *Épître sur l'Unicité Absolue* (Paris, 1982), which is often mistakenly

schemas (of matter and spirit, etc.) adopted by other schools of Sufism and other religious and philosophic traditions—Prof. Gril's concise introduction (pp. 7-31) identifies these main 'characters' and some of the standard sources for their interpretation (see n. 36 above), but—no doubt wisely—does not attempt a detailed commentary, which would require many volumes of this size.

VI. The two recent books by Mr. Charles-André Gilis, which can only be partially considered as translations of Ibn 'Arabi,[548] are curious contemporary illustrations of the perennial phenomena of 'scholasticization,' glosses, and supercommentaries that were often manifested in the ongoing process of reception of Ibn 'Arabi's work, especially in the non-Arabic Islamic world.[549] As is inevitable in such cases, the commentary tradition—rather than serving to re-create or make accessible the spiritual and intellectual insights that motivated Ibn 'Arabi's writing—easily takes on a life of its own, becoming a 'doctrine' or intellectual object of study in its own right, accessible only to members of the particular school or sect in question. In this instance, excellent and thoughtful translations of important works of Ibn 'Arabī, and serious reflection concerning them, have been clothed in an elaborate supercommentary on the author's own 'two masters' (R. Guenon and M. Valsān) which unfortunately will tend to obscure Ibn 'Arabi rather than to illuminate him, for those who are either unfamiliar with those more recent writers or who happen to find the author's distinctive mélange of (among others) numerology, astrology, Hermeticism, Masonic ritual and Vedantic terminology less congenial.[550]

If we have not simply passed over these two books in silence, it is because the underlying works of Ibn 'Arabi are of substantial value in their own right, are quite capably and seriously translated and, at least in the second case, would well repay the effort of study in abstraction from their exotic surroundings. *La Doctrine Initiatique du Pèlerinage à la Maison d'Allāh* [Tr C.-A Gilis. Pp.331. Paris: Les Editions de l'Oeuvre 1982.], based loosely on chapter 72 of the *Futūhāt* ('*On the Hajj and Its Secrets*')[551]—although it is virtually impossible here to separate the author's personal commentaries

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attributed to Ibn 'Arabi; the significance of this point will be brought out in detail in Part II-A of this review article.

[548] In significant contrast with all the previous works, it is the translator/commentator's name—and not Ibn 'Arabi's—which figures prominently on the cover of these books.

[549] **See Part II-A** below for details; if the phenomenon is universal with the heritage of all great original thinkers, it is still especially easy to comprehend in the case of Ibn 'Arabi, given the diversity and volume of his writings and the altogether exceptional variety of sources and traditions that are integrated in them.

[550] In all fairness, it must be noted that the author's commentaries in both volumes also include some contributions from two classic Islamic interpreters of the Shaykh's school who will be encountered again **in Part II-A below**, 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī, whose remarks are usually more obviously relevant to the texts of Ibn 'Arabi. However, the author's references to their works here are almost impossible to separate from their occultist surroundings.

[551] To give some idea of the abridgement involved (and at the same time of the detail of Ibn 'Arabi's interest in this subject and the depth of his interpretation), the lithographed Arabic text of almost

from the actual translations of Ibn 'Arabī, even with Arabic text in hand—should at least draw atten-tion to the central position in the Shaykh's thought and practice of the prescriptions of Islamic law. His developments in that area are more profound and subtle, as well as more voluminous, than the better-known comparable passages in al-Ghazali's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*.[552]

Le Coran et la Fonction d'Hermès [Tr. C.-A. Gilis. Pp. 226. Paris: Les Editions de l'Oeuvre. 1984.], despite its title (which has nothing directly to do with Ibn 'Arabi or his work in question), is in fact centered on a translation of chapter 198, section 9 (vol. II, pp. 405-21) of the *Futūhāt,* consisting of Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation of the thirty-six Qur'anic statements of *tawhid* (the Unity of God), corresponding to the *shahāda*, but each set forth in slightly different terms.[553] The fascinating way in which Ibn 'Arabi brings out unsuspected riches of insight and meaning in each of those Qur'anic verses, in conjunction simultaneously with the spiritual states and corresponding metaphysical realities they manifest and express, is a remarkable illustration of his extraordinary capacities of interpretation, as well as an excellent practical introduction to the central role of the divine Names and Attributes throughout his thought.

One cannot read this work through, challenging as that may be, without gaining at least some sense of the persuasiveness of Ibn 'Arabi's repeated claims that all his writings and inspirations are nothing more than the fruits of reflection on, or internalization of, the Qur'an and hadith—and thus not the application to them of an external schema of interpretation. Nor can one study any work of his for long without developing a transformed awareness of and sensitivity to the inimitable words and deeper spiritual dimensions of the Qur'an. It is just this sort of realization, that can only be reached through actual meditation on Ibn 'Arabi's writings—not from any account of that work, no matter how capable—that helps to justify (and no doubt partly motivated) the years of devoted effort that are represented by all these new publications.[554]

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100 pages (I, pp.665-661) would be equivalent to some 1000 printed pages of a complete, annotated English translation.

[552] The most monumental and accessible illustration of this dimension of Ibn 'Arabi's teaching is the sections in the *Futūhāt* on the '*Secrets of the Sharī'a*' and the basic rituals of Islam *(tahāra, salāt, zakāt,* etc.), vol. I, 322-763 including this chapter on the Hajj, equivalent in total to several thousand pages in annotated English translation; there are also many shorter treatises by the Shaykh along similar lines, some of them discussed in Asin Palacios' work mentioned above.

An excellent introduction to this still largely neglected central area of the Shaykh's thought is the article by M. Chodkiewicz, '*Ibn 'Arabi, la lettre et la Loi*,' pp. 27-40 in the *Actes du Colloque 'Mystique, Culture et Société',* (Paris,1983). **[[THE VOLUME IS CITED IN THE BIBLIO. – ALSO, ISN'T HIS *UN OCEAN SANS RIVAGE* THE EXPANDED VERSION OF THIS ARTICLE, PERHAPS?]]**

[553] Fortunately the translator's personal commentaries on this work are clearly separated from a complete translation of Ibn 'Arabi's *own* remarks, following each of the 36 sections. Mr. Gilis' comments, while still reflecting (as in his title) the same personal concerns, are considerably more closely related to Ibn 'Arabi's own writing than in the preceding volume on the Hajj.

[554]Certain translations of other books frequently mis-attributed to Ibn 'Arabi which readers might expect to find here in **Part I are instead dealt with in Part II-A below.** In particular, those

SUMMARY:

Parts II and III of this article survey some representative lines of interpretation and influence of Ibn ‘Arabī's work among subsequent Islamic mystics and thinkers—and their critics—as they are revealed in recent translations. Their comparison with Ibn ‘Arabī's own writings brings out (1) the intellectual and institutional conditions underlying the creative aspects of the Shaykh's work and accounting for its phenomenal spread; (2) important aspects of his writing and teaching often neglected by his later interpreters; and (3) the remarkable diversity, selectivity, and autonomous development of subsequent Sufi traditions as they transformed and adapted his works in light of their own concerns. Part II deals with a famous treatise (by Balyānī) representing the "monistic" Sufism of Ibn Sab‘īn (and its many critics); an interesting apocryphal work (actually by a later Qādiri writer); the influential Persian works of Nasafī; and the decisive role of the metaphysically oriented teachings of Ibn ‘Arabī's disciple and son-in-law S. Qūnawī and his successors.

INTRODUCTION

Paraphrasing Whitehead's famous remark about Plato—and with something of the same degree of exaggeration—one could say that the history of Islamic thought subsequent to Ibn ‘Arabī (at least down to the 18th century and the radically new encounter with the modern West) might largely be construed as a series of footnotes to his work. To the degree that such a statement is justifiable, this wide-ranging influence must be explained not simply by reference to the intrinsic characteristics of Ibn ‘Arabī's own life and works discussed in Part I of this article (such features as the sheer volume of his writing, the diversity of intellectual disciplines he draws on, his consistent focus on the Qur'an and *hadīth* as his fundamental sources and primary mode of presentation, or the remarkable scope of his personal teaching and contacts, from Andalusia to Anatolia), but also by their coincidence with a broader historical movement of institutionalization of Sufism (with a concomitant penetration of "Sufi" forms and allusions in virtually every domain of the arts and intellectual life) that seems to have touched the most scattered regions of the Islamic world at almost the same time, and with a broad range of inescapable intellectual and practical problems posed by that institutionalization.[555] Because of the vast extent of that larger movement and the degree to which Ibn ‘Arabī's own works are grounded in broader traditions (of common texts, vocabulary, methods, etc.) he shared with other prominent Sufi

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[555] Historical observers have often noted the remarkable—some would say "providential"—coincidence of many of the greatest Sufi saints (Abū Madyan, Ibn al-‘Arīf, etc.), poets (Rūmī, ‘Attār, Ibn al-Fārid), and founders of most of the classical orders within the period of a century or so surrounding the dates of Ibn ‘Arabī's life. (See, e.g., A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, 1975), p. 279, who also notes the coincidence of similar mystical movements at the same period in non-Islamic parts of Europe and Asia.) One of the most striking examples of this is the circle of Sufi acquaintances of Ibn ‘Arabī's disciple Sadr al-Din al-Qūnawī discussed later in this article. Historical research into the nature and significance of the wider process of institutionalization, in particular, is still in its infancy and largely determined by limited scholarly perspectives (architectural. political, social, geographical, etc.) that make generalizations concerning the broader phenomena very difficult.

figures of this period, it is often very difficult to gauge the depth and directness of his influence once one goes beyond the most prominent tradition constituted by his commentators and the line of his disciples and their direct students.

Despite these complicating factors, however, it is clear that an adequate account of Ibn 'Arabī's inter-preters, in addition to (1) the direct line of his commentators and students, would have to take into consideration at least the following broader dimensions of his influence; (2) the profound penetration of his technical vocabulary and concepts (more or less adequately understood) in subsequent Islamic poetry (first in Persian, then in languages such as Turkish or Urdu influenced by Persian poetic forms), as well as in the explanation or interpretation of earlier Sufi poets such as Rūmī or Ibn al-Fārid;[556] (3) a similar spreading of his metaphysical concepts and problems—again with widely varying degrees of comprehension and agreement or disagreement-into subsequent schools of philosophy (especially those descending from Avicenna), kalam theology, and even Twelver Shiite thought;[557] and (4) the more

[556] (The commentaries on Ibn al-Fārid's famous *Nazm al-Sulūk* by such key figures in Ibn 'Arabī's school as Sa'īd al-Farghānī and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī are discussed below, **nn. 63 and 73.)** The widest popular survey of the influences of Ibn 'Arabī's terminology and popularized (and often quite fallacious) versions of his thought in the poetry of many Islamic languages is in A. Schimmel, op. cit. (index under "Ibn 'Arabī'," *"Wahdat al-wujūd,"* etc.), which is especially helpful for the Turkish and "Indo-Pakistani" regions, complementing the largely Iranian focus of much of the research summarized in this article. Professor Schimmel frequently stresses (e.g., p. 210) that the poetic integration of Ibn 'Arabī's terminology often reflected little or no understanding of his teachings, and readers should be cautioned that the pages devoted in her survey to the Shaykh himself (pp. 263-74, on "theosophical Sufism") actu-ally are best understood as a reflection of some of those later classical stereotypes and misunderstandings ("pantheism," "monism," "gnosis," etc.). As we have attempted to point out both in **Part I and in several sections below,** those recurrent misrepresentations are not simply a "vulgarization" or popular "simplification" of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas, but rather the symptoms of certain ongoing, historically influential tendencies in Sufism (corresponding to certain perennial possibilities in the philosophic understanding and formulation of mystical experience) considerably pre-dating the Shaykh. In fact, the more theoretical aspect of his writing (and the efforts of his later disciples) can best be understood as an attempt to overcome the interrelated practical, philosophic, and theological impli-cations of precisely those popular and recurrent misunderstandings!

[557] A number of particular aspects of this tendency are discussed in the fourth section (Qūnawī, Kāshānī, Āmulī, etc.) and accompanying notes below. The only broad introduction to this movement, at least in Western languages, is to be found in Part II of H. Corbin's *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1986): "La philosophic islamique depuis la mort d'Averroës jusqu'à nos jours," also pp.1067-1188 in the volume *Histoire de Ia Philosophie-III* (Paris, 1986) in the *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade;* see especially pp. 1097-1134 on "La metaphysique du Soufisme" and pp.1149-52 on "l'Intégration d'Ibn 'Arabī à la Métaphysique Shi'ite"), and in its continuation, in somewhat greater detail, in the volume entitled *La philosophie iranienne islamique aux XVIIᵉ et XVIIIᵉ siècles* (Paris, 1981), a collection of the French introductions to the first three volumes of the Persian and Arabic texts edited by J. Ashtiyānī in the *Anthologie des philosophes iraniens depuis le XVIIe siècle jusqu'à nos jours* (Tehran, 1971, 1975, and 1978). In addition to the inherent limits of these studies—in the case of the encyclopedia article [now

practical and devotional use of the full range of his writings (not so exclusively the metaphysical or doctrinal ones), as part of the larger corpus of Sufi literature, by ordinary Sufis of all ranks, especially in those regions where Ibn 'Arabī's own Arabic works were more popularly accessible.[558] Finally, as a sort of secondary reflection of all these diverse strands of influence, there is the ongoing (and still virtually unexplored) chain of critiques and attacks on Ibn 'Arabī—or more precisely, on social movements, phenomena, and formulaic "theses" vaguely associated with his name—that has likewise continued

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reprinted, with updated bibliography, in a single volume with Part I, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*], the extreme concision of both the text (largely limited to the citation of key figures and their major works) and bibliography; in the case of the *Anthologie,* the necessarily personal selection of themes discussed in the French summaries—readers should also keep in mind that these discussions are primarily limited to the themes and individuals that were subsequently taken as important in later *Iranian* (and primarily Twelver *Shiite)* thought. Similarly extensive developments in the Ottoman realms and Muslim India and Central Asia, for a variety of reasons, have not yet received the same kind of sustained scholarly attention as the traditions that survived in Iran.

[558] This is the realm in which the question of Ibn 'Arabī's more profound spiritual influences—most closely corresponding to his own aims and intentions, as expressed in his claim to be the "seal of Muhammadan sainthood" *(walāya),* and to his perception by later Sufis as the "greatest master"—is certainly most pertinent, since his ultimate aim was clearly not the promulgation of a personal doctrine or teaching, but rather an individual transformation and realization whose inner degree and outward manifestations necessarily differ with each individual. It is also where the limitations of historical and literary evidence are most evident. As a small but typical illustration, one can imagine the difficulties involved in tracing Ibn 'Arabī's widespread "influences," even in non-Muslim (and non-scholarly) circles, in the modern West. As one can see in a noteworthy case like 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī (at the end of this article), that sort of transmission is often connected with Ibn 'Arabī's profound historical role in a wide number of Sufi orders (again, see Schimmel, op. cit., for interesting cases in India and even Malaysia). Invaluable evidence concerning Ibn 'Arabī's own oral teaching and practical activity as a spiritual master is provided in the important text by one of his closest and oldest disciples, translated and edited by Denis Gril, "Le *Kitāb al-inbāh 'alā tarīq Allāh de* 'Abdallāh Badr al-Habashī: un temoignage de l'enseignement spirituel de Muhyī l-dīn Ibn 'Arabī." (**A complete review of Prof Gril's study, which came to our attention too late to be included in this article, should appear in a future issue of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society.**)
Another typical illustration of the Shaykh's wider, and less purely "theoretical," influence among Sufis in (at least) the Arab world can be found in the studies of the later Moroccan Sufi Ibn 'Ajība (1747-1809) by J.-L. Michon: *Le Soufi Marocain Ahmad Ibn 'Ajība et son Mi'rāj: glossaire de la mystique musulmane* (Paris, 1973), and *L'Autobiographie (Fahrasa) du Soufi Marocain Ahmad Ibn 'Ajība* (Milan, 1982, second edition). In addition to bringing out the influence of Ibn 'Arabī's prayers *(awrād)* and poems in this context, such studies are extremely important—if not indeed indispensable—in giving a more concrete sense of the sort of practical and historical settings in which the transmission of these "influences" and teachings took place. We have tried to suggest something of the decisive importance and diversity of those contexts—which specialists often take for granted, but which are seldom self-evident to readers limited to translations and the purely literary dimension—in the discussions that follow.

throughout the Islamic world down to our own day, illustrated by such symbolically important (and otherwise disparate) figures as Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Khaldūn, or Ahmad Sirhindī.[559]

In light of the scope of each of these perspectives and the multitude of still largely unexplored problems and areas of research they suggest,[560] the translations discussed in this article can only serve to highlight

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[559] For some of the literary sources of this long line of critiques and defenses—in almost all cases, symptomatic of the lack of any serious interest in Ibn 'Arabī's own writings or teaching, limited to a few "classic" passages from the *Fusūs al-Hikam*—see the references by Osman Yahia in his *Histoire et classification,* vol. I, pp. 114-35, which are considerably expanded in the Arabic introduction to his edition (with H. Corbin), discussed **below at n. 88,** of the introduction to Haydar Āmulī's commentary on the *Fusūs al-Hikam (K. Nass al-Nusūs /"La Texte des Textes,"* Tehran, 1975), pp. 36-65 of the Arabic introduction. This can be supplemented, for certain regions, by related references and discussions in E. L. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, especially for the sources of one aspect of this controversy in the Maghreb and Egypt (pp. 92-131, otherwise unreliable in depiction of Ghazālī, Ibn 'Arabī, and later Sufism and Islamic philosophy in general); for the Yemen, see allusions by Ahmed Ateş in his article on Ibn 'Arabī in the *EI*, vol. III, pp. 710-11.

As with the most recent modern continuation of this controversy—i.e., the public debate over the attempted suppression of O. Yahia's new critical edition of the *Futūhāt* in Egypt in the late 1970s—most stages of this dispute are fascinating and revealing signs of underlying political and social tensions and conflicts in which, with rare exceptions the brief references to Ibn 'Arabī (whether pro or con) serve almost exclusively an ideological (and not intellectual or philosophic) function. Unfortunately, most secondary accounts, even by modern Western scholars, have been content to repeat the outward "theological" remains of these disputes rather than to investigate their actual contemporary implications in each case. (Two notable exceptions, carefully distinguishing the intellectual and socio-political elements of such controversies in their contemporary settings, are the study of Simnānī by H. Landolt discussed below **[n. 80],** and Y. Friedman's *Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī: An outline of his thought and a study of his image in the eyes of posterity,* Montreal, 1971; the case of Sirhindī is discussed more generally in the historical surveys of both Dr Schimmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 367ff., and M. Molé, *Las mystiques musulmans,* Paris, 1965, pp. 108-10.) Hopefully the many contemporary instances of persecution of Sufis or similar groups (e.g., most recently in Sudan and Iran) will encourage further healthy discrimination, in historical studies, between the intellectual and spiritual seriousness of such controversies (most often negligible, at best) and their specific ideological functions and significance in each particular case: see, in this regard, the illuminating remarks concerning three earlier classic "Sufi trials" (of Nūrī, Hallāj, and 'Ayn al-Qudāt) in C. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, 1955), pp.97-132.

[560] The limitations (for the most part implicit) of the translations and studies discussed below are in fact representative of two broader problems with most available work on other traditions of Islamic thought in general during this later period: (l) Scholarship (Islamic at least as much as Western) continues to focus mainly on Arabic (and Persian and Turkish sources from the "central" Islamic regions, and thus frequently reflects categories and judgments (e.g., of "decadence," "marginality," "dependency," etc.) which may or may not be applicable to developments in regions like Malaysia, Indonesia, Central Asia and China, non-Arab Africa, etc. (2) The limitations and distortions of the classical theological *cum*

our relative ignorance—historically speaking, at least—of this vast period of Islamic intellectual life and the riches it contains.[561] The works dealt with in this Part are introduced roughly in chronological order (according to the dates of their original author), but each section focuses on a different aspect of the Shaykh's broader heritage that is exemplified by the translation in question. This procedure should provide a framework within which non-specialists can also better appreciate the historical context and importance of these (and other forthcoming) contributions in this area. Of course this also means that the same weight cannot be given, in the limited space of this article, to other perspectives and aspects of these works that—depending on each reader's interests—are certainly equally deserving of further attention in each case. Fortunately, quite apart from their historical interest which is our main focus here, many of these books are themselves classics in one field or another of Sufi literature, chosen by their translators for their evident intellectual or spiritual value. Even in translation, those intrinsic qualities should be readily accessible to readers approaching them in that spirit.

I. Michel Chodkiewicz's translation of Awhad al-Din Balyānī's *K. al-Wahda al-Mutlaqa* [*Épître sur l'Unicité Absolue*. Pp.85. Paris: Les Deux Oceans. 1982.] is far more than a new (and greatly improved) version of a classic, frequently translated Sufi text often mistakenly attributed to Ibn ʿArabī.[562] Thanks to the

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philological treatment of Islamic disciplines become quite apparent where, in contrast with earlier periods, we have sufficient historical evidence to perceive more clearly both the intellectual and the socio-cultural complexities of later developments. Integrating those two approaches, however, requires a breadth of training and insight that are likely to remain quite rare in these fields.

[561] "Relative" ignorance because that ignorance (and corresponding "knowing") which concern our authors here clearly transcend any particular historical situation and even the traditions which serve (potentially, at least) to transmit and awaken that awareness. On the purely historical plane, what is remarkable is how much our current ignorance reflects not a lack of textual sources, but rather a sort of willful negligence or collective "amnesia"—extremely recent, historically speaking—flowing from the transformation of educational methods and social structures, and from movements of "reform" and "return to the sources" frequently involving the radical rejection of an immense cultural heritage of which these traditions are one integral part. The writings of ʿAbd al-Qādir (d. 1300/1813) discussed below—and their contrast with his perception by modern nationalists—are one particularly striking illustration of the very recent and radical nature of this transformation.

[562] The same book was originally translated at the turn of the century by T. H. Weir ("Translation of an Arabic Manuscript in the Hunterian Collection, Glasgow University" in the *JRAS* 33:4, 1901; reprinted as *Whoso Knoweth Himself,* London, 1976), who attributed it directly to Ibn ʿArabī. An Italian version was published in 1907 **by "Abdul-Hādī" [Ivan-Gustav Agueli; see M. Chodkiewicz's references, p. 17, n. 4 of the introduction],** followed by a French version (**in *La Gnose,* 1911**) most recently reprinted as *Le traité de l'unité,* "dit d'Ibn ʿArabī" (Paris, 1977), along with another translation and article by Abdul-Hādī. Abdul-Hādī's original introduction (pp. 19-21 of the 1977 edition) clearly raises the question of attribution and the likely authorship of "Balabānī" or "Balayānī," while the most recent editor (**G. Leconte,** p.10) follows M. Vālsan in definitely attributing it to "al-Balabānī."

author's extremely condensed notes and introduction—clearly the fruit of years of research and reflection not only on Ibn 'Arabī but also on the many other currents (and critiques) of later Islamic mysticism—this study actually constitutes an extraordinarily rich introduction to the new and distinctive dimensions of Ibn 'Arabī's thought, the underlying motivations (both historical and philosophic) for those contributions in the context of the development of Sufism, and the essential reasons for their remarkable historical success when compared with other efforts in the same direction. Mr. Chodkiewicz brings out these crucial points through his succinct allusions to four interrelated historical and doctrinal developments: (1) the identification of the real author of the work, a Persian Sufi master of Shiraz (d. 686/1288),[563] and other sources concerning his teaching; (2) the relations of Balyānī with the influential "monistic" Sufi teachings characteristic of Ibn Sab'īn (d. 669/1270) and his followers, and the fundamental differences separating them from the views of Ibn 'Arabī; (3) the partial awareness of these differences and of their deeper philosophic significance revealed in the famous critiques of later Sufism by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Khaldūn; and (4) allusions to the significance of this misattribution, as spread by the earlier translations, for the prevalent image of Ibn 'Arabī in the West, both popularly and in much scholarly writing. In each case, the historical references, which at first glance might appear to be merely scholarly details, actually serve to bring out certain fundamental (and still far too often neglected) aspects of Ibn 'Arabī's work and thought.

To begin with, this new translation, far more than its predecessors, has successfully caught the extraordinary, almost lyrical rhetorical power of Balyānī's brief work (pp. 45-79, including the extensive notes), that rigorous simplicity and "force incantatoire" (p. 38) which no doubt help explain its favor with the earlier translators and succeeding generations of students. Introduced as a sort of commentary

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Osman Yahia (*RG* Numbers 12, 181, 458) also recognizes both the apocryphal nature of the attribution and the multiplicity of titles, which apparently explains the eventual attribution to Ibn 'Arabī: one of those titles, the *R. fī al-Ahadīya* is very close to an authentic work of Ibn 'Arabī—on a very different subject—entitled *K. al-Alif,* or *K. al-Ahadīya.* That genuine work of the Shaykh has recently been translated by Abraham Abadi: *The Book of Alif (Or) The Book of Unity,* along with brief commentaries from the *Fusūs al-Hikam* (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society* 2, 1984).
M. Chodkiewicz's translation is based on a new, scientific **edition (see p.40),** drawing on a number of manuscripts mainly attributed to al-Balyānī (Osman Yahia lists only those Mss apocryphally attributed to Ibn 'Arabī), which is to be published with a collection of related Arabic texts on the question of *wahdat al-wujūd.* He notes that the same text exists under at least seven **titles (p. 19, n. 8),** and that his choice in this case *(R. al-Wahdat al-Mutlaqa)* "rests on purely doctrinal considerations" (i.e., close affinities with the school of Ibn Sab'īn). which are carefully explained in the rest of the commentary.

[563] M. Chodkiewicz also clears up the longstanding confusion—e.g.. in Brockelmann—of this individual with several later writers with the same last name, and explains at least some of the variations in spelling, which may have been already current by the time of Ibn Taymiyya. The most important new biographical information, which is in perfect accordance with the content of this book (see **the anecdote at n. 11 below),** is drawn from **Jāmī's *Nafahāt al-Uns,* pp. 258-62 in the edition of M. Tawhīdīpūr (Tehran, 1336/1958);** according to this account, Balyānī was a shaykh of the Suhrawardīya order.

on the famous *hadīth* "He who knows his self, knows his Lord,"[564] it is far less a theological or philosophic analysis than an extended *shath*—an "ecstatic utterance" expressing directly and without qualification an immediate personal realization of the ultimate Unity of God and the soul, and the "illusory" nature of all else when seen from that enlightened perspective. One cannot help but be reminded at every point—and it is here that the identification of the author as an influential Sufi shaykh of Shiraz, descended from a line going back to al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074), takes on its full importance—of the echo of so many famous Persian verses, reflected in a wide variety of images, on the same ecstatic theme of "*hameh ūst*" ("All is He!"). For the individual building blocks of this almost lyrical work— Balyānī's particular choice of Qur'anic verses, *hadīth* (especially the recurrent *hadīth al-nawāfil*), and *shatahāt* (from al-Hallāj and al-Bastāmī)—were the same familiar materials through which generations of earlier and later Sufi writers in that part of the Islamic world continued to express their spiritual insights in Persian poetry or Arabic prose. Clearly, then, what sets this work apart is not the originality (or exactitude) of its thought, but the artistry, simplicity and above all the passion with which it repeats that overpowering vision.

Indeed to a great extent it was precisely the growing pervasiveness and familiarity of these mystical symbols and forms of expression, even outside their original Sufi setting, and the concomitant risks of serious misunderstandings—at once practical, philosophic, and theological—that they pose when taken literally or simplistically, without regard to their appropriate context,[565] that help account for Ibn 'Arabī's

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[564] The translator has an excellent discussion (pp. 27-31) explaining the significance of the form of this *hadīth* adopted by Balyānī (i.e., beginning the concluding phrase with *fa-qad,* implying that one **already** knows/knew one's Lord), and underlining the very different interpretation sometimes given to this *hadīth* by Ibn 'Arabī, in view of the particular, highly "individualized" meanings of the notion of "lord" *(rabb)* in his thought.

More generally, Balyānī's use of *hadīth*, based on a limited selection of classic themes already dictated by a long preceding Sufi tradition, is in striking contrast with Ibn 'Arabī's procedure. The difference does not concern questions of "authenticity" where, as M. Chodkiewicz notes, both authors adhere to criteria other than those of the strictly historicist *muhaddithūn*—but rather the far greater *range* of materials and (at least relative) *independence* and originality of Ibn 'Arabī's interpretations, which often (like his treatment of the Qur'an) reflect a genuine inspiration and personal effort of meditation, instead of the repetition of accepted themes. (See also our discussion of his collection of *hadīth qudsi,* the *Mishkat al-Anwar,* **in Part I of this essay.)**

This is also one of the more obvious distinctions between Ibn 'Arabī and later writers of his "school," who seldom depart from his interpretations (especially in the *Fusūs*). That is, their familiarity with those interpretations, whether of Qur'an or *hadīth,* and their readiness to provide a coherent metaphysical explanation, eventually tend to obscure the (sometimes no doubt intentionally) shocking freshness and originality of Ibn 'Arabī's own formulations. (This is another advantage to discovering Ibn 'Arabī through reading the *Futūhāt,* where no such "insulating" body of traditional interpretation exists.)

[565] These risks of a sort of "misplaced literalism" with regard to Balyānī's language (and its equivalents throughout Sufi literature) are poignantly stated in Jāmī's story **(p. 22 in the introduction to this translation)** of a disciple of the Shīrāzī shaykh who let himself be bitten by a poisonous snake because. as he reproaches his master, "You yourself said that there is only God!" **M. Chodkiewicz cites (pp. 22ff)**

most distinctive personal contribution and the aspect of his work that had the greatest visible impact on subsequent Islamic thought: that is, his persistent focus on a comprehensive and elaborately balanced systematic framework (both theological and philosophic) for those following the spiritual Path—a framework which in the Shaykh's own writings, at least, is always at once metaphysical and highly practical. Balyānī's work, with its repeated literal insistence on the world and self alike as nothing but "illusion," was the perfect exemplification of those recurrent moral dangers and genuine illusions—antinomianism, quietism, and messianism—and those ostensibly "heretical" theological formulations which had to be overcome and resolved, on both the theological and the deeper philosophic or spiritual levels, if Sufism was to answer the more serious underlying objections of such critics as Ibn Taymiyya or Ibn Khaldūn.[566]

The "originality"—if not the comprehensiveness and relative effectiveness—of Ibn ʿArabī's response in this regard is often exaggerated in secondary accounts of his work. Almost all of Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111) later writing, for example, is directed towards countering the same theoretical and practical dangers and illusions that are so vividly illustrated throughout Balyānī's treatise; indeed the *hadīth* and *shatahāt* which Ghazali repeatedly discusses, and the misunderstandings he seeks to avoid, are precisely those chosen and emphasized (one might almost say "flaunted") by this later shaykh of Shiraz.[567]

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other statements by Balyānī transmitted by Jāmī (e.g., "Be God!" *[khudā bāshīd])* which, while comprehensible in the broader doctrinal context of this work, would likewise readily lend themselves to rather obvious misunderstandings. Whether or not such stories are apocryphal is of relatively little importance compared to their exemplary significance in this context.

[566] The translator discusses at some length the frequent condemnations of Balyānī (and of the "monist" interpretations of Sufism more generally) by Ibn Taymiyya. It is important to recognize that the underlying concerns of these and other related Islamic critiques are not limited to the particular (and to us often seemingly arbitrary) theological terms in which they were often formulated. We have mentioned antinomianism, quietism, etc., because these are real, historically visible consequences (and ever-present inner temptations) whenever the intellect fails to grasp the intended meaning of cognate spiritual teachings, in any civilisational setting. Long before Ibn ʿArabī or Ibn Sabʿīn and the purportedly "monist" and "theoretical" Sufism that is the ostensible target of such critics as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Khaldūn, one can find essentially the same criticisms and concerns constantly repeated, for example, in the works of al-Ghazālī (**see below and n. 13**).

[567] Many of the relevant passages by al-Ghazālī from this perspective, are collected in the series of translations by Father R. McCarthy to be found in his *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Boston, 1980), which also contains a useful annotated bibliography. Readers should be warned that at least 90% of the vast secondary literature on Ghazālī, including many translations, betrays no awareness of the unifying spiritual (both philosophic and Sufi) perspectives and multifaceted rhetorical methods and intentions that tie together his outwardly disparate writings. There is still no single study showing how Ghazālī creatively transformed the meaning of elements from other earlier intellectual traditions—Ash'arite *kalam,* Avicennan *falsafa*, Sufi authors and Shiite writings—in light of this central intention. Nor is there a single readily available source showing where his reworkings of those traditions may be guided by an internal, "descriptive" mirroring of metaphysical realities and their reflection in spiritual experience, and

Moreover, Ghazālī's favorite dialectical "tools" and vocabulary in that effort were drawn from the same Ash'arite kalam and Avicennan philosophy that are key elements of Ibn ʻArabī's own systematic thought, while similar efforts, using a different metaphysical vocabulary, were made by such lesser-known earlier figures as ʻAyn al-Qudāt Hamadānī and Suhrawardī.[568] Perhaps the most influential such systematic

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where—as is far more commonly the case—their particular form is dictated by an apologetic, defensive response to (or intellectual clarification of) the sort of theological/philosophical critiques and polemics evoked here.

In any event, Ghazālī is certainly the most important known "precursor" of the explicitly metaphysical aspect of Ibn ʻArabī's writings—the often cited "school of Ibn Masarra" being, so far as we know, a curious fiction inadvertently created by Asin Palacios. See the explanation of the textual misunderstandings on which that myth was built, in S. M. Stern's "Ibn Masarra, Follower of Pseudo-Empedocles, an Illusion" in *Actas do IV Congresso de estudios arabes e islamicos* (Leiden, 1971), and now reprinted in S. M. Stern's *Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Thought,* ed. F. W. Zimmerman (London, 1983) as article V]. Stern's remarks are confirmed by the recent discovery of authentic works by Ibn Masarra, which have no "pseudo-Empedoclean" elements, but are typical of the early Sufism of Sahl al-Tustarī. Probably the best introduction to this side of Ghazālī's thought (given the unfortunate inadequacy of most of the explanatory material for many of the existing translations from his *Ihyā 'Ulūm al-Dīn*) is his *Mishkāt al-Anwār,* which should be approached in the excellent recent French translation by Roger Deladrière, *Le Tabernacle des Lumières*. The frequently reprinted English "version" by W. H. T. Gairdner (originally London, 1924) completely changes the order and divisions of Ghazālī's text, entirely misrepresenting it as merely a sample of Sufi "exegesis" and giving no idea of the strict technical terminology and conceptual structure underlying Ghazālī's exposition.

The comparison of Ghazālī and Ibn ʻArabī also brings out the third, and most problematic, dialectical "ingredient" in their thought, namely, their debts to Shiite (or related Neoplatonic) authors, beyond the more apparent role of the Ikhwān al-Safāʼ—their common interest in not drawing attention to such readings being readily understandable. If Ibn Khaldun's accusations (in his *muqaddima)* that everything distinctive of the later, more "theoretical" schools of Sufism was "borrowed" from the Shiite "extremists" are as much polemical mudslinging as they are a concrete historical judgment, they do at least rest on a number of striking *formal* resemblances, e.g., in cosmology, astral cycles, spiritual hierarchies, eschatology, and the use of "negative theology." But quite apart from the more obvious adaptations of such themes in a writer like Ibn ʻArabī, there is considerable doubt whether the Neoplatonic ontology and negative theology one finds in those earlier Shiite sources actually represents the same kind of mystical, "spiritually descriptive" (and only secondarily "theoretical") function that it takes on in Ibn ʻArabī (and already in Ghazālī's *Mishkat*).

[568] The relative lack of influence of both of their efforts in Islamic circles probably has less to do with the martyrdoms of both thinkers as relatively young men, and more to do with their relative outspokenness and unwillingness to emphasize too exclusively the inner concordance between their spiritual insights and the more popular and legalistic understandings of the Islamic revelation—features which, as we have emphasized in Part I, are developed with scrupulous care and attention throughout Ibn ʻArabī's writings, and most extensively in the *Futūhāt.* (See additional discussions of this essential dimension of his work in several places below.)

elaboration of the metaphysical dimensions of Sufism. after the writings of Ibn 'Arabī, was developed in the works of his fellow Andalusian Sufi and near contemporary, Ibn Sab'īn, whose distinctively "monistic" forms of expression may also have had an indirect influence on Balyānī's writing.[569] Mr.

For this Suhrawardī (traditionally referred to as *"Maqtūl,"* to distinguish him from his influential Sufi homonyms in Baghdad, including the founders of the Suhrawardīya order, initiator of *the futuwwa* movement, etc.), see the many studies by Henry Corbin, and especially his translation of fifteen shorter mystical and philosophic works, *L'Archange empourpré* (Paris, 1976). There now also exists Corbin's and Jambet's *Le livre de la sagesse orientale* (Paris, 1987), which includes Corbin's translation of the complete metaphysical part of Suhrawardī's *magnum opus,* the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq,* along with large parts of the commentaries by Shahrāzūrī, Qutb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, and Mullā Sadrā Shīrāzī: together, these texts already constitute something like a history of this still largely unknown tradition of Islamic philosophy over a period of several centuries. In English, readers may refer to the excellent brief introduction to Suhrāwardī's life and work in S. H. Nasr's *Three Muslim Sages* (Delmar, N.Y., 1964), as well as *The Philosophy of Illumination* (Provo, Utah, 1999), which is the *Hikmat al-Ishraq* edited and translated by John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai.

For 'Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadānī, non-specialists interested in his mystical/ philosophical thinking—which seems to have been most appreciated among later Indian Sufis (see the translations and commentaries on his *Tamhīdāt* cited by A. Schimmel, *op. cit.*, Index under "'Ayn al-Qudāt")—still have in English only a few relatively short studies by T. Izutsu, despite the availability of excellent critical editions of his major works by **A. 'Usayrān (and A. Munzavī) [[ADD OMID SAFI THESIS]]**. Izutsu's studies include "Creation and the Timeless Order of Things: A Study in the Mystical Philosophy of 'Ayn al-Qudāt" (*The Philosophical Forum* 4, 1972); "The Concept of Perpetual Creation in Islamic Mysticism and in Zen Buddhism," in *Mélanges offerts à Henry Corbin* (Montreal, 1977); and "Mysticism and the Linguistic Problem of Equivocation in the Thought of 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī" (*Studia Islamica* 31, 1970). The first two articles, which bring out this Persian mystic's considerable affinities with the later thought of Ibn 'Arabī, are now more readily accessible in a French translation (along with two of Prof. Izutsu's other, more general studies of Islamic mystical thought) by M.-C. Grandry, *Unicité de l'Existence et Création Perpetuelle en Mystique Islamique* (Paris, 1980). A. J. Arberry's translation of the *Shakwa al-Gharīb,* an "apology" written shortly before his martyrdom, is a fascinating autobiographical document and introduction to 'Ayn al-Qudāt's lyrical Sufism, but does not give much idea of his more philosophic and technical writing: *A Sufi Martyr: The Apologia of 'Ain al-Qudāt al-Hamadhānī* (London, 1969).

[569] M. Chodkiewicz—following Massignon—indicates **(pp.23-25 [[OF?]])** that this influence could have passed through Ibn Sab'īn's disciple, the influential Arabic mystical poet (and effective founder of the Sab'īnīya *tarīqa* in Egypt) al-Shushtarī (d. 668/1269), with whom Balyānī may have studied during a pilgrimage to Mecca. Whatever their historical relations—and many expressions reminiscent of Ibn Sab'īn's ecstatic "monism" of Being can be found, apparently independently, in both earlier and later Persian mystical poetry—the distinction between that 'monistic' outlook and Ibn 'Arabī's far more subtle metaphysics and theology, which the translator underlines at many points in this text, are certainly instructive. **(He promises, at p.39, a mare detailed study of these contrasts in a future book on Ibn 'Arabī's thought.)**

Chodkiewicz 's comparative notes (based on extensive references to relevant passages of the *Futūhāt*)—through their detailed contrast of Balyānī's (and Ibn Sabʿīn's) rhetorically simplified, often intentionally paradoxical metaphysical formulations with Ibn ʿArabī's far more sophisticated "non-dualistic" meta-physics of *tajalliyāt*—clearly bring out the very different (if not ultimately opposed) practical and theoretical implications of the two perspectives.[570] Yet at the same time, precisely this contrast between these two widespread "systems" of later Sufi metaphysics—a distinction already noted by such critics as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Khaldun—helps remind us of the symbolic (and inherently relative) nature of the particular expressions of any theoretical schema in this domain, a point whose decisive practical importance was not always openly acknowledged by Ibn ʿArabī's commentators.[571]

Despite the completion of accessible editions of Ibn Sabʿīn's major works, there is still a remarkable lack of any extensive published Western studies of his thought. (The available sources, largely in Arabic or unpublished theses, are cited at **pp. 34-35 here.)** Readers should he cautioned that the more openly mystical, Sufi side of his thought emphasized here (which may itself, as the translator hypothesizes, have been influenced by Ibn ʿArabī's writings) seems to have been integrated with other substantial elements (psychology, epistemology, etc.) explicitly drawn from various earlier schools of Islamic philosophy (i.e., *falsafa)*: see, for example, the text of his *al-Masāʾil al-Siqilliyya, "Correspondance philosophique avec l'empereur Frédéric II de Hohenstaufen,"* edited by S. Yaltkaya and with a French introduction by H. Corbin (Paris, 1941), which gives some idea of his extensive philosophical training, strongly recalling Suhrawardī. For a brief but revealing overview, which also brings out the still unexplored differences between Ibn Sabʿīn and Shushtarī, see the selected texts from both authors in L. Massignon's *Recueil de textes inédits concernant l'histoire de la mystique en pays d'Islam* (Paris, 1929), pp. 123-40, and most notably the strange *isnād* of the *tarīqa sabʿīniyya* (cited pp. 139-40), mixing Plato and Aristotle, famous Sufis (*including* Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn al-Fārid), and such Islamic philosophers as Ibn Sina, Ibn Tufayl, and Ibn Rushd!

[570] M. Chodkiewicz generally seems to imply—no doubt rightly, and following a perspective that is already evident in both al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī (with regard, e.g., to similar sayings of al-Hallāj)—that Balyānī's work and outlook (and by extension, that of Ibn Sabʿīn and other Sufis, especially poets, sometimes employing similar expressions) can best be understood as a sort of rhetorical reduction (or in some cases, possibly an unreflective "spiritual realism") which may be justified on its own plane, provided that the reader or listener is able to supply the necessary metaphysical (and practical) qualifications. Something of the same sort seems to have been true of Balyānī himself, if we may judge by his prudent reaction (as reported by Jāmī: **see n. 11 above**) to the disciple bitten by the poisonous snake he had taken for "God."

[571] Although it is certainly assumed by the much wider group of Sufis—illustrated by the works of Nasafī and the later Qādiri author discussed in the following two sections—who tended to assimilate individual "pieces" of Ibn ʿArabī's terminology or teachings (e.g., concerning the "Perfect Human Being," *wahdat al-wujūd,* or *walaya* and prophecy) without the same concern for the systematic coherence and intellectual understanding of his thought that is so evident in Qūnawī and his successors. (In this regard, M. **Chodkiewicz notes [p. 36] the** interesting story of a meeting in Egypt between Ibn Sabʿīn and Ibn ʿArabī's two disciples Qūnawī and Tilimsānī, bringing out the latter's relatively greater affinities with Ibn

The translator's discussion of Ibn Taymiyya's famous attacks on (among other things) the more systematic metaphysical pretensions of later Sufism also serves to bring out those distinctive features of Ibn ʿArabī's writing which no doubt go far in explaining the overwhelming success of his "systematization" of Sufi doctrine in the later Islamic world when compared with the comparable efforts of such figures as Balyānī, Ibn Sabʿīn, or Suhrawardi. Those characteristics, illustrated in detail in Mr. Chodkiewicz's invaluable notes, are essentially (a) his extraordinarily careful attention, in unfolding the inner meaning of scripture, to the significance of the "letter" and smallest details of expression of the Qurʾan, *hadīth*, and Islamic 'law' (the *sharīʿa*); (b) his relative concentration on expressing his metaphysical insights in the vocabulary of kalam theology, rather than the suspect terminology of the philosophers; (c) his insistence on the central role of the Prophet, at every level of being, and of the superior efficacy (compared to other valid methods and paths) of the practical implementation of all of his teachings; and (d) his systematically balanced consideration of the needs and limitations of the full range of human types, capacities and social situations (not merely the spiritual elite) in his expression of his teachings.[572] Yet however important these features may have been, historically speaking, for the acceptance and wide-ranging influence of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching throughout the Islamic world, it must also be admitted that they do not always facilitate its accessibility to a non-Muslim audience.

In this light, the widespread interest in Balyānī's work in the West—despite its ironic misattribution to Ibn ʿArabī—is not really so surprising. In many ways, its distinctive features are almost the opposite of those outlined above: there is (a) no explicit reference (except for a few hints at the very end) to the indispensable role of spiritual practice and experience, and to the decisive differences of human capacity in that regard; (b) no stress (to put it mildly) on the practical or metaphysical importance of the Prophet and the *sharīʿa*, or indeed of any form of human responsibility, and (c) a corresponding emphasis (whose quietistic or antinomian implications are unavoidable) on the "illusory" nature of the world and the self; and (d) not only no appeal to the intellect and the intelligible order of the world at all levels of manifestation, but in fact a sort of "anti-intellectual" depreciation of any effort of either activity or understanding.[573] Moreover, the superficial resemblances of Balyānī's formulations to certain

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Sabʿīn—which are confirmed by his association, along with Shushtarī, as targets for later critiques of the "monist" *wujūdīya*.)

[572] Most of these characteristics are essentially shared, although in varying degrees, by al-Ghazālī (i.e., Abu Hāmid—not his brother Ahmad) in his Sufi writings, and no doubt also help account for his similarly widespread veneration (as "Imam," etc.) among Sufis and non-Sufis alike.

[573] It is important, both historically and philosophically, to note that although these points certainly do *not* apply to Ibn ʿArabī or to many other Sufi writers and teachers and their followers—and seldom or never led to the dramatic antinomian excesses *(ibāha)* and heresies cited by the polemicists in every age—they do point to real and socially important practical trends in later Sufism, especially in its more "popular" and vulgarized forms, that were an evident target both of earlier critics such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Khaldūn and of modern "reformers" mainly concerned with the purported this-worldly effects of such ideas and corresponding popular customs. One illustration of these tendencies is the fact that the greater part of the dozens of apocryphal treatises attributed to Ibn ʿArabī, as listed by Osman Yahia, concern magical and occult practices (astrology, etc.)—precisely the sort of superstition that is one of

popular conceptions of Hindu thought (especially the role of "Māya") are especially striking.[574] Although Mr. Chodkiewicz does not say so explicitly, there can be little doubt that the emphasis on the "universality" of the Shaykh's thought and teaching which has been a keynote of modern Western discussions owes a great deal to the facility (in both senses of the term) of Balyānī's little treatise. What he does demonstrate, convincingly and in detail, is that readers who take Balyānī to be Ibn ʿArabī will find it very difficult indeed to enter into the far more complex and challenging—if no less "universal"—world of the Shaykh's own writings and teachings.

II. If we were to follow a strictly chronological order, Roger Deladrière's translation of the *Tadhkirat al--khawāss wa ʿaqīdat ahl al-ikhtisās* [*La Profession de foi*, Pp.317. Paris: Sindbad/Editions Orientales. 1978.)—a bizarre mixture of Hanbalite *ʿaqīda* (a doctrinal statement following a standard kalam-like framework) and turgid "Sufistic" sermonizing in the florid rhetoric of a 10th or 11th century (AH) Qādirī author[575]—would come near the end of this article, illustrating the wide range of Ibn ʿArabī's formal or

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the prime targets of Ibn Khaldun's lengthy attacks and "debunking" of Ibn ʿArabī most later Sufism in the *Muqaddima.*

[574] This should not at all be taken to deny that one can ultimately find very similar conceptions in Ibn ʿArabī's own thought; but like most Islamic esoteric *writers* (including Shiite thinkers and philosophers, as well as Sufis), he is usually reluctant to refer too directly to realities and phenomena which—if they were misunderstood—could lead to negligence of one's ethical and social responsibility (*taklīf*). This reticence is not always so evident in the actual oral teaching and methods of spiritual masters, and the relative "frankness" of Nasafī's writings (see below) may partly correspond to a more restricted original audience.

[575] Note the following example, illustrating both the author's prolix style and his Qadiri affiliation: "…incomparable masters of the esoteric Truth, illustrious links in a chain extending from my lord, master of the masters of knowing, the quintessence of the Saints in God's proximity *(muqarrabūn)* and of those who know with certainty *(muqīnūn),* the master of the Way and the source of the esoteric Truth *(maʿdin al-Haqīqa),* the master ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlī—may God sanctify his sublime soul and illuminate his tomb" (pp. 103-4); "... our lord, our guide and our model in the path to God, the Shaykh Muhyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlī (p. 142); and "… according to our lord the Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir (p. 165)—each of these preceding long citations from ʿAbd al-Qādir's famous *K. al-Ghunya li-Tālibī Tarīq al-Haqq.*
The author of this work is evidently one "ʿAbd al-Samad al-Qādirī," cited as such in two of the oldest of eight manuscripts—the earliest of them dating only from the 11th/17th century—used in the critical edition that formed part of the translator's dissertation (1974). (**This information taken from the review by Prof. D. Gril in** *Annales Islamologiques,* **XX (1984), pp. 337-39 [[THIS CITATION IS FOR AI XX, RIGHT? LOOKS WRONG, THOUGH.]],** since these highly relevant facts are not mentioned in the brief notice concerning the edition given at the beginning of this published volume.) The work is not listed in either of Ibn ʿArabī's long lists of his own writings, and it is especially significant that the book itself contains no indication that the original author—i.e., as opposed to the modern translator—had the slightest pretense of attributing it to Ibn Arabi, especially since both the style and contents (apart from the specific borrowings mentioned below) are so totally incompatible with any of Ibn ʿArabī's known works.

literary "influences" in later Sufism and the important fact that sort of influence was often relatively superficial, reflecting in many cases no serious understanding or study of his works.[576] However, we shall mention it here because, like Balyānī's work (only perhaps more so), it offers an ideal opportunity to bring out further characteristic and fundamental features of Ibn ʿArabī's spiritual teaching and method—precisely because its style, content, and intentions (aside from the few passages borrowed literally from his writings) are so totally different from those of the Shaykh al-Akbar.

Unfortunately, rather than using this work (which is otherwise of only limited historical interest) for that purpose, Professor Deladrière has astonishingly chosen to accept—or more honestly, to promote[577]—its

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Ibn ʿArabī (as noted by D. Gril in the above-mentioned review) occasionally does mention ʿAbd al-Qādir, including a spiritual encounter with him in the *barzakh,* but not with the sort of worshipful quotation of lengthy passages (and the almost idolatrous encomiums) found in the sections cited above. Likewise, the close association of Hanbalism and Qādiri Sufism evidenced here is not surprising (although it is by no means the rule among later Qādirīs either), given that ʿAbd al-Qādir himself was a fervent Hanbalite preacher (see article 'Abd al-Kadir al-Djīlānī" in *EI*, I, pp. 68-70) and that many other Hanbalites, perhaps even more than with some of the other legal *madhhab*s, were also prominent Sufis, including most notably ʿAbdullāh Ansārī of Herat. (The notorious critiques of Sufism by Ibn Taymiyya and other later Hanbalite *fuqahāʾ*, sometimes themselves associated with more "moderate" orders, were commonly directed at what they considered reprehensible "excesses or innovations.")

[576] And sometimes, as in this case (see below), actually turning up in contexts almost diametrically opposed to the spirit. and intentions of his teaching. (See also the general observations of Professor Schimmel with regard to the widespread later poetic usage of Ibn ʿArabī's technical terminology, **cited in n. 2 above.)**

[577] Given the obvious Hanbalite-Qādirī allegiance and much later Arabic style of this work **(see n. 21 above),** which could scarcely escape even a beginning student, one must choose between two hypotheses concerning the translator: either unusual negligence—which is difficult to imagine, given his able rendering of the Arabic and evident learning (including considerable study of Ibn ʿArabī's own works) that are manifested both here and in his earlier articles and later excellent translations of several Sufi "classics" [including Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwar* **(ref. at n. 13 above),** Kalābādhī's *K. al-Taʿarruf* (*Traité de soufisme: les Maîtres et les Étapes,* Paris, 1981), and the collected fragments and sayings of Junayd (*Junayd: Enseignement spirituel),* Paris, l983]—or a sort of well-intentioned "pious fraud" reminiscent of Farabi's similar use of Plotinus (of the *Theology)* as "Aristotle" for the purposes of his famous exoteric "Harmonization" of Plato and Aristotle.

Not only does the translator carefully refrain from mentioning all the most obvious signs of the true authorship just mentioned **(n. 21),** which could scarcely fail to strike even the most naive reader of the French version (much less the Arabic), but in discussing (pp.32-39) the *ʿaqīda* borrowed from the beginning of the *Futūhāt,* he forthrightly misrepresents it as the Shaykh's "major" profession of faith (the following passages being dismissed as "two other minor professions of faith") in a way that is more or less the exact *contrary* of what one actually finds stated repeatedly and explicitly in precisely those same passages of the *Futūhāt.* (**See below, notes 27, 29-31.)**

attribution to Ibn ʿArabī. His motives for this pious deed are clearly stated at the end of his Introduction (p.78):

> "Thus it seemed to us that the best means of unquestionably refuting every accusation against Muhyī al-Dīn [by "Ibn Taymiyya as representative of the *Sharīʿa*"] was to publish his Profession of Faith, which is in perfect agreement with the doctrine of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-jamāʿa*"[578]

Unfortunately, while there is indeed no doubt about the "pure doctrinal orthodoxy" (p.76) of this particular book from that particular point of view—since its author's stated purpose, from first to last, is to outline the simple creed of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* (the epithet the Hanbalites applied to themselves and those rare Muslims they approved of) and to show how the other 72 troublemaking "sects" of Islam (not to mention the rest of humanity!) are all eternally damned to Hellfire—one wonders whether even the most obtuse of those "*Hashawīya*" would ever have given credence to its attribution to Ibn ʿArabī.

The framework of the book as a whole (sections 1-13 and 159-65, in the translator's division), as we have just indicated, is the famous *hadīth* of the "73 sects," interpreted here—in the polemic (in fact often fanatic) heresiographical language used throughout the work—to exclude from the single "saved sect" all Muslims but the author's own handpicked group, who are defined by the Hanbalite *ʿaqīda* outlined in the intervening sections: chapters on *Tawhīd*, the "Reality of the Prophet," Faith, and the first four Sunni Imams and their rank (sections 88-158, the main body of the work). In all but the first two chapters, there is nothing remotely resembling the treatment of those subjects in any of the known works of Ibn ʿArabī, and indeed their Hanbalite dogmatism and polemic intention leave little room for more than brief allusions to the author's apparent Qādirī Sufism. The visible "influences" of Ibn ʿArabī, apart from one or two verses,[579] are some very brief quotations in the section on the "Reality of the Prophet,"[580] plus the opening *ʿaqīda* (sections 14-27), which is quoted in part—with some brief but

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[578] Despite the tendentious nature of the latter part of the Introduction (pp. 32ff.), the two opening sections (pp. 11-31) do contain some valuable biographical information on Ibn ʿArabī, and a brief discussion of his supposed "Zāhirī" tendencies in *fiqh*. However, while we have already stressed the relative negligence of these elements of the Shaykh's thought and background in Western literature until recently (a tendency itself reflecting later Islamic treatments of Ibn ʿArabī's intellectual "system" in relative separation from its practical, operative spiritual dimensions), readers would certainly be better advised to consult Ibn ʿArabī's own, quite radically different treatment of those traditional materials—as illustrated in several of the recent translations mentioned in Part I—rather than this Hanbalite document, which is far removed from Ibn ʿArabī's typical understanding and spiritual depth of treatment of those scriptural and traditional materials.

[579] In addition to those items identified by the translator, D. Gril **(in the review cited in n. 21 above)** also mentions the poem borrowed at the end and in section 26. The fact that none of these borrowings are explicitly referred to Ibn ʿArabī is certainly understandable in the author's Hanbalite setting, where the Shaykh's name was by no means universally revered, to say the least.

[580] Again, most of these passages, as the translator indicates, seem to he paraphrased from the *Shajarat al-Kawn* or other works concerning the "Muhammadan Reality": **Prof. Gril (see n. 21) has** recognized

significant additions and exclusions—from Ibn ʿArabī's *Muqaddima* to the *Futūhāt*. However, what is significant about these two brief "borrowings"[581]—and so representative of much subsequent popular use of Ibn ʿArabī's work—is that they are ultimately literary or stylistic, phrases and terminology borrowed without any (implicit or explicit) reference to or deeper understanding of their original systematic context and implications.[582]

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section 57, e.g., as a quotation from Ibn ʿArabī's *R. al-Ittihād al-Kawnī,* the text he edited and translated (see our review of that work in **Part I of this essay**). It is typical, however, that those borrowings are used here in an apologetic, defensive, and historicist sense which reflects a complete misunderstanding (or intentional misrepresentation) of Ibn ʿArabī's own distinctively ontological (and therefore necessarily universal) use of these concepts. (See also **notes 27-28 below.)**

[581] This *'aqīda* corresponds very roughly to the *Futūhāt* I, pp.36.6-38.3, but with some very significant internal changes and omissions—not to mention the suppression of Ibn ʿArabī's essential qualifications of this passage (see nn. 29-31)—which are especially revealing of this Hanbalite author's radically different understanding and intentions. One especially striking example is the passage on the divine "Speech" *(kalām),* which in this version (Section 24, p. 98 of the translation) becomes a series of separate outward *historical* acts: "... By it He spoke to Moses and He called it Torah; by it He spoke to David and called it Psalms, to Jesus and called it Gospel…" (including lines completely absent from the *Futūhāt* here in any form!).
In the corresponding passage in the *Futūhāt* (I, p.38, lines 20-21) one finds something entirely different from this literalist, historicist Hanbalite perspective: "... with this [Speech] He spoke to Moses, and He called it Revelation *(tanzīl),* Psalms, Torah, and Gospels, *without letters or sounds or voice or languages*..." What Ibn ʿArabī is referring to here is already quite clearly—although his meaning is amplified in hundreds of later pages throughout the *Futūhāt*—precisely the eternal spiritual Reality which is at once the Source of all historical "revelations" and the common object of the path and teachings of the *awliyā'* in *any* historical or religious setting. As always in Ibn ʿArabī—and that is precisely the point of *his* "credo of the *'awāmm*"—this formulation encompasses and illuminates the popular comprehension of the Hanbalites (and indeed of virtually all the other "schools," in this and other religions), but it is in no way reducible to that limited vision, and in fact directs readers precisely beyond whatever partial ("believed", in Ibn ʿArabī's terms) mental images and conceptions they may happen to have of that Reality.
[582] This is especially obvious in this author's references to the "Muhammadan Reality," which here is little more than empty boasting on a sectarian historical level, without the any inkling of the meaning and implications of that central term in Ibn ʿArabī's own writing. (As such, it is a typical illustration of the sort of literary "influence" of Ibn ʿArabī's terminology and concepts without any serious understanding of what they represent, and indeed often in ways quite contrary to his intentions: see already nn. 2, 26, and the entire section on Nasafī below.) In Ibn ʿArabī, for example, this Reality (with its many equivalent names: see S. Hakim, *al-Muʿjam al-Sufi* [**discussed in Part I, n. l],** pp. 347-52 and 158-68, plus the long list of cross-references in each case) is consistently treated in a way that brings out its universal, ongoing manifestations, both in Islam and other religions (and prophets) and at all the relevant levels of the "Perfect Human Being" *(insān kāmil).* It is perhaps worth adding that in Ibn ʿArabī these implications and

This point is especially clearly—and ironically—illustrated in the case of the opening *'aqīda* borrowed from the *Futūhāt*. For Ibn 'Arabī, far from being the "credo of the elite" as in the title of this work (*'aqīdat ahl al-ikhtisās*), it is described as the "credo of the commoners ... among the peoples of *taqlīd*,"[583] and is immediately followed by two long, extremely complex symbolic and mystical discussions which together make up what Ibn 'Arabī explicitly calls his own—how radically and irreducibly different!—*'aqīdat ahl al-ikhtisās min ahl Allāh.*[584] But that second stage is only the beginning: "Now as for the *'aqīda* concerning God of the quintessence of the elite (*khulāsat al-khāssa*), that is a matter even above this one, which we have spread throughout this book …"[585] In other words,

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manifestations are by no means a matter of some abstract theoretical "system," but of concrete and particular realizations in the life of each individual. (The best available illustration to this theme is in the recent translations and commentaries on the *Fusūs al-Hikam* **discussed in Part I.)**

[583] The precise terms of Ibn 'Arabī's descriptions of this '*aqīda,* both preceding and immediately following it, are extremely important and deserve to be cited in full, although we cannot elaborate here on the technical meanings of each of the terms he uses. *Futūhāt* I, p. 37.5: "Appendix, containing what should be believed (*i'tiqād*) among the common public *(al-'umūm, hoi polloi)*: it is the credo of the people of outward submission *(islam),* accepted *(musallama)* without any inquiry *(nazar)* into (rational or scriptural) indications (*dalīl*) or (spiritual and experiential) proof *(burhān).* *Futūhāt*, I, p.38: "So this [preceding statement, including a long concluding section not used by the Hanbalite author] is the credo of the masses *('awāmm)* among the people of submission *(islām),* the people of *taqlīd,* and the people of *nazar* [in Ibn 'Arabī's usage, primarily the *mutakallimun,* but also similar types of philosophers], summarized and abridged." The full meaning of these terms will be recognized by those who have fre-quented Ibn 'Arabī's works. In any event, there can be little doubt that such terms as *'awamm* and *taqlīd* refer here—as likewise in many other traditions of Islamic thought—to precisely the sort of rigorous non-thinking (by no means exclusively Hanbalite) so perfectly illustrated and defended in this particular book.

[584] *Futūhāt* I, p. 47, lines 7-8. This description of the intervening sections (pp. 41-47) as summarizing "the belief of the people of the *elite* among the people of God (one of Ibn 'Arabī's favorite expression's for the true Sufis) who are between intellectual inquiry *(nazar)* and experiential unveiling" (I, p. 41.3) has been quoted because it provides such an ironic commentary on the pretensions evident in this later Hanbalite text. In Ibn 'Arabī's longer description (I, p.38, lines 22-28) of these two "intermediate" and already more distinctively Sufi "creeds"—entirely different, incidentally, in their subjects and forms of expression—he describes these true *"ahl al-ikhtisās"* as "the elite of the people of God among the people of the Path of God, those who truly realize the divine Truth (*al-muhaqqiqun,* in its Sufi usage), the people of direct spiritual unveiling *(kashf)* and true Being (or "ecstatic finding," *wujūd*)." To describe this stage as "minor" (as the translator does), in relation to the preceding credo (n. 29), represents a perspective which—although no doubt faithfully Hanbalite—is certainly radically different from Ibn 'Arabī's.

[585] *Futūhāt* I, p.47, lines 7ff.: the passage continues "… because most intellects, *being veiled by their thoughts,* are unable to perceive this because of their lack of (spiritual) purification *(tajrīd)*" (emphasis ours). The fact that the *Futūhāt* in its entirety contains clear but "dispersed" allusions to the highest

the ground and true meaning of Ibn 'Arabī's opening *'aqīda*—and the immeasurable distance separating it from the perspective of this one-dimensional Hanbalite "profession of faith"—can only be fully appreciated by one who has assimilated all the teachings and insights of the *Futūhāt* and (most importantly) the profound spiritual realization underlying them.

No doubt the translator of this work is quite justified in insisting throughout his Introduction that Ibn 'Arabī was indeed "muslim," "sunni," "orthodox" (and many other things besides),[586] but readers of this work will learn nothing—and indeed are likely to be seriously misled about the deeper, perennial dimensions of such terms in the life and teaching of the Shaykh and the ways he suggests they can be realized (the crucial dimension of *tahqīq*). "*Ahl al-sunna*," like "catholic," has several possible levels of meaning. As we have indicated in Part I of this article, both *kalām* and *fiqh* are extremely important— and still largely unstudied—aspects of Ibn 'Arabī's thought, especially in the *Futūhāt*. But his distinctive personal treatment and multidimensional understanding of both subjects, consistently transcending the sectarian and dogmatic approach of the traditional *madhāhib*, is a sort of polar opposite to the fanatic dogmatism of this later Hanbalite tract.

III.   The widely read Persian works of the Kubrāwī shaykh 'Azīz al-Nasafī (d. late 7th/ 13th century) illustrate some important aspects of the initial reception of Ibn 'Arabī's work, on a more practical and less purely theoretical level, among Persian and Central Asian Sufis, a movement that is already evident in the direct relations of Nasafī's own master Sa'd al-Dīn al-Hamū'ī (d. 650/1253) with both Ibn 'Arabī and Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī.[587] Not only does Nasafī's work (like that of Balyānī above) represent a vital,

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spiritual reality and truth, which each reader must "put together" according to the degree of their spiritual insight, is stated even more clearly at I, p. 38, lines 25-28: "Those [clearer statements of the Truth] are separated and scattered, as we have mentioned. So may he on whom God has bestowed their understanding recognize (the truth of) their matter and distinguish them from the other things. For that is the True Knowledge *(al-'ilm al-haqq)* and the Authentic Saying (*al-qawl al-sidq). There is no goal beyond It, and '*the blind and the truly seeing are not alike*' [cf. Qur'an 6:50, etc.] in Its regard …".

[586] See n. 24 and the discussions of translated genuine works of Ibn 'Arabī partly illustrating these points, as he understood them**, in Part I.**

[587] For Hamū'ī's contacts with Qūnawī and a description of the contents of his letter to Ibn 'Arabī, see M. Molé's Introduction to his edition of the *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil* (and several other collections of short treatises) of Nasafī (Tehran, 1998 reprint of 1962 edition, pp. 7-8). Since Hamū'ī knew Qūnawī in Damascus before Ibn 'Arabī's death, it seems almost certain that he did have some personal contact with the Shaykh. Hamū'ī's influence is visible throughout Nasafī's works, where he is constantly cited as "our master," etc.: see the further discussion of their relations in Molé's Introduction, op. cit., pp.7-21. A number of early shaykhs of the Kubrawiya order have been closely studied in works by several scholars which together give us probably the most detailed picture, both in quantity and quality of discussion, of any comparable period and region of Sufi activity. (These studies also make it clear that Hamū'ī's and Nasafī's relative interest in the ontological and theoretical aspects of Ibn 'Arabī's work was not shared by other important contemporaries in that same "order": see, e.g., the references to Simnānī below.)

long-established current of Sufi thought and expression in its own right (in which, following Tirmidhī, the more theoretical writings—often in Persian—of Ahmad Ghazālī and ʿAyn al-Qudāt Hamadānī had played a formative role), but at the same time it brings out quite sharply, even more than Balyānī, the vast range of problems and complex issues (both practical and theoretical) that had already come to the forefront in the development of Sufism prior to Ibn ʿArabī, and which in large part helped structure both his own creative response and the subsequent uses and transformations of his writings in the eastern Islamic world. Moreover, the comparison of Ibn ʿArabī and Nasafī (and the tendencies their differing formulations represent) is not only historically illuminating. It is also a salutary philosophic reminder of the full range of ethical, political, theological, and practical problems that one inevitably encounters (in any cultural context) in attempting to realize the deeper spiritual intentions of those writers (or of the prophets who are their own guides and inspiration).[588]

The wide diffusion and lasting popular influence of Nasafī's writings—a success which may be explainable, at least in part, precisely by their characteristic directness and relative lack of subtlety and overt systematic concerns (whether theoretical or practical)—can be judged by the profusion of manuscripts and early translations (especially Turkish) of his works. Their relative accessibility is no

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For Nasafī himself, see also two studies by F. Meier, "Das Problem der Natur im esoterischen Monismus des Islams" (*Eranos-Jahrbuch* 14, 1946), and "Die Schriften des ʿAzīz al-Nasafī" (*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 52, 1953), as well as M. Molé's article on "Les Kubrawiyya entre sunnisme et shiisme" (*Revue des études islamiques* 29, 1961). The classic study of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā himself is F. Meier's German introduction to his edition, *Die Fawāiʾih al-ǧamāl wa-fawātih al-ǧalāl des naǧm ad-dīn al-kubrā* (Wiesbaden, 1957). For Nūr al-Dīn Isfarāyinī (and his disciple Simnānī, discussed **further at n. 80 below),** see especially the long Introduction to H. Landolt's edition of his *Correspondance spirituelle* with Simnānī (Tehran, 1972), and his Introduction, translation of Isfarāyinī's *Kāshif al-Asrār,* and edition of that work and related Persian letters of spiritual guidance in *Kāshif al-Asrār* (Tehran, 2005 repint of 1980 edition). This latter work, which in fact constitutes a history of many aspects of the early Kubrāwīya order more generally, has now been republished, in a revised and more accessible version, as *Le Révélateur des Mystères: traité de soufisme* (Lagrasse, France, 1986). For more detailed bibliography (including many other studies by Meier and Molé), see both Landolt, op. cit., and R. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens* (Wiesbaden, 1981 reprint of parts I and II of 1965 and 1967, respectively),* which also offers a broader historical perspective on this movement. For the important figure of Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, see **n. 62 below.**

[588] Seen in this light, detailed historical research (whether socio-cultural or "doctrinal" and philological in focus) can be of considerable philosophic value, even when the researchers themselves are relatively unconcerned with the spiritual dimensions of their subject. One of the limitations of translations of Sufi texts aimed mainly at "introducing" "Sufism," which still includes most of the English books readily available to students, is that they tend to present an idealized, abstract image leaving out the full range of actual problems and issues (with their historical particularities) with which individual Sufis have necessarily always been involved. The studies just mentioned **(n. 33)** are especially helpful in that regard, in that they help bring out aspects of Sufi practice (and life in a particular medieval society) which were often taken for granted in mystical *literature*—and for that reason are often "invisible" to modern readers.

doubt also reflected in the remarkable series of Western versions of his brief *Maqsad-i Aqsā* which for several centuries constituted one of the few translated sources on Sufism in Europe, beginning with **A. Mueller's Turkish edition and Latin translation (Brandenburg, 1665), then F. Tholuck's influential handbook on "the pantheistic theosophy of the Persians" (Berlin, 1821),** and E. H. Palmer's English "paraphrase" [*Oriental Mysticism: a Treatise on Sufiistic and Unitarian Theosophy of the Persians*. Pp. xiv + 84. London: Routledge. 2008. (Reprint of 1867 edition.)].[589] Yet while it is not difficult to recognize, with considerable regret, the wider intellectual consequences of taking a work like the *Maqsad-i Aqsā* (and moreover, in a truncated, grossly inadequate summary) as somehow intellectually or spiritually representative of "Sufism" in general, Palmer's paraphrase does retain a certain usefulness for specialists who can approach it with an awareness of the underlying text and its historical background, since Nasafī sometimes states his own opinions more explicitly there than elsewhere.[590]

Fortunately, though, Isabelle de Gastines' recent translation of two of Nasafī's longer writings, the *Manāzil-i Sā'irīn* and *Insān-i Kāmil* [*Le Livre de l'Homme Parfait*. Pp.381. Paris: Fayard. 1984.], gives a far more comprehensive and revealing view of this fascinating figure. Both "books" included in this trans-

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[589] For details on the manuscripts and translations, see Molé's edition of *al-Insān al-Kāmil* **(n. 33 above)**, pp. 1 and 28-56, as well as F**. Meier's article on Nasafī's writing's (ref. at n. 33).**

Palmer's opening assertion (p. ix) that "this work was originally written in Turkish and translated into Persian by Khwarazim Shah" gives some idea of its overall accuracy and quality. The exactitude and method of his "paraphrase"—which completely alters Nasafī's chapter divisions, and in which it is often impossible to decide where Palmer is interjecting his own extraneous remarks—can be judged by comparing his "Part III" (pp. 43-44, on *walāya* and *nubuwwa),* with Molé's complete translation (roughly twice as long) of the corresponding chapter 5 of Nasafī's work (at pp. 15-18 of his Introduction to the above-mentioned edition). The reprint publisher's assertion (on the jacket) that "Some works stand the test of time better than others" and that this one "is still an indispensable tool for Islamic scholars" is an ironic illustration—among the multitude that could be cited by any teacher in this or other areas of Islamic thought—of the long-lasting damage that can be done by inadequately prepared and annotated translations of important works, not least by discouraging any subsequent attempt at a more adequate treatment.

[590] Most notably on the question of *walāya* and *nubuwwa* (= Palmer, pp.43-44), according to discussions by M. Molé and F. Meier, referring to the relations between the *Maqsad* and Nasafī's longer *Kashf al-Haqā'iq*: see, e.g., Molé, pp.15-27 of the Introduction to *al-Insān al-Kāmil*. Another advantage of the *Maqsad,* when compared, for example, to the texts included in *Le livre de l'Homme Parfait,* is its relative concision and systematic form, which brings out more clearly the overall structure of Nasafī's concerns—although one would hesitate to call this a "system," if compared to the intellectual coherence evident in Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators discussed below. Unfortunately, even with some awareness of the likely Persian and Arabic equivalents, one can never be very sure how close Palmer's "paraphrase" is to the original terms. (For the full measure of the exactitude and complexity of that original terminology, whether in Persian or Arabic, see the many illustrations in the notes to H. Landolt's translation of Isfarāyinī's *Kāshif al-Asrār* **[n. 33 above**] and the detailed French and Persian indexes to that study. Many of Prof. Landolt's "notes" there—reminiscent of Kraus's famous *Jābir ibn Hayyān*—are actually separate monographs on the development of these Sufi concepts and technical terms.)

lation are actually collections of Nasafī's letters in response to questions from his disciples or other Sufis; these particular titles, the overall order and number of treatises, and even the prefaces purporting to explain that order all seem to have been added (or at least revised) after their original composition, either by Nasafī or by later "editors."[591] While raising a number of serious interpretive problems, the particular circumstances of their composition do go a long way toward explaining some of the most striking characteristics of both of these works, features which make this translation especially fascinating, if also sometimes frustrating, reading

Those unusual characteristics, which in many respects are certainly typical of the behavior of a living shaykh with his disciples (but *not* so commonly of Sufi prose works destined for an indeterminate public), include: (a) Nasafī's relative disorder and lack of concern for formal systematic coherence, whether in his practical advice or in his treatment of theological and metaphysical issues, an impression that may be partly explicable by the different inner aptitudes and conditions of his particular correspondents; (b) his open, informal style, showing no fear of (apparently) contradicting himself or admitting his own uncertainty and hesitation on crucial issues, sometimes verging on a systematic skepticism—features which are remarkably revealing (for medieval Islamic literature) of Nasafī's own character and personality; and (c) his apparent (but as we shall see, quite problematic) "openness" and explicitness in discussing the most controversial esoteric questions. All these distinctive features— which are sometimes so striking here, when compared with most classical Sufi prose, that one could almost imagine oneself in California[592]—may also reflect the widespread socio-political disorder and

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[591] See Molé's introduction to his edition for an explanation of the complex and problematic manuscript history of these works, all of which later circulated under many name's, with the same treatise often appearing in roughly the same form in several different collections. In addition to a vast number of ordinary variant readings (pp.488-557), Molé also includes (pp. 444-82) long alternate sections (often equivalent to several pages in translation) found in certain manuscripts of these treatises. The French translation contains no reference to those serious problems which have a potentially important bearing on how one interprets the work as a whole—e.g., how much is Nasafī's own writing, what may have been changed or interpolated by later compilers, etc. The title adopted here, as Molé notes (intro., p. 38), is almost certainly due to a later compiler, and quite possibly to a confusion with Jīlī's much more systematic and celebrated work (see below) of the same name.

In general, readers should be cautioned that the translator here—as in her preceding version of Attar's *Musībatnāmeh* (*Le livre de l'épreuve,* Paris, Fayard, 1981, with preface by A. Schimmel)—has adopted a relatively popular or free literary method of translation (often paraphrasing or dropping several lines, and with essentially no explanatory introduction, detailed notes, or index) directed toward the "general public" in the broadest sense. The result is often less repetitive and more immediately "readable" and aesthetically pleasing (to our modern taste), but at the same time tends to obscure those meanings and issues that would require any more extensive acquaintance with the author and his historical context. (Those interested in Nasafī himself or the Kubrāwīya, for example, will therefore still have to refer directly to the Persian texts and studies cited above.)

[592] By this we are referring to Nasafī's remarkably open, relatively non-dogmatic, and frequently pragmatic or even "experimental" attitude—as in his repeated indications of uncertainty as to whether withdrawal from this world, or (ascetic) participation in it, is a better spiritual method—and his continued acknowledgment of the 'spiritual "data," focusing on what actually works in a given case. As

consequent greater freedom of expression in Ilkhanid Iran and Central Asia after the Mongol invasion.[593] But more importantly, they are also indicative of certain broader (both earlier and ongoing) Sufi traditions and tendencies in that region (already visible, for example, in Balyānī's work, but dramatically illustrated in many Persian Sufi poets) that helped determine the particular forms of "reception" of Ibn 'Arabī's writings —just as earlier, in the case of al-Tirmidhī or certain Shiite sources, they had helped shape the problems that Ibn 'Arabī was intent on resolving.

The significant contrasts between Nasafī and Ibn 'Arabī are equally apparent whether we consider their treatment of the practical questions of spiritual discipline and method or more "theoretical" and doctrinal issues. Here we shall concentrate on a few typical theological/ philosophical questions, since they so clearly illustrate the types of widespread, potentially controversial problems for which Ibn 'Arabī's works, through their adaptation by Qūnawī and later interpreters (discussed below), were subsequently to provide more adequate and widely accepted solutions. These closely interrelated problems—since all of them are only facets of what Nasafī (following many other Sufis and Shiite

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just noted, these characteristics may actually be typical of many Sufi masters in their real life, but they are rather striking when compared to most of the *literature* of Islamic mysticism, in which (as with the Hanbali/Qadiri text discussed above) theological considerations of one sort or another are usually much more visible. (This impression may also have to do in part with the free and uncommented nature of this particular translation, as indicated in the preceding note.)

[593] This extremely unusual set of political circumstances—in which Islam (and Sunni forms in particular) actually ceased to be the state religion and (to some extent, at least) the state-enforced law for close to a century—is cited in a variety of connections in the studies by Landolt, Molé, and Meier mentioned above **(n. 33):** the eventful political role of Sufis like Isfarāyinī, in particular, is discussed in detail in H. Landolt's introduction to his *Kāshif al-Asrār,* pp. 15-19 and related notes. The broader importance of these socio-political conditions—including the control of *waqf* endowments by the Shiite philosopher and scientist Nasīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī, as Mongol *wazīr*—in encouraging the spread of Avicennan philosophy and "speculative mysticism" (among other "heterodox" movements) in the eastern Islamic world, is evoked by W. Madelung in his "Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Ahsā'ī's Synthesis of *kalām,* Philosophy, and Sufism," now readily available in his *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London, 1985), selection XIII (pp. 147-56). (See also the illustrative case of Ibn Abī Jumhūr's open positive reference to the transmigration of human **souls, n. 46 below.)**
It should be stressed that the consequences of this temporary period of relative "intellectual freedom" were quite different from (if not indeed the exact opposite of) those following the Safavid imposition of clerical Twelver Shiism several centuries later. The widespread veneration of 'Ali and concern with *walāya* that is so evident with Nasafī and other Sufis of this time—and which is more closely analyzed in an extensive literature which can be found in the works cited **at n. 33—**seem to have had little or nothing to do with the quite distinct learned Twelver Shiite legal and *hadīth* schools during this period. (The case of the Ismaili movement after the Mongol invasions seems to have been quite different: there the interpenetrations with Iranian Sufism were so profound that Sufis like Nasafī (see Molé's introduction, pp. 20-27) and Shabistārī (see H. Corbin's edition and translation of an Ismaili commentary on his *Gulshān-i Rāz* [*Trilogie ismaélienne,* Tehran, 1961, pp. 1-174 of the French translation, section III]) were apparently "adopted" as their own by later Persian Ismailis.

thinkers) understands by the different dimensions of human beings' "Resurrection" (*qiyāma*)—are (1) the relation of *nubuwwa* (or *risāla*, i.e., prescriptive prophecy) and *walāya*, as bound up with (2) the theory of cosmic and historical cycles; (3) the successive lives and forms of existence involved in the gradual perfection of the soul; and (4) his understanding of the position of the "people of Unity" (*ahl-i vahdat*), in relation to the rest of mankind. If Nasafī (like his master Hamū'ī) was already aware of some of Ibn 'Arabī's theories in these and related areas, his very limited adaptation of them only serves to underline the more fundamental distance separating the two perspectives.[594] In each of these cases (and in many others), Nasafī's underlying approach is basically the same, characterized by (a) an ostensible "openness" (which, from Ibn 'Arabī's standpoint, would instead probably be characterized as an illusory literalism and reductive vulgarization) concerning the "esoteric" (*bātin*) dimension of the spiritual path; and (b) a concomitant elitist disregard—indeed sometimes an almost dualistic or gnostic disdain—for every aspect of "this world" (including the *zāhir* of religion and prophecy) and the mass of men who are deluded into taking it as their sole reality.

That these characteristics are not simply a matter of rhetorical emphasis and partial expression (as they may well be in certain poets) can be seen most clearly here in Nasafī's understanding of the *walī* (or *valī*, in Persian), who for him—in a conception totally different from what one finds in Ibn 'Arabī'—is the "*Sāhib al-Zamān*," a messianic figure whom Nasafī (like his teacher Hamū'ī) apparently took to be a particular historical individual who was shortly coming, in his own lifetime, to transform totally the human condition so that the *sharī'a* (and "*zāhir*" in general) would no longer be necessary and only the esoteric Truth (the *bātin*) would rule.[595] His own openly historicist, non-symbolic conception of that

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[594] In the *Maqsad-i Aqsā* (Palmer's paraphrase), note the discussion of the *Fusūs al-Hikam* (p. 55) and of a dispute between Qūnawī and Hamū'ī concerning the divine Names and Attributes (pp. 27-28). More generally, as in parts of *al-Insān al-Kāmil,* one can see Ibn 'Arabī's positions being taken into account in regard to such questions as *tawhīd* or the "unity of Being," *walāya,* the *a'yān thābita* (where Ibn 'Arabī is cited by name, p. 296), or the "Perfect Human Being" (a far less important topic in this collection than the subsequently imposed title might suggest). While the very interest in these metaphysical and cosmological topics does distinguish Nasafī and Hamū'ī from a far more practice-oriented Kubrāwī shaykh like Isfarāyinī (see references in n. 33 above), for example, it is also clear that Nasafī is dealing with Ibn 'Arabī's contributions (which here, as so often throughout later Eastern Islamic culture, seem to be essentially limited to the *Fusūs*) on something like a case-by-case basis—as though in conversation with another respected shaykh about matters with which each is familiar—with little sense of either his overall systematic coherence or the supreme respect for his teachings that certainly characterizes all the commentator figures in the "school" of Qūnawī discussed below. A particularly obvious example of this relative "independence"—although it would probably be more accurate and useful to take Nasafī as often representing precisely the sort of typical, relatively disorganized discussion of these questions prior to their transformation by Ibn 'Arabī—is his discussion of the "Perfect Human Being," pp.16-22 in the translation, where that symbol is dealt with primarily as a particular human individual, an ideal human type, with little emphasis on the transcendent, cosmic dimensions that are always so prominent in Ibn 'Arabī.

[595] For the historicity of Nasafī's conception (following Hamū'ī), see his dream of the Prophet **in n. 42 below**. Nasafī's own views on this question must be carefully distinguished from (1) Ibn 'Arabī's views

function (or rather, of that individual)—and the wider antinomian dangers of such popular messianic beliefs—are aptly illustrated in his observations about the many pretenders to this role who were springing up throughout Iran in his time: their failures did not seem to shake his own profound assurance that such an individual was about to come (and would even approve the teaching and promulgation of Nasafī's own books!).[596] His expectation of this forthcoming transformation of the human condition was apparently bound up with his beliefs concerning a series of cosmic cycles—of 1000, 7000, and 49,000 years—that make up, at least on one plane of interpretation, what Nasafī understands by the "lesser," "great," and "greatest" Resurrections.[597] While one can find superficially

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concerning the relations of *walāya, nubuwwa,* and *risāla,* which have little to do with the particular point Nasafī is discussing in terms of the "*walī*" [See now the comprehensive study of these subjects in Michel Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints*]; (2) Ibn 'Arabī's conception of the *Mahdī,* which is more closely related to this point; and (3) Twelver Shiite and Ismaili Shiite conceptions of the *Mahdī*, *Walī*, and *Sāhib al-Zamān*, which are again closest to Nasafī's terminology, although that similarity is unlikely to reflect any dogmatic theological "allegiance" on either his or Hamū'ī's part (see Molé's **[ertomemt** discussion in his introduction to the edition of this text, pp. 20-27).

What sets Nasafī apart from all of the above—or at least from their more spiritual conceptions, if not the popular messianic misunderstandings—is precisely his historical "literalism" and apparent belief that the Mahdi will totally transform the human condition by *doing away with* the *sharī'a* and *zāhir,* rather than (as in many *hadīth* cited by Ibn 'Arabī) coming to hold all humanity to the *sharī'a*—or more precisely, ruling according to the *bātin* of the (true, eternal, divine) *sharī'a.* While not denying the validity of the many traditions concerning the transformations to take place at the "end of time" (about which, moreover, they differ in other important respects). both Ibn 'Arabī and most Shiite thinkers alike tended instead to stress the *present* meaning or potential of those transformations as an inner spiritual reality—and not as somehow "doing away with" the *zāhir* of this world and its "relative reality." The inseparability of the two aspects has obvious practical implications for their attitude toward human beings' ongoing external religious (and legal and socio-political) duties as well.

[596] See the translation of Nasafī's dream of his encounter with the Prophet and his master Hamū'ī, taken from the preface to his *Kashf al-Haqā'iq* (Molé, intro. to *al-Insan...* pp.8-9), in which the Prophet assures him that after the year 700, most of the students in the *madrasas* will be studying his writings. Perhaps even more significant, in light of what we have already noted about the striking "openness" of Nasafī's statements, is Hamū'ī's remark, in the same dream, that "*he* (i.e., Nasafī) *strives to proclaim openly and unveil everything which I had tried to hide and conceal*" (p.9).

[597] In this view (pp. 334-36 of the translation), the lesser, 1000-year "resurrection" involves the establishment of a *new sharī'a* throughout the earth (the concordance of this millennium with his immediate expectation of the *valī* after only 700 years is not explained; perhaps he would rule until the coming of a new law-giving prophet), while the two greater cycles involve partial and total cosmic cataclysms, each wiping out all animal and plant life, which then begins over in a new cycle. This chapter of the *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* (pp. 329-40 of the translation) implies views of transmigrations of ("the"?) soul which are apparently presented here as Nasafī's own. (The Persian text is actually more clear than the French in implying—although not with absolute certainty—that Nasafī is talking about conditions he

similar notions of cosmic cycles in both Ibn 'Arabī and many strands of Shiite thought (and indeed in many other religions as well), whose outward aspect is apparently based on the implications of a common astronomical/astrological and cosmological system, what is again most striking with Nasafī—especially compared with Ibn 'Arabī or the Shiite writers expounding such theories, for whom they can (and perhaps must) be understood first of all on a purely symbolic, interiorized level—is the literalism and historicity of Nasafī's account, with its apparent underlying assumption that the spiritual Truth (the *bātin*) could somehow be "taught," if it were not for the temporary obstacles posed by humankind's current condition and the (apparently "untrue") teachings of the theologians, philosophers, etc.

The same assumption of "literal esotericism," with similarly problematic ethical and religious implications, is apparent in Nasafī's account (translation, pp.329-40) of the development of the ("individual"?) soul as involving a gradual purgation and perfection, over thousands of years, through conditions as mineral, plant, animals, and human-animal (with its manifold possibilities) until finally reaching the truly human state, where humankind's spiritual development, more strictly speaking, can actually begin.[598] From this perspective—which seems to convey at least the most explicit and tangible aspect of Nasafī's own eschatological belief—Paradise and Hell (and more especially, for most of mankind, the latter: see p. 239) are quite immediately with us here and now, and it is only through many lifetimes of long and painful experience (the purgative torments brought on by our passionate psychic attachments to one or another dimension of "this world") that some individuals can move on to the higher, paradisiacal stages of spiritual awareness and the true "end" of their "cycle" of perfection.[599] Again, while one would not

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really believes to be the case. These views are certainly coincident with the eschatological opinions he expresses in other chapters of these two collections.)

[598] Here one might expect Nasafī to continue by speaking of the soul's further purification and advancement, at least in symbolic terms, "through" the heavenly spheres or the higher spiritual States they represent, as in so many other forms of Islamic thought. But another rather original aspect of Nasafī's work is his treatment of the spheres and the planets (in his discussion of the "cosmic tree" as seen from the highest stage of the *ahl-i vahdat,* pp.345-48) as themselves part of the "lower world" (*dunyā*). Instead, he quite vigorously insists (in the same chapter, at least) that the highest state of perfect vision is that attained *in the here and now*. (Denial of the spiritual, supernal state of the heavenly spheres and their Intellects, as implied in the accepted Ptolemaic cosmology of that time, is usually to be found only among the most literal-minded theologians.) This attitude may also flow from a very literal conception of "reincarnation" on Nasafī's part; one wonders, in the same connection, whether his words about the possible "re-descent" of sinners into animal bodies are to be taken literally or—as for so many other Persian Sufis—as reference to the vast majority of "human animals" (*bashar,* not *insan)* exhibiting a corresponding variety of "animal" and spiritually imperfect natures.

[599] The final chapter of *al-Insan al-Kāmil* (pp.237-51 of this translation), devoted to the exposition of "the Paradise and Gehenna *that are in us*" fits integrally with the account of *naskh* and *maskh* (loosely translatable as "transmigration," though whether of "individual" souls or one cosmic soul is also unclear from this description) in the description of the fifth stage of the soul's development in the *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* (the chapter discussed at n. 43 above). Nasafī adds that the "story" of "the paradise and hell that will be" is "already known" and that he will speak in another treatise of the one "that is outside us"—

want to deny that, with appropriate qualifications, this is at least one possible aspect of Ibn ʿArabī's (and many other Islamic thinkers') understanding of the eschatological language of the Qurʾan, what is extraordinary here (for an Islamic mystic, at least) is Nasafī's unqualified and quite open statement of this point of view—opening the way to all those potential ethical perversions of this vast transmigrationist perspective (in terms of either quietism or antinomianism, *ibāha*) which, in the Islamic world, seem to have restrained its non-symbolic formulation by any but certain "extreme" (and in their own way equally literalist!) Shiite ʿ*ghulāt*' groups.[600] Moreover, quite apart from these potentially dangerous popular misunderstandings, even the experienced Sufi reader could easily reduce the bearing of Nasafī's formulations—which give only minimal reference to the complex eschatological symbolism of the Qurʾan and *hadīth*, portrayed in such detail in Ibn ʿArabī's own writings—to the single plane of his or her own limited immediate experience, with the obvious dangers either of a short-circuiting of their spiritual realization or of a sort of vain "spiritual elitism" (familiar dangers Nasafī himself denounces in other contexts).

We have already dealt with the characteristic way Ibn ʿArabī (and his followers), through their emphasis on the key notion of *tajalliyāt*, carefully avoided the confusions and practical dangers flowing from the simplified conceptions of "Unity" (*wahda*) exemplified in the works of Balyānī or Ibn Sabʿīn, and many of the same remarks would be applicable to Nasafī's own discussions of the "people of Unity" (*ahl-i vahdat*, perhaps equivalent to the *muwahhidūn*, in the usual Sufi usage of that term), whom he usually considers the highest, most realized group.[601] (He also speaks of their unitive insight as though it *were* the reality of the "resurrection" and Paradise, whereas that realization is always quite explicitly only one important dimension of those symbols in Ibn ʿArabī.) An interesting practical corollary of this metaphysical

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not necessarily the same as the story that is "already known"?—but he does not do this here or in the other works we have seen, so far as we can tell.

[600] It is essential here—as indeed in most traditions of Islamic thought, whether mystical, philosophic, or Shiite—to distinguish carefully between what is *expressed* and what may well be believed or known: it is usually the public expression, and not the belief, that caused certain groups to be classed as "extremist." (See Ibn ʿArabī's own indications in this regard. nn. 29-31.) Ibn Abī Jumhūr's open statement, at a slightly later period, that "most of the philosophers and the Illuminationists" believed in the transmigration of souls (cited by W. Madelung, op. cit**. in n. 39 above;** Madelung does not give the Arabic term or add what additional explanations may have been provided in the original text), is a revealing indication of what can be gathered from the symbols and allusions of such other important figures as Suhrawardi, the *Rasaʾil* of the Ikhwān al-Safāʾ, and many other Sufis and philosophers before and after that time.

[601] Nasafī's terminology or categorization seems to vary in this regard (this being one of the points where reference to his other works and other Kubrāwī writings might have been especially helpful): at the end of the *Manāzil al-Sāʾirīn* (pp.349-52), he calls the "gnostics" *(ʿārifān)* an even higher group within the *ahl-i vahdat.* In any case, it is interesting that here (e.g., p. 240) the term "Sufi" already refers to a relatively lower, more popular category or stage, reminding us of the similar relative denigration of the ʿ*ābid* and *zāhid* (common terms applied to the earlier historical Sufis), in favor of the term ʿ*ārif* ("gnostic" or "true knower") already found in the works of Ibn Sina, Ghazālī, etc.

conception throughout both works translated here is Nasafī's comparison of the *ahl-i vahdat* with the (for him) clearly inferior conceptions of the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers (*hukamā'*). For him (see p. 265) these are the first two stages of humankind's truly responsible spiritual advancement—the vast mass of humanity, as already indicated, being still animals in outwardly human form—and once their illusions and limitations are described, they merit no further mention. With Ibn 'Arabī, and even more so in his later interpreters discussed in the following sections,[602] the focus is always on the formulations of each group of the "theoreticians" (as with the even more fundamental role of the unique personal "lord" present in each person's faith), as in themselves a prefiguration of the Truth, a valid and indispensable mirroring, in that person's experience, of the absolute Reality (*Haqq*)—a truly universal perspective which emphasizes the brotherhood flowing from each individual's intrinsic (if rarely fully realized) relationship with God (rather than the exclusiveness of a "gnostic" elite), and which suggests a far more comprehensive awareness of the manifold functions of the prophets (and their true "heirs"), in this world as well as the hereafter.

IV. 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. ca. 735/1335) was one of the foremost and certainly one of the most influential representatives of what may more rightfully be called a "school" of Ibn 'Arabī, a line of inter-pretation and further development of the Shaykh's thought whose essential features are already clearly evident in its founder, Ibn 'Arabī's stepson and close disciple Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (or "al-Qunyawī," after the city of Konya where he died in 673/1274): Given the decisive and still largely unrecognized importance of this school for the later development of Islamic thought in general, along with the remarkable lack of translations and general studies of its key figures,[603] the few recent French publications on Kāshānī will be supplemented in this section by brief references to works in several languages on or by other major figures in this movement (Qūnawī, Jīlī, Āmulī, and Jāmī) and by an

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[602] See the similar comparisons of the Sufi, *kalām,* and *falsafa* positions on basic theological questions, with the same systematic approach (but quite different conclusions from Nasafī's) in works by such figures as H. Āmulī, Ibn Turka Isfāhānī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Jāmī, and Mullā Sadrā discussed in the text and notes immediately below (**section IV).**

[603] The most substantial studies on the early, formative figures in this school are those cited in the rest of this section below, which can be supplemented by the general historical outlines in the two surveys by H. Corbin mentioned **in n. 3 above**. In addition to the writings discussed in those studies, see the much longer list of sources and authors (especially the dozens of commentators of the *Fusūs al-Hikam* and Ibn 'Arabī's brief Summary, *Naqsh al-Fusūs*) given by Osman Yahia in his *Histoire et Classification . . .* (*RG*, items 150 and 523) and in the Arabic introduction to his edition (with H. Corbin) of Haydar Āmulī's *Nass al-Nusūs* (**full references at n. 5 above**). Also extremely important in this regard, because they give us some insight into the many possible "*non*-literary" chains of transmission, are the long lists of direct auditors (from the early manuscripts) given in Dr. Yahia's new, ongoing critical edition of the *Futūhāt,* as well as his summaries of several *silsila*s of direct transmitters of Ibn 'Arabī's works (*Histoire...*, Addenda A, II, pp.539-51) and the transmission of Ibn 'Arabī's *khirqa akbariyya* (Addenda, B, II, p.543). For further references to this last *silsila,* which was separately transmitted within several of the well-known Sufi orders, see the discussions by **Michel Chodkiewicz, ref. at n. 113 [Part II-B of this essay] below.)**

introduction to a few of its distinctive characteristics shared by all these authors. To begin with, this tradition of highly sophisticated philosophic and theological speculation must be distinguished from several other important but more diffuse lines of influence of Ibn 'Arabī's work in the later Islamic world which are, if anything, even less studied: (a) the influence of the Shaykh and his *Arab* Sufi disciples (e.g., Ibn Sawdakīn, ʻAfīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī, etc.) in the Maghreb and other Arabic-speaking regions;[604] (b) the multiple dimensions of Ibn ʻArabī's influence on "practicing" Sufis within many different orders, as illustrated in part by the work of Nasafī and the later Qādiri text discussed above; and (c) the even more complex question of "borrowings" of vocabulary and concepts (especially connected with the notion of *wahdat al-wujūd*) by later poets, theologians, etc., exhibiting varying degrees of acquaintance with Ibn ʻArabī's own works or even with the commentators on the *Fusus*.[605]

With regard to its formal and historical characteristics, the school of Islamic thought[606] that developed out of Qūnawī's interpretation of Ibn ʻArabī was marked by at least four distinctive features. First, its

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[604] For a few aspects of this subject, see the discussion of ʻAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʼirī at the end of this article **[Part II-B]** and the references to the 18th-century Moroccan Sufi Ibn ʻAjība (works by Jean-Louis Michon cited **at n. 4** above), as well as the important treatise by Ibn ʻArabī's close disciple Badr al--Habashī, also mentioned in **n. 4. It** is certainly the case that the "Ibn ʻArabī" criticized by Ibn Khaldun in the *Muqaddima,* where the focus is entirely on the occult, magic, and the supernatural (which may have played a much greater role in some kinds of "popular" Sufism: see the kinds of apocryphal works commonly attributed to Ibn ʻArabī, n. 19 above), is unbelievably distant from the image of Ibn ʻArabī presented in the tradition of Qūnawī and his successors discussed here.

[605] This relatively superficial approach is certainly characteristic of much of the polemical literature, whether pro or eon, revolving around the *Fusūs al-Hikam* (references above**, n. 5),** as well as with much of the widespread later poetic and literary use of Ibn ʻArabī's technical terminology **(n. 2 above).** As with the uses of Platonic (or Neo-Platonic) themes in Western literature, it was probably fairly rare for poets and men of letters to have studied the longer works of Ibn ʻArabī and his interpreters in great detail; yet the ability to perceive and convey his central insights (as with Plato) is not dependent on (nor even always combined with) a more "scholastic," systematic study of those works themselves.

[606] The term "school" here must be used cautiously and subject to two extremely important qualifications. First, the real philosophic and theological unity and diversity of these different writers have not yet begun to be explored in modern research; the same is true, incidentally, for most of the later schools of Islamic philosophy as well. (Most Western authors, as can be seen from many of the translations available in this field, have sought instead to bring out the general "Islamic" or "Akbarī" aspect of these works—which is understandably more important to today's general audience—rather than to focus on those philosophical and theological questions that generated the hundreds (if not thousands) of studies produced over the centuries in this school.)   Secondly, none of these writers are mere "commentators" of Ibn ʻArabī, as can readily be seen even in those early works (Kāshānī, Jīlī, Āmulī, Jāmī, etc.) discussed below. As with "Aristotelianism" or "Platonism" in Western thought, Ibn ʻArabī's writings were only the starting point for the most diverse developments, in which reference to subsequent interpreters quickly became at least as important as the actual study of the Shaykh's own writings.

focus on the actual writings of Ibn ‘Arabī, insofar as they were studied at all,[607] was primarily on the *Fusūs al-Hikam*, and even there was mainly dedicated to bringing out the metaphysical and theological aspects of that work (the "Unity of Being," the ontology of the divine "Presences," and their reflection in the "Perfect Human Being"). Secondly, the popularity and tremendous influence of this more strictly conceptual, metaphysical approach seem to have been greatest on the eastern Islamic world (including the Ottoman realms, Central Asia, Muslim India, and other lands where Persian was for many centuries the *lingua franca* of higher culture), where Arabic was for the most part the language only of a learned scholarly elite; hence its leading figures, beginning with Qūnawī, were often *‘ulamā’* as well as Sufis, and were used to writing in both Arabic and Persian (and sometimes Turkish), depending on their intended audience.[608] Thirdly, this school developed, from the very beginning, in extremely close interaction with the separate intellectual traditions of Avicennan *falsafa* (especially as transmitted by N. Tūsī) and of later *kalām* (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Ījī, etc.) which were both already deeply established in those regions;[609] this restricted intellectual context in particular involved a serious limitation—or at least a

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[607] See more **generally nn. 51-52 above.** In particular, the special role of the *Fusūs al-Hikam* as the primary *teaching* tool (although the masters themselves no doubt read more widely) in the eastern Islamic world is amply illustrated by the vast number of commentaries produced down to the 19th century **(see n. 49).**

The fate of Ibn ‘Arabī in this regard, at least within this more scholarly tradition, is closely analogous to that of Ibn Sina in later Islamic philosophy and *kalām*: already by the time of Ghazālī (and indeed of Avicenna's immediate disciples such as Bahmanyār, whose *K. al-Tahsīl* [ed. M. Mutahharī, Tehran, 1997] quickly became a favorite teaching text), Ibn Sina's ideas—often in unrecognizable and no longer philo-sophic form—were largely being transmitted through subsequent manuals and summaries, whether in logic or metaphysics, often reducing his thought to rote *"kalām"* (in both senses of that term).

[608] For the ongoing importance of Persian poetry, in particular, in the further spread of Ibn ‘Arabī's "ideas"—with the transmutations that expression necessarily involved—see the discussion of Jāmī and ‘Irāqī later in this section.

[609] See especially the discussion of Qūnawī's correspondence with the Avicennan philosopher (and Shiite theologian) Nasīr al-Din al-Tusi discussed **at n. 65 below** (article by W. Chittick). An especially useful indication of the historical situation of these intellectual traditions in Anatolia immediately prior to the spread of Ibn ‘Arabī's thought by Qūnawī and his followers (if we can trust the date 629/1231 in the colophon) is the text *al-Bulgha fī al-Hikma* published in facsimile by the Turkish scholar (and author of an important work on Qūnawī), Dr. Nihat Keklik, as *El bulga fi’l-hikme* (Istanbul, 1969). While the work is most certainly *not* by Ibn ‘Arabī, as the editor then maintained—a point worth stressing, given the way such mis-attributions tend to spread if not noted by booksellers and libraries—it is a remarkable indication of the situation of "speculative mysticism" in its more intellectual, metaphysical form at this formative period: it therefore reflects many of Ibn ‘Arabī's (and Qūnawī's or Ibn Sab‘īn's) immediate precursors in this area of Islamic thought. The unknown author draws especially on the works of Suhrawardī "Maqtūl" (**see n. 14 above) and Ghazālī (see n. 13),** within a broader metaphysical framework taken (as with both Suhrawardī and Ghazālī) largely from a certain Avicennan tradition. His positive and enthusiastic use of Suhrawardī is especially interesting, since most of Suhrawardi's later commentators **(see n.14)** actually known to us—up until Mulla Sadra—tended to be fairly non-mystical

significant transformation—of its audience, intentions, and choice of subjects when compared with the actual writings of Ibn ʿArabī. Finally, while all three of these traditions of Islamic thought maintained their separate identities—and especially their fundamentally different conceptions of spiritual or philosophic method, which often were at least as significant as their nominal "conclusions"—they shared a formally similar *kalām* language and problematic, so that representatives of each "school" were usually at least superficially acquainted with the literature and terminology of the opposing groups.[610]

What resulted from these developments, already in the writings of Qūnawī, was a body of complex theoretical literature focusing on the intellectual understanding and elaboration of certain perennial philosophic and theological problems within its own independent conceptual framework and technical terminology, drawn largely from the writings of Ibn ʿArabī.[611] Whatever one's opinion of this transformation—and, among the many motivations for Qūnawī's efforts, there is little doubt that it helped to make Ibn ʿArabī more interesting and acceptable to the educated elite of the time, from both

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Avicennan thinkers (notably Q. al-Shīrāzī) treating Suhrawardi not as a particularly Sufi, spiritual writer, but as another scholastic commentator of Ibn Sina.

[610] This continuing separation of these distinct intellectual traditions becomes quite apparent, after Qūnawī **(cf. n. 65)**, in the many works by later writers in the more mystical school of Ibn ʿArabī comparing his positions with those of the Avicennan philosophers and *mutakallimūn*: see the works by H. Āmulī, Ibn Turka Isfāhānī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Jāmī, and Mulla Sadra discussed below.
Apart from studies of those writers, we still have almost no literature bringing out the vitality, independence. and originality of these other later traditions of Islamic thought, usually because outside scholars have been unaware of the "code-words" and distinctive commitments and assumptions underlying the common—and often highly misleading—kalām/Avicennan framework. (One would have much the same initial impression in approaching the classics of medieval Latin philosophy with no prior background.) Some idea of those defining intellectual features—within a quite limited time and geographical area—can be gathered from the selection of later ʿIranian' texts included in Corbin and Ashtiyani's *Anthologie des philosophes iraniens* (edited by H. Corbin and J. Ashtiyānī) (**See n. 3** above and our review in *Sophia Perennis* III, no. I [Tehran, 1977], pp. l28ff).

[611] This description is already true even of the earliest "commentaries" on the *Fusūs* (**see n. 52 for** the possibly misleading nature of this term) by Qūnawī, where independent theoretical developments already often take precedence over the illumination of Ibn ʿArabī's actual writing. (See illustrative translations by W. Chittick mentioned below.) While the commentary of Dawūd al-Qaysarī is probably the most helpful in actually understanding the *Fusūs* itself, his "Introduction" (*muqaddima*) to that work is virtually an independent philosophic study with a clear pedagogical architecture, and was itself the object of dozens of subsequent commentaries. The latest of those supercommentaries (itself a revealing illustration of this genre, which almost overwhelms Qaysarī's relatively brief Introduction) is S. Jalāl al-Din Ashtiyānā's *Sharh-i Muqaddamah-ʿi Qaysarī bar Fusūs al-Hikam* (Mashhad, 1966) (651 pp., with French and English introductions by H. Corbin and S. H. Nasr). Significantly enough, in view of the continuing clerical suspicions of Ibn ʿArabī (**see n. 5 above**), Ashtiyānī's own extended Persian commentary on the *Fusūs,* promised in this volume, has not yet been published.

kalām and philosophic backgrounds—the outcome was clearly something very different from Ibn 'Arabī's own writings (and especially the *Futūhāt*), as one can readily verify even in translation.[612] Within this new intellectual perspective, one may also note the relative neglect (at least in the literature itself) of two key features of most of Ibn 'Arabī's own writings: his detailed concern with method and practice, the "phenomenology" of the spiritual Path (a dimension he shared with other Sufi masters and most earlier Sufi authors); and his attempts to communicate his spiritual realizations and insights directly to his readers, through a wide variety of rhetorical devices (often closely tied to the Arabic language) which are never entirely separate from—nor reducible to—their implicit intellectual and metaphysical framework.[613] The relative suppression of these features, while allowing greater conceptual clarity and systematic coherence, did have its costs. For both of these reasons, non-specialists will almost inevitably find Ibn 'Arabī's own writings both more powerful and more directly accessible than those of his interpreters in this "school," since the works of Qūnawī and his successors are often virtually incomprehensible today without a lengthy preliminary explanation of their own intellectual framework and terminology, as well as the related *kalām* and *falsafa* systems frequently involved in the discussions.[614]

Qūnawī's more systematic and theoretical writings, however, reflect only one dimension of his role in the transmission and systematization of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas and teachings. Equally important was the extraordinary range of his personal relationships which—whether as master, disciple, or colleague—spanned almost every Islamic intellectual tendency and school, both Sufi and non-Sufi, of his age. (That phenomenon is no doubt partly explicable by Konya's unusual situation at that time as a sanctuary for

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[612] A handy illustration of this point, while awaiting the longer translations promised by William Chittick and S. Ruspoli (nn. 67-68), it the translation of Qūnawī's brief *Mir'at al-'Ārifīn* discussed below, **at n. 69.**

[613] This is not at all to imply that the foremost representatives of this school were not themselves Sufis, nor that they did not also, in some cases (see Jīlī below) write other works illustrating either of these points. In fact, most of them were often deeply involved in various *tarīqas*—this concern with the "practice" of Sufism being of course the element that especially distinguished them, for example, from the Avicennan philosophers whom they were debating. But it is nonetheless true that these two aspects of theory and spiritual realization are not nearly so intimately and explicitly (indeed often quite inseparably) linked in their works as they are in the Shaykh's own writings. (See our remarks on the importance of this highly distinctive "rhetorical" dimension of Ibn 'Arabī's writing, in the broadest sense of that term, in Part I of this review article, **at n. 11.)**

[614] For these reasons (**see n. 56 above**), the relative originality and creativity of Islamic thought in this period—which are undeniable, e.g., in a writer like Jīlī (see below)—are still largely unexplored, and must remain relatively "invisible" until their terminology and categories are more adequately explored (The impressions of "stagnation," "decadence," "fossilization," and the like that one often finds in secondary accounts are seldom based on serious, lengthy study of the traditions in question—being roughly equivalent to the likely initial reaction if one were to hand works of Kant and Hegel, in the original and with no commentary or explanation, to someone from an entirely different civilization. At the very least, that person would find it very difficult to sort out what is original and important from what is not, without much deeper acquaintance with the full historical tradition in question.)

influential refugees fleeing the Mongol invasions of Central Asia and Iran.) Among his wide-ranging contacts were the renowned Persian mystical poets Rūmī (d. 672/1273), Awhad al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 635/ 1238, a shaykh of the Suhrawardīya order and, along with Ibn ʿArabī, Qūnawī's own master), and—most directly influenced by Qūnawī's teaching—Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī (d. 688/ 1289);[615] the Kubrawiya shaykhs Saʿd al-Dīn Hamūʾī (d. 650/1252-53; the master of Nasafī discussed above) and Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 654/ 1256),[616] author of some of the most widely read Persian prose manuals of Sufi teachings; Saʿīd al-Dīn Farghānī (d. ca. 700/1300), the influential commentator (in both Persian and Arabic) of Ibn al-Fārid's celebrated Arabic Sufi poem, the *Tāʾiyya*;[617] and finally the leading Avicennan philosopher (and Shiite theologian) of that time, Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī, and his prolific disciple Qutb al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311), who also spent several years studying with Qūnawī.[618] The record of Qūnawī's extended correspondence

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[615] For a vivid and detailed description of ʿIrāqī's relations with Qūnawī—and of Qūnawī's larger circle, including his own relationship as a disciple of Kirmānī—see the biographical section, pp. 33-66, in the translation and study of ʿIrāqī's *Lamaʿāt* by William Chittick and Peter L. Wilson, *Divine Flashes* (New York, 1982); this work is discussed further in the section on the poet Jāmī below. These biographical passages, including a letter of ʿIrāqī to Qūnawī, are invaluable simply for their portrayal of an aspect of Qūnawī that could otherwise scarcely be imagined simply on the basis of his more theoretical writings.

[616] For Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, Hamūʾī   , and other major figures in the early Kubrawiya, see the **references at n. 33 and** throughout the longer section on Nasafī above. Prof. H. Landolt has detected some influence of Ibn ʿArabī's thought (as with Nasafī, on a particular subject, not as a total system) in the *Mirsād al-ʿIbād,* a widely read Persian prose work on Sufism by Najm al-Dīn Rāzī: see the article on Simnānī and Kāshānī in *Der Islam* (full references at **n. 80 in the concluding part II-B of this article),** p.30, n. 4. Rāzī's work has recently become available in a complete English translation (with limited Introduction and annotation) by H. Algar, *The Path of God's Bondsmen* (North Haledon, N.J., 1980).

[617] His commentary has also been edited: *Mashāriq al-Darārī: Sharh-i Tāʾiyya-i Ibn-i Fāriz,* ed. Jalāl al-Din Ashtiyānī (Mashhad, 1978), 883 pages. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, whose Qurʾanic commentary is discussed later in this section, has also been attributed a famous commentary on this *Nazm al-Sulūk* (**but see n. 73 below).** See also the English translation and running commentary of the same work by A. J. Arberry, *The Poem of the Way* (London, 1952).

[618] The works of both men have been studied (in the West) most recently in terms of their astronomical activity at the famous observatory Tusi established at Maragheh; see the articles on this aspect in the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (New York, 1970). Unfortunately, Tūsī's decisive and multi-faceted in-fluence on subsequent Islamic thought—where he was of the utmost importance in reviving the truly philosophic study of Ibn Sina (through his commentary on the *Ishārāt* and his several works severely attacking the influential *mutakallim* Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī) and inaugurating an important line of Twelver Shiite theology (through his *Tajrīd al-ʿAqāʾid,* the object of dozens of later commentaries)—has not yet attracted study in proportion to its importance. (See **also n. 39 above,** for W. Madelung's article stressing Tūsī's major political role as well.) W. Strothmann's monograph *Die Zwölfer Schīʿa: Zwei religionsgeschichtliche Characterbilder aus der Mongolenzeit,* recently reprinted (Hildesheim/New York, 1975), is a helpful biographical outline—also bringing out the (again still largely unstudied) importance of Tūsī's many years of activity as an Ismaili theologian—but does not really go into a deeper study of his

with Tusi, carefully summarized in an important article by William Chittick,[619] is a remarkably revealing illustration of the way this systematic "school" of Ibn 'Arabī developed in many respects out of the attempt to rephrase the Shaykh's insights and conclusions—taken to be representative of the methods and principles of Sufism more generally—in terms convincing and intelligible to the prevailing learned Eastern-Islamic philosophic and theological schools of the time.[620]

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role in Islamic *intellectual* history, and especially the way his lifelong Avicennan philosophic commitment was expressed throughout his range of theological and political activities.

The apparent lack of any serious "Sufi" orientation in Qutb al-Dīn's commentary on Suhrawardī (**see n. 14** for its forthcoming publication in French translation) has often been commented on; but again, there is not yet any comprehensive published study of his many activities (closely paralleling those of his mentor Tūsī, except for the Shiite theological side).

[619] "Mysticism Versus Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History: the al-Tūsī, al-Qūnawī Correspondence" (*Religious Studies* 17, 1981), where the author also mentions (p.98, n. 1) that he has prepared a critical edition of this text. Those acquainted with the difficulty of the original Arabic—consisting of a letter from Qūnawī attempting to phrase key insights and assumptions of Ibn 'Arabī in terms comprehensible to Avicennan "Peripatetic" thought; Tūsī's rather condescending response, echoing Ibn Sina's condescending attitude toward Sufism in the *Ishārāt;* and Qūnawī's reply and answers to Tūsī's objections—will appreciate the mastery of Prof. Chittick's summary of the underlying issues.

In particular, this correspondence and the Avicennan intellectual context it assumes (see also n. 55 above) suggests some of the reasons for the subsequent centrality of problems of *wahdat al-wujūd* (and the corresponding formulation of Ibn 'Arabī's thought in primarily ontological, rather than theological, terms, drawing largely on Ibn Sina's vocabulary) in the ongoing tradition of writings of this school, since that concentration is by no means reflective of the overall importance of this problem of this ontological vocabulary in Ibn 'Arabī's own writings. Typically—and following other Sufi writers of his time in general—he makes far more frequent use of the *kalām* and Qur'anic language of the divine Attributes and Names, with the distinctively Sufi focus on their existential correlates. This contrast can readily be seen in comparing the *Fusūs* itself with any of these famous commentaries. (See further remarks on Kāshānī's philosophical vocabulary below.)

[620] This should not be taken to imply that the form of this tradition can simply be understood as a sort of apologetic (or polemic) reaction to competing intellectual traditions of the time; but it does mean that even "internal" developments and explication of problems already posed within Ibn 'Arabī's writings tended to be formulated in the language and concepts taken over from existing *falsafa* and *kalām* traditions. This process is especially evident with commentators like Kāshānī who came to Ibn 'Arabī not from a purely Sufi background. but with extensive training in the philosophy (or theology) of Ibn Sina and his followers. The same path, of course, was also followed by Suhrawardī (**nn. 14 and 55 above**), whose distinctively mystical thought and insights were likewise expressed in terms still so heavily Avicennan that subsequent philosophical commentators often took little note of the decisive differences between the two perspectives.

It is also important to recognize that within this intellectual and historical context, the resulting figure of "Ibn 'Arabī" (i.e., the writings of this tradition of Qūnawī and his followers) often came to be seen as a sort of normative theological "representative" and protagonist—as in the many controversies already

Our knowledge and understanding of Qūnawī's work and his creative historical role in the transmission of Ibn ʿArabī should be greatly increased by two major works whose publication has been promised by **Dr. S. Ruspoli (a French translation and commentary of the *Miftāh Ghayb al-Jam' wa-l-Wujūd*)**[621] and Professor William Chittick (a comprehensive study including a number of translations).[622] While awaiting those longer studies, one can gain a first impression of the major themes and distinctive style of Qūnawī and his school—and of the original developments separating his approach from Ibn ʿArabī's—from an English version of his short treatise (only 14 pages in translation), *Mir'at al-ʿĀrifīn* [*Reflection of the Awakened*. "Attributed to al-Qūnawī." Tr. Sayyid Hasan Askari. Pp.59 + 48 pp. of Arabic text. London: Zahra Trust. 1983.].[623]   The central themes alluded to here (so concisely as to be incomprehensible without lengthy commentary)—such problems as Qur'anic cosmology and the degrees of existence, their reintegration in the realization of the "Perfect Human Being" (*al-insān al-kāmil*), and the ontological correspondences and distinctions at each level of that "circle of being"—are all illustrated and analyzed in profuse detail in the longer works of Qūnawī and his followers, especially the influential line of commentators of the *Fusūs al-Hikam* that continued through Muʾayyid al-Dīn Jandī (d. ca.

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discussed **in n. 5 above**—for a multitude of existing Sufi orders and practices, including many beliefs and tendencies that could scarcely be justified or defended on the basis of his own Sufi writings. (See also the ongoing references to influential attacks by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Khaldūn throughout the preceding sections.)

[621] This is a revised and abridged version of his doctoral thesis (Université de Paris-IV, 1978), which also included a critical edition of this major work of Qūnawī.

[622] This work, **"tentatively titled *Ascendant Stars of Faith,"* is** mentioned in several of Prof. Chittick's recent studies of aspects of Qūnawī's thought, and will apparently include translations of several important treatises. In the meanwhile, in addition to his related articles cited above (**n. 65) and below (n. 71),** see also "Sadr al-Din Qūnawī on the Oneness of Being" (*International Philosophical Quarterly* 21, 1981) and "The Last Will and Testament of Ibn ʿArabī's Foremost Disciple and Some Notes on its Author" (*Sophia Perennis* 4, 1978).

[623] The phrase "attributed to al-Qūnawī" refers to the interesting and historically significant fact, discussed at length in Prof. Askari's introduction, ". . . that from the twelfth century onwards both in Persian and Urdu [Twelver Shiite] circles, *Mirat 'l-Arifin* [sic] was seriously considered as a work of Imam Husayn" (p.3). While the book itself is undoubtedly either by Qūnawī or some later figure in his school, this attribution is itself a fascinating phenomenon on at least two counts: (1) as it illustrates the remarkable penetration of Ibn ʿArabī's ideas and vocabulary in all areas of the eastern Islamic world (**see n. 2 above**); and (2) as it raises still virtually unexplored questions of the background—or at least the undeniable parallelism—between many of Ibn ʿArabī's themes and methods and those of earlier Shiite works, questions which are often applicable to some of the wider intellectual and philosophic expressions of Sufism more generally (**see n. 13 above).**
The translator's notes and explanations of this text are also a salutary illustration of the difficulties facing anyone who wishes to explain the technical philosophic language and problematic of Qūnawī and his successors to contemporary readers (see nn. 56 and 60 above)—a problem which in itself points to the substantial differences between their writings and those of the Shaykh himself.

700/1300), ʿAbd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (d. 736/1335), and Dawūd Qayṣarī (d. 751/ 1351).[624] Together, these four figures—whose works demonstrate an originality and independence that makes them considerably more than mere "commentators" in any limited sense—seem to have determined the major themes and conceptions that guided the more theoretical teaching and understanding of Ibn ʿArabī (and, at least in much of the Eastern Islamic world, of Sufism more generally), through dozens of subsequent commentaries and more independent works, down to the present day. An excellent introduction to some of their central common themes, and at the same time to their individual particularities, is now available in two pioneering comparative studies by Professor Chittick, incorporating extensive translations from each of these authors: "The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qūnawī to al-Qayṣarī" and "The Chapter Headings of the *Fuṣūs*."[625]

PART III (CONCLUSION): INFLUENCES AND INTERPRETATIONS

Concluding our survey of major historical tendencies in the interpretation and reception of Ibn ʿArabī's writings in various traditions of later Islamic thought, as illustrated by recent translations and related studies, this final section deals with representative figures in the more philosophic 'school' founded by Qūnawī (Kāshānī, H. Āmulī, and Jīlī); in mystical poetry (Jāmī, ʿIrāqī, and others) and philosophy (Mullā Sadrā and his successors); and with the more recent Sufi writings of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī, who recapitulates and integrates many of these traditions while returning to the spiritual sources and intentions underlying Ibn ʿArabī's own work and teaching.

IV [Continued]   ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. ca. 736/1335) has almost certainly been the most widely read (and cited) of these early interpreters of Ibn ʿArabī, to such an extent that much of the subsequent discussion of 'Ibn ʿArabī's' thought and doctrine, whether in the Eastern Islamic world or in the modern West, can best be understood as in fact a reference to Kāshānī's writings—especially where writers are expounding what they take to be Ibn ʿArabī's 'system' or philosophic 'doctrine' (e.g., of *wahdat al-*

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[624] **See n. 57 above** for the most recent continuation of this tradition (based on Qayṣarī's "Commentary") by a distinguished modern Iranian student of these authors, and **see n. 49** for the multitude of intermediate links in this chain of writers on the *Fuṣūs.* Also worth noting is the fact that each of these four figures personally studied the text with his predecessor, beginning with Ibn ʿArabī: see references in O. Yahia, *Histoire...* Addenda A (II, pp.539-41)*.*

[625] The first of these articles (*The Muslim World* 72, 1982), as the author notes, is likewise about one essential aspect of Ibn ʿArabī's notion of the *Insān Kāmil*. This study is based on the works of Qūnawī and his students more generally, and thus brings out the importance of the thought of his other disciple al-Farghānī, whose commentary on the *Nazm al-Sulūk* was already mentioned **(n. 63 above)**. The second study (*Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn ʿArabī Society* 11, 1984), which includes remarks from each of these thinkers, is especially useful in suggesting their historical relations of dependency and originality.

wujūd).[626] In this regard, the modern attribution to Ibn ʿArabī of Kāshānī's *Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān* is unfortunately as symptomatic as it is historically unfounded.[627] Professor Pierre Lory's recent study of that frequently reprinted work [*Les Commentaires ésotériques du Coran d'après ʿAbd ar-Razzāq al-Qāshānī.* Pp. 171. Paris: Les Deux Oceans. 1980.] is not only an excellent introduction to the main outlines of Kāshānī's metaphysics or 'spiritual cosmology,' hut also a useful illustration of those characteristic features of his writings and interpretations that help explain their great influence on later Muslim thinkers, especially philosophers and theologians. (Readers without access to the Arabic can supplement Professor Lory's analysis of this commentary by referring to the carefully annotated partial

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[626] This is even true to a certain extent of T. Izutsu's fundamental study of Ibn ʿArabī's thought, *Sufism and Taoism* (see **Part I, n. 6 above).** which, as the author himself stresses in the Introduction, is heavily reliant on Kāshānī's commentary, usually citing it at the same time as the text of the *Fusūs al-Hikam.* (This is another illustration of the characteristic pedagogical usefulness and intention of Kāshānī's works, discussed below in relation to his Qurʾanic commentaries.)

[627] Although Prof. Lory, following Brockelmann, remarks that all the manuscripts of this work are attributed to Kāshānī (or one of the other variant forms of his name, such as 'al-Kāshī,' etc.), Osman Yahia *(Histoire...,* no. 732 and 724) does mention a few later manuscripts of this work attributed to Ibn ʿArabī (along with Kāshānī's treatise on *qadāʾ* and *qadar, RG* no. 723). However, it is certainly true, as P. Lory indicates, that the most recent modern publishers of this work (in India, Cairo, and Beirut) must have been primarily motivated by commercial considerations in continuing to affix "Ibn ʿArabī's" name to the text. Some of the more important distinctions between Kāshānī's and Ibn ʿArabī's respective approaches to the Qurʾan are discussed below in this section or, for Ibn ʿArabī, in several earlier parts of this article as well.

Both Prof. Lory (p.23) and O. Yahia (II, p. 483, based on Kāshānī's own autograph version of his work, attributed by later librarians to Ibn ʿArabī) note that certain manuscripts of Kāshānī's commentary go only as far as Sura 32; the same fact is noted in H. Landolt's important study of Kāshānī's corre-spondence with ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla al-Simnānī (**discussed at n. 80 below),** without any hypothesis as to who might have completed it—possibly an immediate disciple, since readers do not seem to have noticed any great differences between the earlier and later sections. Professor Landolt also points out pp. 36) that the commentary on Ibn al-Fārid's *Nazm al-Sulūk* usually attributed to our author (in several printed editions and in Arberry's translation of Ibn al-Fārid, see **n. 63 above**) is actually by ʿIzz al-Dīn Mahmūd al-Kāshānī (d. 735/1334-35), best known for his widely read Persian translation of ʿUmar Suhrawardī's famous Sufi manual *ʿAwārif al-Maʿārif,* the *Misbāh al-Hidāya.* (The *Misbāh,* rather than Suhrawardi's original Arabic, was the actual basis for Wilberforce Clarke's still frequently reprinted partial English paraphrase *"The ʿAwārif uʾl-Maʿārif,"* Calcutta, 1891, most resently Lahore, 1973) In the context of this article, the fact that this commentary on Ibn al-Fārid has for so long passed as the work of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī is still another interesting sign of the remarkably rapid penetration of subsequent Iranian (or more broadly 'Persianate') Sufi thought by the conceptions and terminology of this 'school' of Ibn ʿArabī.

translations of M. Vālsan, or to the summaries of certain sections in M. Ayoub's *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters*)[628]

Kāshānī's work is in fact not so much a *ta'wīl* in the more specifically Sufi usage of a profound and inevitably quite personal awareness of the immediate spiritual implications of particular Qur'anic verses,[629] as it is the *application* to the Qur'an of a coherent metaphysical system, elaborated in all of his

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[628] Prof. Lory gives a brief reference to M. Vālsan's translations, which are again of consistently high quality and with extremely useful notes and explanations, in the *Bibliography* (p.167) at the end of his book; for full biographical details and a complete listing of the passages translated, see the bibliography of all of Mr. Vālsan's writings, including many translations from the *Futūhāt,* discussed **in Part 1, n. 27 above** (the collected articles entitled *L'Islam et la Fonction de René Guenon,* M. Valsan).

Prof. Mahmoud Ayoub's work—vol. I (Albany, 1984) covers *Sūrat al-Baqara* and the *Fātiha,* but the study is to be extended to the entire Qur'an—can be used only for a general notion of Kāshānī's interpretations, since usually it gives only a paraphrase or summary of certain brief sections. Although Prof. Ayoub briefly mentions that 'it is more commonly believed' that this work is 'by one of Ibn 'Arabī's disciples 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī' (p. 6), he concludes that 'whoever the author may be, the work clearly represents the thought and style of Ibn 'Arabī, and then proceeds to cite 'Ibn 'Arabī'—with no further mention of Kāshānī—throughout the rest of his study, including the index, bibliography, and key to the sources. This practice—which hopefully will be corrected in the second and subsequent volumes—is especially unfortunate not only because Kāshānī is *not* at all representative of Ibn 'Arabī's 'style' or 'method' of exegesis, and only to a very limited extent (for reasons outlined below in this section) of Ibn 'Arabī's 'thought.' More important, far from 'representing Sufi thought at its highest level of esoteric exegesis' (p.6), it is—as Kāshānī himself explicitly brings out in his Introduction (n. **75 below**)—an *elementary* work, for beginners on the spiritual Path, with very limited pedagogical aims, and therefore is completely different in style and content from what one usually finds (to take only examples in the framework of this article) in either the works of Ibn 'Arabī or the more intimate passages in 'Abd al-Qādir's *Mawāqif* (translations discussed below).

[629] P. Lory gives a remarkably condensed summary of these typical features of Sufi 'hermeneutics' at the beginning of this study (pp- 9-18), with appropriate emphasis on the fundamental role of individual spiritual realization (p.l5) in all the forms of Sufi exegesis—a dimension which makes it extremely diffcult to 'summarize' or systematize, even within the works of a single author. However, he does not draw the reader's attention to the great degree to which precisely Kāshānī's commentary tends to depart from this norm. (For a relatively accessible sampling of some more typical cases of Sufi *ta'wīl*—typical precisely in their radical diversity of outlook and interpretation—see the translated selections from discussions of Rūzbehān Baqlī, Najmuddīn Kubrā, **Simnānī [n. 110 below**], and others included H. Corbin's *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism,* tr. N. Pearson, Boulder/New York, 1978.)

It is perhaps also indicative that Ibn 'Arabī himself rarely uses the term *ta'wīl* (which in his work can often have a pejorative sense of any sort of artificially 'forced' interpretation arbitrarily attached to a Qur'anic expression, with no essential inner connection to the actual intended spiritual meaning of the text), and that he commonly uses the broader term *tafsīr*—which, as P. Lory notes, was traditionally

works,[630] based on elements from both Ibn 'Arabī's writings and the prevalent Avicennan school of philosophy in which Kāshānī himself was originally trained. The first half of Professor Lory's outline of Kāshānī's system (chapters 4-7) is a remarkably clear and readable summary of its metaphysical structure (the divine 'Presences' and the onto logical levels of the divine Essence, Attributes, and Acts) and its manifestations or expressions in cosmology, theology, and spiritual psychology. The second half of his account (chapters 8-11) deals with Kāshānī's application of this conceptual schema to more practical and experiential aspects of the spiritual life, with regard to a representative selection of Qur'anic verses and themes (eschatology, morality, the religious Law and its application, prophecy and sainthood, etc.) traditionally taken to refer to these issues in Sufi writing more generally. The author's exposition throughout is aimed primarily at readers without much previous background in Islamic spirituality, and thus may well serve (for that group) as an extremely useful general introduction not only to Kāshānī's metaphysics, but also to certain essential features common to many forms of Sufism and their spiritual approach to the Qur'an. For example, Professor Lory's explanation in a number of later chapters of the fundamental shift in perspective from a 'moralistic' and historicist framework (in which Qur'anic categories and judgments are viewed as applying to specific external groups and

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used for 'exoteric,' historical and grammatical commentaries—precisely for his own spiritual understanding. This is only one sign of Ibn 'Arabī's broader metaphysical outlook. For him, in general, what we would ordinarily call the 'spiritual' meaning *is* precisely the 'literal' meaning (as typified in his characteristic linguistic, 'etymological' approach to the meaning of key Qur'anic terms)—indeed is the 'Reality' of the Qur'an itself—in a sense which *includes,* but is in no way reducible to, the sort of historicist and legalistic viewpoints (themselves 'interpretations') that are unthinkingly accepted as the 'obvious' meaning of the text most of the time. This 'Platonic' understanding of the Qur'an (and of revelation in general) is in no way reducible to the sort of *zāhir/bātin* or *tafsīr/ta'wīl* schema implicit in Kāshānī's approach (and in the philosophic, Sufi, and Shiite perspectives he ultimately draws on). Thus it cannot really be 'taught'—precisely because that would imply that the actual spiritual 'meaning' were somehow reducible to a system or set of concepts somehow separable from the ontological triad of Qur'an-reader-Reality which alone is the matrix within which, for Ibn 'Arabī, that meaning is necessarily both manifested and perceived.

It is certainly true that Kāshānī's works in **general (cf. nn. 74, 76, 78)** are extremely helpful pedagogical tools, for those previously unacquainted with Ibn 'Arabī's outlook and terminology, in bringing out some of his key concepts and technical vocabulary. But the relation of these elements to the Shaykh's own works can probably best be expressed as that of a grammar in relation to all the richness of a living language, both spoken and written.

[630] For a further, more detailed introduction to this system, as it was developed in Kāshānī's famous commentary on the *Fusūs al-Hikam,* see T. lzutsu's *Sufism and Taoism* (cf. n. 72 and Part I, n. 6), as well as substantial segments translated or summarized in the two articles of William Chittick on the commentators of the *Fusūs* **cited at n. 71 (in the previous Part II-A)** of this review article. (The same conceptual system is also presupposed in Kāshānī's untranslated, but widely read works mentioned at **n. 78 below.)**

individuals) to a profoundly and rigorously internalized spiritual (or 'ontological') understanding of those passages, is especially helpful in that regard.[631]

Indeed the relative clarity and simplicity of Professor Lory's book also reflect similar features in all of Kāshānī's own works—features which have to do with both the form and the substance of that work, and which in some key respects are radically different from what one finds in Ibn 'Arabī's own writings (or in many of his more purely Sufi commentators). Kāshānī's Qur'anic commentaries, like his other books, are all clearly distinguished by a thoroughgoing pedagogical concern and didactic procedure[632] that is manifested in such interrelated characteristics as their rigorous systematization, the clarification and simplification of vocabulary (especially if compared with Ibn 'Arabī), and the conceptualization (often in an openly reductionist manner) of what were originally multivalent symbols. These tendencies are not merely stylistic particularities; they also reflect a shift in the content and underlying intentions of Kāshānī's writing (when compared with Ibn 'Arabī) that brought him very close to the prevailing systems of Avicennan philosophy (especially in their interpretations of the phenomena and claims of Sufism) and related schools of kalam—to such a degree that their verbal formulations are sometimes virtually indistinguishable.[633]

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[631] In this regard, it should be noted that Prof. Lory's book is evidently intended not only as an introduction to Kāshānī's own thought, but also as a general introduction to certain common features of Sufi exegesis, as well as their relation to other forms of Islamic Qur'an interpretation (as explained, for example, in the author's Foreword and the opening and concluding chapters). There is certainly a great need for such an introduction for students unable to read exemplary texts in the original Arabic or Persian, since the most adequate modern Western-language studies of this subject (e.g., P. Nwyia's *Exégèse Coranique et Langage Mystique* [Beirut, 1970] and G. Böwering's *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'ānic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl al-Tustarī* [Berlin/New York, 1980]) probably presuppose more background than can be expected from most beginning students, while the still frequently cited works of Goldziher and Massignon are both outdated and extremely misleading on fundamental points. However, one may question whether most readers of this work will be able to readily distinguish where (as in chapters 4-7, on the underlying 'spiritual cosmology') Kāshānī's views are relatively unique or representative only of this particular school, and where (as in most of the latter chapters) his approach and presuppositions are more broadly typical of Sufism in general.

[632] This particular intention is brought out very clearly in the Introduction to Kāshānī's *Ta'wīlāt,* which is translated in full here (pp. 149-153), where he clearly explains that his intention is only to open up the *possibility* of a spiritual understanding of the Qur'an for those *beginning* Sufis who may still find that difficult (as he himself once did), and where he states that he will avoid his more personal (and possibly controversial) understandings of many points. However, the same pedagogical approach and broader audience likewise seem to be assumed in his other extant writings, including his commentary on the *Fusūs* **(cf. n. 76)**, on Ansārī's *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn,* and his frequently cited Sufi lexicon *(Istilāhāt al-Sūfiyya),* which was explicitly intended as a learning aid for readers of the three above-mentioned commentaries.

[633] The permeation of Kāshānī's thought by Avicennan concepts and presuppositions (largely explicable by the biographical elements mentioned at **n. 80 below**) is especially evident in his psychology and

The background of that tendency is at least partly explained by some rare autobiographical remarks in Kāshānī's famous letter to 'Alā' al-Dawla al-Simnānī defending his conception of *wahdat al-wujūd*—a passage translated in its entirety here (pp. 154-65) from Jāmī's *Nafahāt al-Uns*[634]—in which he explains

theory of intellection (e.g., at pp. 56-62 in P. Lory's book), where his remarks could no doubt be read by the Avicennan philosophers of his day as simply a restatement of their own views. (This was especially likely since post-Avicennan philosophic thought had developed an explanation of Sufi practice and experience, building on hints in Ibn Sina's *K. al-Ishārāt,* which granted them a certain validity, albeit at a lower, pre-philosophic level.)

While Kāshānī's adaptations of Avicennan thought can probably best be understood, on their *own* terms (and judging by his own autobiographical explanations**, n. 80 below**), as an attempt to explain the insights of Ibn 'Arabī to students with a philosophic background, with the aim of drawing them into the practical efforts necessary to realize the more profound intentions of Ibn 'Arabī (and Sufism more generally), they also made it easy for subsequent students to treat the Shaykh's thought as a purely intellectual and, as it were, 'alternative' philosophical system, with little or no reference to its experiential and practical presuppositions and ultimate aims.

[634] Here readers are referred to H. Landolt's much more detailed classic study of this correspondence (including Simnānī's reply to Kāshānī): "Der briefwechsel zwischen kāšānī und simnānī über *wahdat al-wuğūd*" (*Der Islam* 50, 1973). There Prof. Landolt highlights the grounds for Simnānīs's attack—which was an important source for later critiques of Ibn 'Arabī, such as that by Ahmad Sirhindī (**see n. 5, in Part II-A above**), even if it was not exactly typical of Sufi attitudes at the time (Kāshānī notes [p. 163] the approval of Ibn 'Arabī's thesis by Simnānīs's own Sufi master, Isfarāyinī)—in his personal fears for Islamic 'orthodoxy' (especially in regard to official enforcement of Islamic law) in a situation in which his own conception of Islam appeared quite concretely threatened by other religions or sectarian views (such as the temporarily favoured Imami Shiism of certain rulers and viziers) under the relative tolerance enforced by the Mongol rulers of the time. For Simnānīs's own dramatic life and politico-religious role, see the bibliographic references in the same article (**p. 37, n. 36);** Prof. Landolt's Introduction (pp. 5-52) to his edition of the *Correspondance spirituelle* of Simnānī and Isfarāyinī; the article "'Alā' al-Dawla al-Simnānī" (by F. Meier) in *EI* (I, pp. 346-7); and the additional sources on the Kubrāwiyya order and the historical context at this time discusse**d in notes 33 and 39 of Part II-A above.**

Within the perspective of this article, Kāshānī's letter is especially significant in explaining (a) the early reception of Ibn 'Arabī's thought (once again, in the form of the *Fusūs)* in Iranian Sufi circles primarily as a form of 'mystical theology'—especially on the question of *wahdat al-wujūd*—filling a widely-felt need for a more adequate intellectual defense (or description) of the metaphysical claims of the existing Sufi orders, and (b) the pervasiveness of Avicennan conceptions (whether understood as theology or philosophy) in the intellectual training of the time (**see nn. 79, 55-56, and 64-6 [in Part II-A above]).** On the last point, especially, Prof. Landolt's article (pp. 33-36) adds a number of indispensable explanations (biographical details, etc.) to the list of names of his masters supplied by Kāshānī, including the fact that the philosopher-scientist Qutb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (cf**. notes 14 and 64 in Part II-A above)** studied with Kāshānī's own spiritual master, during his youth.

that as a young man he reached the highest degree of attainment in the study of logic and (Avicennan) philosophy, before continuing spiritual dissatisfaction drove him to seek the company and guidance of Sufi masters. It is not so surprising, then, that Kāshānī 's works often appear, at the very least, as a highly theoretical sort of 'theology' of Sufism directed—whether as apologetic or protreptic—more towards convincing readers with a similar *falsafa* or kalam training (rather than toward the spiritual direction of already practicing Sufis); or that often his writing turns toward a purely conceptual, 'rational' philosophic exposition in which only the broader problems and technical vocabulary recall the influence of Ibn 'Arabī or other Sufi authors. This latter development, through which selected themes and approaches from Ibn 'Arabī's works gradually became integrated into the intellectual discourse of a variety of later philosophic and theological schools, is especially well illustrated in the recent reprint of S. Guyard's much older translation (and Arabic edition) of Kāshānī's *R. fī al-Qadā' wa al-Qadar* [*Traité sur la Prédestination et le libre arbitre, précédé de quarante hadiths.* Introduction (and supplementary material) by G. Leconte. Pp. 114 + 25 pp. of Arabic text. Paris, 1995 reprint of 1978 edition],[635] which (despite the limited title) actually recapitulates the broad outlines of his distinctive metaphysical system. In this respect, Kāshānī is probably the best-known (if by no means the most profound) representative of this major intellectual tendency in the treatment of Ibn 'Arabī's heritage in later Islamic thought, among his philosophic and theological defenders and critics alike.[636]

Whether one happens to view this transformation positively or negatively, the distance separating Kāshānī's approach from that of Ibn 'Arabī—in style, content, audience, and ultimate intentions—stands out dramatically when one compares their writings on almost any issue. To take one of the most striking examples, the related problems of eschatology, resurrection, and the afterlife, Professor Lory clearly points out (pp. 107-21) how for Kāshānī—who in his interpretation follows the understanding both of earlier philosophers and many Sufi writers (cf. Nasafī above [Part II-A]) as well—'...the Resurrection is

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[635] The systematic scope of this treatise can be measured by consulting D. B. MacDonald's article "'Abd al-Razzāk al-Kāshānī," reprinted in the *EI* (I, pp. 88-90), which is largely an extensive summary of its contents, based on S. Guyard's translation and edition. The editor of this reprinted edition has added a helpful introduction placing Kāshānī's ideas in the larger context of Ibn 'Arabī's thought, with a number of references to the *Futūhāt* and the *Fusūs,* as well as a *new* translation (again by Mr. Leconte) of a collection of 40 hadith from the *Risāla* by the jurist al-Qayrawānī, intended to show the dogmatic 'orthodoxy' of the Sufi position (here identified with Kāshānī). While these supplementary texts are fascinating in themselves and help to bring out the broader Islamic background behind Kāshānī's (and Ibn 'Arabī's) characteristic positions on this particular metaphysical issue, it is perhaps worth noting that the range of possible positions on this question—whether from the standpoint of hadith and Qur'an, *fiqh, kalām,* and Sufism, among others—is not quite as simple as the editor might imply, since this particular problem (of *jabr* and *qadar*) has generated a monumental literature within each of those intellectual traditions, extending from the first Islamic centuries down to our own day.

[636] To take only his 'defenders' or later interpreters in the Eastern school of Ibn 'Arabī mentioned below, he is frequently cited by Haydar Āmulī, Jāmī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Ibn Turka, Mullā Sadrā (who, following Jāmī, discusses the correspondence with Simnānī at length in his *K. a1-Asfār al-Arba'a*)**,** and a number of the later Iranian thinkers included in the *Anthologie…* of S. J. Ashtiyani and H. Corbin (**discussed earlier at n. 3, part II-A above).**

that "instant" in which the encounter of the atemporal (of the metaphysically "timeless") and historical duration shatters the latter while revealing to it its own true nature' (p. 120). But while that formula—and the insight and experience it conveys—surely corresponds to at least one important facet of Ibn 'Arabī's eschatology, taken by itself it could also lead, as frequently seems to be the case with Kāshānī, to a sort of allegorical reduction of the complex symbolism of the Qur'an and *hadith* to a single (or at most twofold) plane of reference, and even potentially to an implicit denial of any meaningful 'survival' of the individual soul, with its wide range of possibly serious practical consequences, both personally and politically. By contrast, in Ibn 'Arabī (e.g., *Futūhāt,* chapters 60-64 and 371, for the most extended accounts of eschatology), what must strike any reader is the consistent and thorough 'literality'—an attitude equally removed from Kāshānī's 'symbolic' approach and from what we ordinarily think of as 'literalism'—with which the Shaykh treats the profuse descriptions given by the Qur'an and *hadith,* his extraordinary respect for each concrete detail in the 'timing' and 'location' of the stages of the human being's post—mortem existence (his ongoing development and spiritual experience in the *barzakh* or 'lesser Resurrection,' then the events of the Greater Resurrection, then the many facets of Gehenna, the Garden, and the beatific Vision).[637] When this characteristic procedure is combined with Ibn 'Arabī's

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[637] (**See already the discussion of Ibn 'Arabī's broader attitude toward the Qur'an and hadith in Part I and at notes 10 [Part II-A above] and 75.**)

In metaphysical terms, one could say that the difference turns especially on their differing conceptions of what Ibn 'Arabī calls *khiyāl,* in both its cosmic dimensions, on many planes of being (including even the 'material' world); and its microcosmic, human manifestations (where 'imagination' is both a weak and misleading equivalent, since khiyāl in this metaphysical sense underlies *absolutely all* phenomena—not merely the 'religious' or imaginal—of experience in general). For a more concrete example, one can compare Ibn 'Arabī's treatment of the eschatological materials of Islamic tradition with that of Ghazālī in his *Durrat al-Fākhira fī Kashf 'Ulūm al-Ākhira* (*The Precious Pearl: a Translation from the Arabic,* tr. Jane Smith, Missoula, Mont., 1979 [not to be confused with Jāmī's entirely different and much later *Durrat al-Fākhira*, whose translation and edition are discussed **in section V. below**]), a work whose restricted exoteric rhetorical intentions and underpinnings—more or less aimed at 'frightening' the common people (*'awāmm*) into carrying out all their religious and ethical duties—are clearly outlined in Ghazali's more philosophic writings **(cf. n. 13, Part II-A above).** It is precisely the relative separation of 'ethical' and 'intellectual' (or spiritual) planes of meaning and intention—and the consequent division of types of writing and teaching—which Ghazali took over from the Avicennan philosophy of his day that is called into question by Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics and his distinctive understanding of prophecy and revelation in all their dimensions.

The same fundamental metaphysical role of *khiyāl* for Ibn 'Arabī likewise seems to underlie his cryptic response, in his famous first encounter with the noted philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes), to his question whether the answer—to a mysteriously unnamed problem—achieved by illumination and inspiration was the same as that provided by rational inquiry: 'Yes and no. Between the yes and the no, spirits take their flight from their matter and heads are separated from their bodies.' See pp. 41-2 in the English translation of H. Corbin's *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*; a more complete translation of the same passage, from the *Futūhāt,* I, 153-54, can also be found in Asin Palacios' *L'Islam christianisé* [**recent French translation discussed in Part I], pp. 30-31**.)

repeated vivid descriptions of his own (or other Sufis') personal visionary experiences and encounters with many deceased individuals (earlier masters, prophets, etc.) in the other world *(barzakh),* it is relatively easy to see that his own constant—and highly problematic, not to say disconcerting—insistence on the primary role of *kashf* (immediate experiential 'unveiling') and the concomitant limitations of abstract, formal 'reasoning' (*'aql*) have been substantially altered, if not indeed reversed, in Kāshānī's far more sober philosophic perspective.[638]

At the same time, it must be stressed that Kāshānī's relatively conceptual treatment of Ibn 'Arabī's symbols—or rather, of his personal experience and re-expression of the data of the Qur'an and *hadith,* in so many domains—represents only one typical strand among Ibn 'Arabī's later interpreters. One cannot help but be reminded again of the similar diversity of approaches in Western civilization to Plato's dialogues, according to subsequent readers' emphases on his myths, psychology, ontology, cosmology, logic, and so forth. The fecundity of Ibn 'Arabī's writing and his richness of expression (and possibilities of interpretation) are certainly comparable, even if their later creative development is still far less known to us. Continuing beyond Kāshānī, students can gain some notion of those alternative lines of interpretation by referring to relatively accessible works by Haydar Āmulī (d. 787/1385) and 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 805/1403), both likewise commentators of the *Fusūs,* but also independent and important thinkers in their own right.[639]

The three works by Haydar Āmulī edited by H. Corbin and O. Yahya (and at least partially accessible to non-Arabists in Professor Corbin's French introduction and related studies) have a considerable historical and an intrinsic interest, even if Āmulī's own immediate influence in Islamic thought seems to have been relatively limited.[640] To begin with, they are an excellent illustration of those general

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[638] Some of the grounds of the differing outlooks of Ibn 'Arabī and Kāshānī have been discussed in general terms in **notes 75 and 83 above.** Still another typical example of Kāshānī's assimilation of Ibn 'Arabī's very different ideas to prevailing Avicennan notions is in his treatment of cosmology (= Prof. Lory's study, pp. 50-59), where the various co-equal and concomitant elements of Ibn 'Arabī's cosmology—discussed briefly in Part I in the context of a translation of D. Gill—are transformed into degrees of 'progressive particularization' (p.54), with 'prime matter' as the lowest level.

It should be stressed that Kāshānī's approach was *not* necessarily typical of all other commentators and interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī. Something of the distinctiveness of his approach (in all the ways outlined above) comes out more clearly, for example, when it is contrasted with Jīlī's much more faithful commentary on Ibn 'Arabī's *Risālat al-Anwār* discussed below. Jīlī's relative faithfulness to the Shaykh's language and intentions can be plainly seen, e.g., in his discussion (pp. 72ff.) of Ibn 'Arabī's allusions to the stages and realities of the next world.

[639] Their line is continued by such figures as Jāmī (d. 1198/1492), Mullā Sadrā, and a number of other less renowned thinkers who are briefly mentioned **below (e.g., at n. 91).**

[640] The relative rarity of manuscripts of Āmulī's works (compared with authors like Kāshānī, Qunawi, or Jīlī) seems to reflect not so much the intrinsic qualities of his thought or expression, as the restricted nature of his original audience—primarily Imami Shiite theologians and jurists—and his pioneering status in defending the writings of Ibn 'Arabī in that sectarian context. (Tellingly, he is among the

features which, as we have already noted, characterize most of the later, more 'scholastic' and theoretical treatments of Ibn 'Arabī's thought: the relative concentration (among the Shaykh's own works) on the *Fusūs al-Hikam,* the determinant role of the commentaries of Qaysarī and Kāshānī, and the centrality of the complex of problems—at once philosophic, theological, and mystical—summed up in the controversial formula of the 'Unity of Being' *(wahdat al-wujūd).*[641]

More important, however, these books have certain qualities which might recommend them more particularly to modern readers, if only they were better known. To begin with, both the massive *K. Jāmi' al-Asrār wa Manba' al-Anwār* and the much shorter *R. Naqd al-Nuqūd fī Ma'rifat al-Wujūd* printed with it (*'La philosophie shī'ite.'* Ed. H. Corbin et O. Yahya. Pp. 832 (Arabic introduction, texts, and extensive indexes) + 76 pp. French introduction. Tehran: Bibliotheque Iranienne, nᵒ. 6. 1969.)[642] are mainly devoted to explaining some of Ibn 'Arabī's key concepts (and their practical, experiential presupposi-tions) to readers who are not assumed to be familiar with his works, an especially difficult challenge that must obviously be faced by any contemporary writer on these subjects. As a result, Āmulī's discussions, while no doubt lacking the philosophic subtlety and complex technical vocabulary of the classical works directed toward 'specialists' (Qaysarī, Kāshānī, Jīlī, etc.), are likely to be considerably clearer and more accessible to readers approaching these issues, at least in their Islamic form, for the first time. This pedagogical interest is amplified, at least in the *Jāmi' al-Asrār*—a work of Āmulī's youth, written soon after his 'conversion' to Sufism in the form of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings—by a revealing personal openness and directness, an unconcealed autobiographical dimension which is relatively rare in Islamic literature in general, and certainly in most works of this school. This personal aspect is especially visible in Āmulī's impassioned attempts—which provide the justification and framework for the book—to convince his mostly hostile and suspicious Twelver Shiite colleagues and friends (in the holy cities of Iraq where he

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authors cited by the later Shiite writer Ibn Abī Jumhūr [see the article of W. Madelung on this **figure at n. 39, in Part II-A above],** who likewise attempted to assimilate many of Ibn 'Arabī's perspectives in the Imami Shiite theological context.) For a tentative listing of Āmulī's works and extant manuscripts, see especially the introductions to his *Jāmi' al-Asrār* (full references in the text below).

[641] The indexes to the *Jāmī' al-Asrār* and *Naqd al-Nuqūd* are especially revealing of the leading role of Kāshānī and Qaysarī in determining Āmulī's conception of Ibn 'Arabī's 'philosophy.' Figures from the same 'school' of interpreters seem to have been equally influential in his later commentary on the *Fusūs* (the *Nass al-Nusūs...*)*,* to judge by the references in his Introduction (the only part so far **edited: see n. 90 below**).

[642] The much wider importance of Osman Yahia's long Arabic introduction to this volume for outlining the entire history of the commentaries and reception (critical as well as favorable) of the *Fusūs al-Hikam*, in many different parts of the Islamic world, has already been mentioned at **n. 5, in Part II-A** above.

Readers unable to consult the Arabic texts in this volume will find an excellent brief introduction to Āmulī's metaphysical thought, based largely on both the works edited there, in Toshihiko Izutsu's article on 'The Basic Structure of Metaphysical Thought in Islam,' now most readily accessible in French translation in the collection of his essays entitled *Unité de l'Existence et Création Perpétuelle en Mystique Islamique* (Paris, Les Deux Océans, 1980), pp. 9-47 (see also **n. 14, Part II-A above).**

was writing) of the ultimate unity of Ibn 'Arabī's Sufi path and the insights and teachings traditionally attributed to the early Shiite Imams.[643]

The second volume edited by Corbin and Yahya, the long introduction to 'Āmulī's commentary on the *Fusūs al-Hikam* [*Al-muqaddimāt min kitāb nass al-nusūs : Fī sharh fusūs al-hikam li-muhyī al-dīn ibn al-'Arabī. / 'Le Texte des Textes.'* Ed. H. Corbin et O. Yahya. Pp. 547 (text) + 77 pp. French introduction and 80 pp. Arabic introduction. Paris/Tehran: Bibliotheque Iranienne, nº. 22-21. 1974.][644] written in his old

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[643] This latter point deserves some further amplification, since Professor Corbin's introduction focuses on the 'meta-historical' or philosophic unity (as perceived by Āmulī and a few other relatively rare Shiite scholars) between Sufism and Shiism, but does not stress the real *historical* difficulties Āmulī (and his successors: **see n. 91 below**) encountered in trying to convince many of their fellow Shiite scholars of the validity of this extremely ecumenical conception. In fact, Āmulī's argument is almost entirely intended to explain Ibn 'Arabī's outlook to Imami Shiite religious scholars (whose training was traditionally in distinctively Shiite forms of hadith*, fiqh,* and *kalām* theology), and thereby to convince them of the superiority of Sufism and its related spiritual practices, in the forms expressed by Ibn 'Arabī, as the proper and uniquely effective way to grasp the true intentions and meanings of the teachings of the early Imams—a distinctive approach which Āmulī understands and presents as yet another spiritual 'Path' (*tarīqa*), sharing many of the key personalities (e.g., Imam 'Alī and Ja'far al-Sādiq) also found in many classical Sufi chains of initiation.

This work is *not* at all devoted (and in this respect the French title may be unintentionally ironic) to defending Shiism to non-Shiite Sufis, for example. Āmulī consistently writes from the perspective of the directly experienced True Reality *(haqīqa)* underlying these and many other religious traditions, and does not attempt to circumscribe the universal import of Ibn 'Arabī's message. In that light, it is easy to understand the relative hostility—or perhaps more often simple indifference—which was the usual clerical response to similar attempts by Āmulī and his successors.

Historically speaking, the efforts of Āmulī and such later Shiite scholars as Mullā Sadrā (or in our own day, by the renowned Iranian specialist, S. J. Ashtiyānī: **see n. 57, Part II**-A above) to bring out this universal spiritual dimension of Shiite tradition (almost always under the direct or indirect influence of Ibn 'Arabī) have usually—with the possible exception of certain widely influential teachers in Qajar Iran—remained at best somewhat marginal in the eyes of the vast majority of the Imami *'ulamā',* and often subject to harassment or even open persecution as a suspect heresy. (The typical case of Mullā Sadrā and his visible attempts to 'veil' the profound influence of Ibn 'Arabī in his more popular and accessible writings, in early Safavid times, is detailed in our translation and extensive Introduction to his *The Wisdom of the Throne*) Without an awareness of this historical background, more recent develop-ments in Imami Shiism might appear somewhat anomalous, rather than as being the continuation of ongoing and deeply-rooted tendencies.

[644] This edition does not include Prof. Yahya's extensive indexes mentioned in the French introduction (as forming part of the the projected Part 2 of this volume in the 'Bibliothèque iranienne'); apparently they (and the remainder of the actual commentary on the *Fusūs*) have not yet been published. An especially interesting feature of this text are Āmulī's many circular, mandala-like pedagogical diagrams

age, is still marked by his Twelver Shiite convictions on the question of *walāya* (which may have accounted for its relative neglect by subsequent non-Shiite authors), but is instead an advanced, philosophically elaborate treatise, aimed at other highly trained students of Ibn 'Arabī, discussing all the key themes of the *Fusūs* from the threefold standpoint of *naql* (*hadith* and Islamic tradition), *'aql* (the dialectic 'reason' of later kalam and Avicennan philosophy), and *kashf* (the direct experiential realization of the Sufis). Āmulī's explicit comparative analysis of these three dimensions (at once of intellectual form and spiritual method), which are inextricably interwoven in Ibn 'Arabī's own writings, is a typical feature of virtually all subsequent commentaries and discussions of his teachings—at least when some attempt was made to explain or defend them to philosophers and theologians outside strictly Sufi circles.[645]

'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428) was undoubtedly both the most original thinker and the most remarkable and independent mystical writer among the figures we have discussed in the 'school' of Ibn 'Arabī (or of Qūnawī). Indeed the sort of derivative 'scholastic' relationship implied by that expression is quite misleading, unless we understand their relation as comparable, for example, to Proclus' position

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used to illustrate aspects of the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* and *tajalliyāt,* which are considerably more elaborate than those actually given by Ibn 'Arabī in the *Futūhāt.*

A physical indication of the extent (and relative philosophic independence) of this tradition of 'commentary' on the *Fusūs* by this time can be gleaned from the editors' remark that an edition of only the first half of Āmulī's actual commentary (the only sections now available in manuscript) would have taken four or five volumes the size of this 'Introduction' (already 547 pages of Arabic text alone).

[645] See the very similar analysis of *wahdat al-wujūd* and related themes, in contrast with the Avicennan philosophic and *kalām* standpoints, by another, slightly later Imami Shiite writer, Sā'in al-Dīn Turka Isfāhānī (d. ca. 835 A.H.) in his *Tamhīd al-Qawā'id* [ed. S J. Ashtiyani 274 pp. + 6 pp. English introduction by S. H. Nasr. Tehran, 1976.]. This work was an important teaching text in later Iranian philosophic circles, as indicated by the glosses by 19th and early 20th-century traditional Iranian philosophers included in this edition; their role is explained in the editor's lengthy Persian introduction (181 pages!). This Ibn Turka was apparently the son or grandson of Sadr al-Dīn Ibn Turka, another Imami scholar 'converted' to the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī much earlier, whose *Risāla fī al-Wujūd al-Mutlaq* is cited by Āmulī himself in the *Jāmī' al-Asrār,* pp. 496-97.

Another successor in this hierarchical resolution of the competing perspectives of kalām, philosophy, and Ibn 'Arabī (often representing 'Sufism' more generally) is the famous Imami Shiite thinker Ibn Abī Jumhūr (d. late 9th/15th century), whose views in his major work, the *K. al-Mujlī* are outlined in W. Madelung's 'Ibn Abī Ğumhūr al-Ahsā'ī's Synthesis of *Kalām,* Philosophy and Sufism' (see n. **39, Part II-A above),** which also mentions his preparation of a forthcoming article on Ibn Abī Jumhūr for the *Supp1ement* to the *EI.* (This article, which was first presented in 1976, does not mention the possible lines of 'Akbari' transmission connected with the earlier Shiite works of H. Āmulī and Ibn Turka.)

Comparative works along similar lines by the poet-philosopher Jāmī and by Mullā Sadrā are discussed in the **section V on** Jāmī below.

vis-à-vis Plotinus.[646] For, having completely assimilated the teachings and writings of the Shaykh (and his earlier commentators), Jīlī proceeds to develop the same broad themes (metaphysics, cosmology, spiritual psychology, etc.), but with an originality and independence which is consistently grounded—like Ibn 'Arabī's—in his own spiritual insight and experience. These distinctive qualities, which are especially striking when set against the relatively greater theological and philosophic emphasis of most earlier (and later) writers in this school, no doubt helped account for the wide diffusion and acceptance of his writings among Sufis from Muslim India (where Jīlī traveled) to the Ottoman lands.[647] However, that same richness and depth of implicit references (again comparable to the later Neoplatonists), which pose such a dilemma for students in most domains of later Islamic culture, are a formidable obstacle for modern students and translators—a fact which may explain the limited availability of his writings in any Western language.

Titus Burckhardt's partial translation of the opening, metaphysical chapters of Jīlī's *K. al-Insān al-Kāmil* [*De l'Homme Universel.* Pp. 101. Paris: Dervy-Livres. 1975 (1st ed. 1953). / English transl. (from the French) by A. Culme-Seymour. *Universal Man.* Pp. 93. Sherborne, UK: Beshara Publications. 1995.], with its extensive introduction and careful treatment of philosophic vocabulary (including an excellent glossary), has been a classic introduction to this dimension of Ibn 'Arabī's thought for many years. However, the translator's intentionally limited selection of topics and particular pedagogical intention—both carefully acknowledged in the opening sections[648]—necessarily lead the uninitiated reader in a

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[646] The analogy in this case is particularly strong because one of the important features of Jīlī's independent philosophic contribution, as with Proclus and subsequent Neoplatonists, has to do with his subtle analysis and multiplication of ontological distinctions concerning the 'intermediate' conditions and states of being: see, for example, E. Bannerth, 'Das Buch der 40 Stufen von 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ğīlī,' *Österrechische Akademie der Wissenschaften, philologisch-historische Klasse* 230, no.3 (1956). 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī's defense of Ibn 'Arabī against some of Jīlī's 'innovations' or disagreements on certain points is discussed by M. Chodkiewicz in the Introduction to his translations from the ***Mawāqif* (the *Écrits spirituels* discussed at the end of this article), pp. 31 and 189.**

[647] For Jīlī's travels and life, see the article by Helmut Ritter, "'Abd al-Karīm al-Djīlī" in *EI,* vol. I, p. 71; the importance of the Yemen in Jīlī's life reminds us of the still virtually unknown story of the acceptance and development of Ibn 'Arabī's influence among Sufis there (a subject evoked only briefly at the end of A. Ateş's article on Ibn 'Arabī in the *EI*). Some idea of the spread of Jīlī's ideas and writings, especially in subsequent Turkish Sufism, can be gathered from the locations of manuscripts of his works listed in **Brockelman, *GALS* II, pp. 283-84,** and—for Jīlī's commentaries on several of Ibn 'Arabī's works—in O. Yahia's *Histoire et classification de l'œuvre d'ibn 'Arabī.*

The most accessible popular introduction to Jīlī is probably still that included in R. A. Nicholson's *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1921; repr. 1967), chapter II.

[648] This version, as the translator stresses, covers only roughly one quarter of the total work, and is not entirely complete even for the chapters that are included. The translator gives a careful outline of the chapter headings of the rest of the book, but—as often with both Ibn 'Arabī and many of his later interpreters—a bare outline often does not really suggest the likelihood of such fascinating discussions as those mentioned **in n. 95 below**. Readers of Jīlī's work, not to mention translators, are certainly not

direction almost the opposite (at least historically speaking) of that actually followed by the author. For it is very difficult, unless the reader is already quite familiar with Ibn 'Arabī and his earlier commentators, to see how Jīlī is actually using their familiar concepts and terminology in an independent, creative fashion to develop and express new insights and original ideas.[649] Indeed a relatively complete and appropriately annotated translation of such a work, difficult as that might be, could help transform many widespread misconceptions concerning this whole current of later Islamic thought.

In the meanwhile, readers can find an excellent, eminently readable illustration of these distinctive qualities of Jīlī's work in the recent partial translation of his commentary on Ibn 'Arabī's *R. al-Anwār* [*Journey to the Lord of Power.* Tr. R. T. Harris. Pp. 116. New York: Inner Traditions International. 1981.].[650] What

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aided by the state of the available printed texts, where it is clear that the editor/printer has himself often not been able to follow the discussion.

[649] In Jīlī's case, the almost universal problem, for modern students and translators of later Islamic thought, of widespread ignorance of the distinct traditions of later *kalām* and Avicennan philosophy **(already cited at nn. 55-56 and 59-60, Part II-A above)** is further compounded by his often *creative* development of Ibn 'Arabī's own technical terminology, which also assumes a considerable acquaintance with the Shaykh's writings in general, especially in his more complex metaphysical discussions.

This is not always the case with Jīlī, as indicated by two fascinating brief excerpts from the *K. al-Insān al-Kāmil* (from later chapters than those included in the Burckhardt translation), which are readily accessible in the English translation of H. Corbin's *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth,* (tr. N. Pearson, London, 1990, reprint of Princeton, 1977 edition), pp. l4-63. (The first selection concerns the favorite Sufi theme of the 'men of *al-A'rāf*' [cf. Qur'an 7:46 ff.], the second a mystical encounter with the initiatic figure of al-Khadir/Khizr.)   Without already being informed that Jīlī was their author, it would be difficult indeed for readers to imagine that these passages are drawn from the same book as the earlier chapters translated by T. Burckhardt in the above-mentioned volume.

[650] The excerpts drawn from Jīlī's commentary here cover 33 pages, versus only 24 pages for the actual translation of Ibn 'Arabī's text. (Asin Palacios' earlier translation of the same influential text was discussed in Part I above.) This partial English version also includes a helpful 11-page glossary (including explanations of biographical references to earlier Sufi authors), while the work as a whole—including the introductory material by two contemporary Jerrahi Sufi shaykhs—reflects the great esteem Jīlī long enjoyed in Ottoman (by no means exclusively 'Turkish') Sufi circles, a phenomenon also indicated by the many manuscripts of his works found in libraries in that region **(n. 93 above).**

Although the translations in this work are not by a scholarly specialist, any shortcomings in that regard (e.g., technical terms not always clearly explained as such, references and allusions not always identified) are somewhat counterbalanced by the translator's obvious care for the clarity and readability of her final version—a fundamental consideration that is unfortunately not always so apparent in the available translations in this field.

is remarkable about that 'commentary,' in comparison with the works by authors discussed earlier in this section, is its consistent, unmistakable reference to *direct experience* of the realities in question, not just as a premise of the discussion, but as its very *raison d'être.* Jīlī, like Ibn 'Arabī and unlike so many of the Shaykh's other commentators, is careful here to raise questions of 'theory' or intellectual explanation as they naturally arise within the context and ultimate aim of spiritual realization—not as they are generated by extraneous apologetic concerns, or by an internal intellectual dialectic taken as an end in itself. The result of that approach, aided by his frequent references from appropriate passages of the *Futūhāt* and other works of Ibn 'Arabī, is a truly Sufi commentary (not so much a philosophic or theological one), grounded in terms accessible to any reader willing to follow the spiritual progression underlying Ibn 'Arabī's exposition in this work. (The same distinctive qualities are likewise evident in the translations from the more recent figure of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī discussed at the end of this essay below.)

V. Although 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Jāmī (d. 898/1492) could quite justifiably be considered a major figure in the 'school' of Ibn 'Arabī and Qūnawī discussed in the preceding section, simply on the basis of his Sufi commentaries and more philosophical writings, he is certainly far better known today as one of the greatest classical Persian poets. Professor Yann Richard's translation (and new edition, with facing Persian text) of his famous *Lawā'ih* [*Les Jaillissements de Lumière.* Pp. 179. Paris: Les Deux Oceans. 1982.], whose thirty-six 'Illuminations' are a masterful combination of powerful, immediately accessible Sufi poetry and complex metaphysical analysis (almost entirely based on Ibn 'Arabī and his earlier commentators), thus illustrates the inner connection between these two equally essential aspects of Jāmī's life and work. At the same time, among all the translations discussed here, this work (along with 'Abd al-Qādir's *K. al-Mawāqif,* discussed below) is especially suitable as an introduction to this current of later Islamic thought for students without any previous background, precisely because Jāmī—whose intentions are ably conveyed in Professor Richard's careful translation—has constructed the work as a sort of dialogue in which the poetry (although occasionally didactic) most often directs the reader to the immediate and indispensable experiential insights (the 'illuminations' or 'flashes' of the title) whose metaphysical and theological implications are then clarified and elaborated in the accompanying prose, often by contrasting the approach of the Sufi 'knowers' (as exemplified here by Ibn 'Arabī and Qūnawī) with the limited methods of the *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa.*[651]

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[651] This sort of 'dialogue' of ecstatic poetry and philosophic prose often strikingly illustrates the sorts of problems and possible misconceptions (at once practical, theological, and spiritual) that frequently gave rise to the need for theoretical and doctrinal clarification in earlier Sufism, as explained in our discussions of Balyānī (and his critics) in Part II-A above. A classic example is the dramatic poetic refrain of '*hama ūst*' ('all is He!') in Illumination 22, immediately followed by Jāmī's cautious theological and practical explanations of what such an ecstatic expression really means (sections 23-24).

See note 100 for some of the explicit references to Ibn 'Arabī and Qūnawī. Jāmī's characteristic comparison of the methods and conclusions of the Sufis, Avicennan philosophers, and kalam theologians is expressed in its most systematic form in his *K. al-Durrat al-Fākhira* (recent translation and critical edition by N. Heer **discussed below).**

In virtually every section, he thereby brings the reader explicitly face-to-face, in extremely concise fashion, with the three essential elements of all the writings of this school: the experiential ground (and its broader Sufi presuppositions); its doctrinal or theoretical elaboration; and its broader dialectical context (i.e., the competing or ostensibly opposed doctrines, methods, and interpretations, each usually expressed in the shared technical vocabulary of post-Avicennan kalam). The apparent difficulty or obscurity of most of the more abstract and purely 'theoretical' writings of this school—including Jāmī's own longer prose works whose translations are discussed below—is almost entirely due to the modern reader's understandable lack of acquaintance with the first and especially the third of those elements, which were naturally presupposed in his original audience.[652]

The same carefully conceived spiritual pedagogy clearly underlies the structure of the work as a whole: Jāmī begins with fundamental conditions of each individual's search (the state of 'dispersion' and its causes, 'illuminations' no.1-4), points out the profound inner relation of the seeker and God *(tawhīd,* no. 5-6) which is the ultimate context of all that follows, alludes to some of the key features of the spiritual method (no. 7-10) leading to a growing awareness of this Reality, [653] and above all to one's awakening to the true nature of Love (no. 11-12), the sign and companion of one's subsequent progress on this path. This first third of the work has a universality that seems to justify Jāmī's initial claim (in his Introduction here) to be nothing but a 'translator' *(tarjumān)* of the Truly Real (*al-Haqq*); and there are constant allusions to this indispensable personal dimension throughout the subsequent metaphysical discussions, until he returns to that plane of immediate insight even more forcefully in his conclusion: 'To express the Realities in words is but a dream . . . Silence is better than this conversation of ours!' The intervening sections (13-36), however, are mainly devoted to an elaborate metaphysical analysis, in terms at once ontological and theological, of the inner structure and dynamics of absolute Being *(wujūd/hastī*) and the divine Reality (*al-Haqq*) in relation to the manifest, phenomenal world, a discussion almost entirely based on the *Fusūs al-Hikam* and its subsequent commentators.[654]

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[652] This problem stands out most clearly when one compares the *Lawā'ih* with the English translation of the *Durrat al-Fākhira* (**see below**), which is often virtually incomprehensible—at least to nonspecialists—for lack of adequate explanation of those presuppositions. (This is not to minimize the difficulty of the challenge faced by translators in this domain, since there really is no simple way to condense several years of study—which would likewise be required for uninitiated readers approaching most Western theological or philosophic traditions for the very first time!—into some more easily accessible form; cf. our remarks on other aspects of this problem at **notes 56, 60 in Part II-A above, and at n. 95 above.)**

[653] The translator's brief outline (pp. 12-15) of some of the key features of Naqshbandī spiritual method is especially illuminating and helpful at this point.

[654] In addition to the explicit references to the *Fusūs al-Hikam* (section 26 [from the *Fass* of Shu'ayb], discussing the heart of the true Knower and the stage of *'ayn al-jam'* is especially important, along with other explicit citations in sections 30 and 36) and to Qūnawī (section 33, citing his *K. al-Nusūs), students of Ibn 'Arabī will recognize that much of this part of the book is basically a Persian translation or paraphrase of famous passages from the *Fusūs* or from commentaries in the line of Qūnawī. Often the subject has been so deeply assimilated that it is difficult to say whether Jāmī was knowingly translating

Rather than attempting a detailed commentary of these complex, still highly condensed discussions (which would no doubt overwhelm this brief and intentionally introductory work), Professor Richard has often referred the reader to two of Jāmī's own longer commentaries on Ibn ʿArabī and his metaphysical/theological thought *(al-Durrat al-Fākhira* and *Naqd al-Nusūs)* which are fortunately now readily available in recent critical editions and at least partial English translations (see discussion below); a detailed, comprehensive understanding of the more philosophic parts of the text is probably impossible without extensive reference to those expanded prose sources. However, his translation (and edition) is especially marked by an awareness of and careful attention to Jāmī's systematic thought and technical vocabulary (including a useful glossary of key terms) that is one of its several distinct improvements over the outdated English version by Whinfield and Kazvini.[655] The translator's brief

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certain passages or simply rephrasing their common insights. (See below for Jāmī's own explicit studies of the *Fusūs.)*

Also noteworthy in this regard are Jāmī's quotations of lines from Rumi's *Masnavī* (in section 6) and from Mahmūd Shabistārī's (d. 720/1320-21) *Gulshān-i Rāz,* indicative of the extent to which Ibn ʿArabī's (or Qūnawī's) ideas had come to be accepted as the standard Sufi interpretation for the mystical verses of many earlier Sufi poets not directly influenced by the Shaykh or his writings. In fact, Shabistārī's *Gulshān-i Rāz,* composed in 1311, is—like the works of Nasafī already discussed above (Part II-A)—an interesting example of the early, popular Eastern Sufi 'piecemeal' assimilation of Ibn ʿArabī's ideas (e.g., concerning the *insān kāmil*), in a form not yet heavily influenced by the much more systematic philosophic and theological language characteristic of the school of Qūnawī. Unfortunately, although there are a number of popular, frequently reprinted English versions (*The Rose-Garden of Mysteries,* tr. E. H. Whinfield, London, 1880 [reprinted]; *Garden of Mysteries,* tr. R. Darr, Cambridge, 2007), the lack of annotation makes it difficult to grasp the more systematic aspect of that work which made it such a common teaching text in Persian Sufi circles for many centuries. The most widely read commentary, in this connection, was no doubt Muhammad Lāhījī's *Mafātih al-Iʿjāz fī Sharh Gulshān al-Rāz* (ed. K. Samīʿī, Tehran, 1337 h.s./1958), written sometime in the later 8th/14th century. (One may hope that projected translations of at least parts of that famous commentary, in both French and English, will soon be completed.)

[655] This book, *Lawāʾih: A Treatise on Sufism,* has recently been reprinted (London, 1978) with the very useful addition of an introduction by Prof. S. H. Nasr (pp. xix-xxvii) covering in a briefer form many of the same points as Y. Richard's French introduction, and correcting Whinfield's extremely misleading introductory comments. (Whinfield's Victorian-era remarks—with their allusions to all sorts of 'causal' explanations of Sufism in terms of supposed Indian, Buddhist, and Neoplatonic sources—are symptomatic of his apparent ignorance of the Islamic traditions themselves, but do indicate the very real progress that has been made in these studies over the past century, when one compares them, for example, with the major recent works of W. Chittick and N. Heer on Jāmī discussed below.) That the English translation itself is still quite useful is no doubt explicable by the fact (explained by Whinfield at the end of his original Preface) that virtually all of it, including the entire philosophic later part, was translated not directly from the Persian, but from a French translation by the renowned Persian scholar Mīrzā Muhammad Kazvīnī.

introduction (pp. 7-28)—again clearly designed for a general audience with little or no specialized background—is a marvel of concision, since it covers not only Jāmī's life and eventful historical context (including his scientific training, his extensive travels and contacts with the Ottoman and Aq Quyunlu sultans, his Naqshbandī Sufi affiliations, his equally famous contemporaries in Herat's 'Golden Age' under Husayn Bayqara, Behzād and Mīr 'Alī Shīr Navā'ī), and the manuscripts, edition and commentaries of the *Lawā'ih,* but also a fascinating summary of Naqshbandī principles of spiritual method and a long list of Jāmī's principal writings (with available translations and editions).[656]

Within the historical context of this article (and given Jāmī's modern reputation primarily as a poet rather than a mystical philosopher and theologian), that list is especially revealing in several respects. Not only are 32 of the 44 titles cited on Sufi subjects (including the renowned biographical compilation *Nafahāt al-Uns,* a classic source for the most diverse historical aspects of Sufism)*,* but the majority of those works actually involve either commentaries on Ibn 'Arabī (including *two* on the *Fusūs al-Hikam*) or elaborations (mostly in Persian prose, but also in poetry and even—notably with *al-Durrat al-Fākhira*— in Arabic prose) of classical themes and problems within the Akbarī 'school.' Often these analyses are applied, as in the *Lawā'ih* itself, to the interpretation of mystical poetry, including Sufi verses by Ibn al-Fārid (both the *Mīmīya* and the *Nazm al-Sulūk),* Rumi (the *Masnavī),* Jāmī himself (his *Rubā'iyyāt*)**,** and Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī *(Ashi''at al-Lamā'āt).*

The mention of the last of those books is especially significant, since 'Irāqī's *Lama'āt,* with its masterful mixture of ecstatic Persian love poetry and short prose interludes, not only provided the obvious formal model for the *Lawā'ih*, but was actually composed under the immediate inspiration of Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's lectures on Ibn 'Arabī's thought. In this regard we can only briefly mention—so as not to preclude the full-length review it richly deserves—the recent study and English translation of 'Irāqī's work by William Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson [*Divine Flashes.* Pp. 178 + xvi (Preface by S. H. Nasr). New York: Paulist Press. 1982.], and especially Prof. Chittick's analytical introduction ('The Mystical Philosophy of the Divine Flashes') and his extensive commentary and index of technical terms bringing out the systematic metaphysical underpinnings of 'Irāqī's poetry. Those sections, which often cite or paraphrase Jāmī's commentary on the *Lama'āt (Ashi''at al-Lama'āt),* in themselves constitute a substantial introduction to Qunawi and his interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī's teaching, and clearly demonstrate its profound influence on Jāmī's own thinking.[657]

The juxtaposition of these two widely read and genuinely popular works of 'Irāqī and Jāmī is also a reminder of the much broader—if still little studied—problem of the 'influences' of Ibn 'Arabī (and espe-

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[656] For more complete and detailed historical references, see the Persian introduction by W. Chittick to his editon of Jāmī's *Naqd al-Nusūs....* (discussed below), and the long bio-bibliographical study by A. A. Hikmat, *Jāmī…*, (Tehran, 1984), pp. 161-213. (Dr. Richard acknowledges those key sources for his abridged bibliography here.)

[657] This work is a model of the sort of background that must often be provided in order to enable non-specialist readers to understand the meaning and intentions of writers in these traditions. In addition to the philosophic commentaries, the book also includes a fascinating—and less demanding—biographical and historical introduction, discussing 'Irāqī's long stay (and subsequent influence) in Muslim India as well as his role in the larger circle of Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (**see also notes 61-64, in Part II-above).**

cially the vocabulary and systematic interpretations of the *Fusūs*) in the later poetry and literature of the Eastern Islamic world, in Turkish, Urdu and other Indian languages (and even Malay or Indonesian), as well as in Persian. Two outward, easily discernable (and no doubt interrelated) signs of that influence are the almost universal use of the systematic conceptions of this 'school' (especially such symbolically rich themes as *wahdat al-wujūd, tajalliyāt,* the 'presences' of divine Being, etc.) in commentaries on earlier, widely-read Sufi poets such as Rumi and Ibn al-Fārid,[658] and the pervasiveness of Ibn ‘Arabī's technical vocabulary (again largely as transmitted by Qūnawī and his successors) throughout the poetry composed in those languages down through the 19th century. Readers familiar with this school can readily note the existence of its terminology and problems; but determining to what degree those formal metaphysical allusions (and Sufi language in general) actually represent conscious acquaintance with and serious understanding of Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers, rather than merely traditional (or even ironic) use of those materials, usually requires close acquaintance with each individual writer and his personal background (Sufi affiliations, studies, etc.) and an informed sensitivity to their actual roles in his writing.[659]

Fortunately, in the case of Jāmī at least, that necessary background is readily accessible, even in English translation, through two recent in-depth studies (including major critical editions) of some of his key metaphysical prose writings—works which are perfectly complementary, and which clearly represent

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[658] See also **notes 2, 63, [in Part II-A above], 73, and 104 (for Shabistārī and Lāhījī)**. Among other, more influential poets whose work was strongly marked by the ideas of Ibn ‘Arabī, one would also have to mention ‘Ibn ‘Arabī's faithful interpreter [Shams al-Dīn M. al-Tabrīzī] al-Maghribī d. ca. 1406)' (quoting A. Schimmel, *op. cit*., p.167), whose mystical ghazals have yet to find their translator, and the founder of the Ni‘matullāhī Sufi order, Shāh Ni‘matullāh Walī Kirmānī. A popular, readily accessible introduction to his life and subsequent spiritual influence can be found—along with translations from his poetic works and those of his disciples and successors (pp. 191-245)—in *Kings of Love: The History & Poetry of the Ni‘matullāhī Sufī Order of Iran,* tr. P. L. Wilson and N. Pourjavady (Tehran, 1978); see Index under ‘Ibn ‘Arabī,’ ‘Qūnyawī,’ and ‘*wahdat al-wujūd*.’ (This study also gives some indication of the vast Persian bibliography on this subject, including the extensive editions of Shah Ni‘matullāh's poetry and prose treatises by the contemporary Ni‘matullāhī shaykh, Javād Nūrbaksh.) In French, see the brief introduction to J. Aubin's *Matériaux pour la biographie de Shāh Ni‘matullāh Wali Kermānī* (Tehran, 1956), and the relevant notices in H. Corbin's *Histoire de la philosophie islamique,* Part II (full references to that **work at n. 3, Part II-A above**), pp. 1125-26 and 1130-33.

[659] The interpretive problem is essentially no different than with, for example, the question of Platonic or Neoplatonic themes in Western vernacular literatures. One has a similar range of possibilities, from conscious literary ‘allusions’ (which can often be purely formal or ‘literary’ in nature) to more mean-ingful and convincing poetic use by writers who may have had little or no formal study of their ‘original’ philosophic sources. The sensitivity needed to judge these questions is especially great with these later Islamic literatures because the *‘sabk-i Hindī’* style (common to Persian, Turkish, Urdu, etc. in the centuries following Jāmī—assumed such a tremendous range of cultural references—including extensive knowledge of metaphysics and theology) on the part of its writers and cultured readers alike. (See the related observations **at notes 56, 60, [Part II-A] and 98 of Part II above.)**

the fruits of years of research in this area.[660] William Chittick's carefully annotated critical edition of Jāmī's early commentary on the *Fusūs al-Hikam* (or rather, on Ibn 'Arabī's own condensed metaphysical summary of it, the *Naqsh al-Fusūs* [*Naqd al-Nusūs fī Sharh Naqsh al-Fusūs.* Tehran, 1977.]—frequently cited in Professor Richard's own introduction—actually constitutes a sort of broad historical introduction (but proceeding backwards in time) to the whole school of Qūnawī, since Jāmī often uses long excerpts from many of the commentators discussed above (though *not* Āmulī and Jīlī). A partial English translation (some 15%, summarizing the main outlines of the work, according to Prof. Chittick) is now readily accessible in the first volume (1982) of the *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society.*[661]

Jāmī's *al-Durrat al-Fākhira*—an Arabic prose treatise comparing the views of the Sufis (i.e., the school of Ibn 'Arabī), the *mutakallimūn,* and the Avicennan philosophers on the central metaphysical/theological questions of Islamic thought (as expressed in their shared theological vocabulary of the divine Essence and Attributes), and implicitly demonstrating the superiority and comprehensiveness of the Sufi understanding of each of those issues—is an even more fascinating historical document, since it was apparently written at the express demand of the powerful Ottoman sultan Muhammad II. That background clearly illustrates both Jāmī's contemporary renown as a metaphysician (as well as poet), and the truly 'ecumenical' nature of Islamic higher culture immediately prior to the historic divisions introduced by the Safavid revolution. At the same time, this work (and the intellectual situation it exemplifies) clearly pointed the way toward the creative resolution of those different points of view by Sadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī ('Mullā Sadrā,' d. 1050/1641), whose comprehensive synthesis and readily accessible presentation of the fundamental insights of Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators (in language largely drawn from both Suhrawardī's 'Illuminationist' [*ishrāqī*] thought and Avicennan philosophy) was to dominate subsequent treatment of these problems in the Iranian world, at least.[662]

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[660] Our comments here are intentionally limited to a brief description, given the framework of this article, so as not to preclude the fully detailed reviews each of these major works deserves—especially since both these recent studies involve more extensive and ambitious scholarly efforts than most of the translations which have been our primary focus in this review article.

[661] "Ibn 'Arabī's Own Summary of the *Fusūs:* 'The Imprint of the Bezels of Wisdom,'" pp. 30-93; the article is reprinted here from two earlier issues of the Tehran journal *Sophia Perennis,* vol. 1 (1975), pp 88-128, and vol. 2 (1976), pp. 67-106. This work by Jāmī includes the complete translation of Ibn 'Arabī's work *(Naqsh al-Fusūs)* itself. 'Summary' is probably not the precise term to describe its relation to the *Fusūs al-Hikam,* given the extreme concision of Ibn 'Arabī's *Naqsh* (itself incomprehensible without a commentary) and its greater focus on the 'metaphysical' side of the *Fusūs*, to a certain extent prefiguring Qūnawi's own primary interpretive orientation.

[662] See the long introductory contextual section of our study, *The Wisdom of the Throne.* For Sadra's own treatment of the same questions summarized by Jāmī in the *Durrat al-Fākhira,* Part I of Sadra's work translated here (pp. 94-129) should be supplemented by his more lengthy discussion of those issues in his companion volume, the *Kitāb al-Mashā'ir,* tr. H. Corbin: *Le Livre des Pénétrations metaphysiques* (Tehran/Paris, 1964). (Prof. Corbin's work includes an edition not only of the Arabic original of Sadra's treatise, but also of a 19th-century *Persian* translation by the same Qajar prince who translated Jāmī's *al-Durrat al-Fākhira: see n. 109 below*.) For a more recent, increasingly scholastic

Professor Nicholas Heer's translation of the *Durrat al-Fākhira* [*The Precious Pearl* . Pp. 237 + ix. Albany: SUNY Press. 1979.], together with Jāmī's own glosses and the subsequent commentary by his foremost disciple al-Lārī (d. 912/1504), is (along with the Arabic edition itself) a monument of industry and erudition, whose careful philological attention to detail (illustrated, among other things, by the massive index/glossary of Arabic technical terms, the identification and discussion of Jāmī's sources for each of the three 'schools' discussed, location of subsequent commentaries, etc.) will make it especially useful to specialists in this area. However, little or no attempt has been made in the translation volume to explain the actual philosophic and spiritual meaning and more universal significance of Jāmī's discussions, so that this text is likely to appear opaque and merely 'scholastic' (in the pejorative sense) to readers without extensive background in the three wide-ranging intellectual traditions in question. In fact, the deeper significance and ongoing historical influence of Jāmī's work is brought out far more clearly in the volume containing the Arabic editions of both of these texts (also due to Professor Heer) and an edition of its Persian translation—by the same Qajar prince who translated Mulla Sadra's widely studied 'textbook' on the same ontological and theological issues, the *K. al-Mashā'ir.*[663]

That 19th-century princely translation of Jāmī's work is only one sign of the vigorous, ongoing development in Safavid and Qajar Iran (and the traditional Shiite centers of 'Irāq) of this school whose

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stage of this Qajar Iranian philosophic development—in which the immediate influence of Ibn 'Arabī's thought is far less apparent—see the translation by T. Izutsu and M. Mohaghegh of the widely-read metaphysical part of the *Ghurar al-Farā'id* (or '*sharh-i Manzūma-yi Hikmat*'), by Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī (d. 1284/ 1878), *The Metaphysics of Sabzavari* (Delmar, N.Y., 1977). This work also includes a translation (by Paul Sprachman, pp. 11-24) of Sabzavari's *autobiography*, a historically revealing document in its own right. The philosophic and theological developments of the intervening period in the Iranian (and Imami Shiite) milieu are partially covered in the anthology volumes of H. Corbin and S. J. Ashtiyānī discussed **in n. 3, Part II-A above**. As already noted, the fate of Jāmī's more philosophic writings—and the broader intellectual tradition they represent—in most of the rest of the Islamic world still remains to be explored; those further developments and influences were certainly not limited to Safavid Iran.

For Jāmī's predecessors among commentators of Ibn 'Arabī correlating the elements or relative contributions of *naql, 'aql,* and *kashf*—terms which could be very loosely connected with the respective methods or presuppositions of *kalām* (and *fiqh*), Avicennan philosophy, and Sufism—see the earlier discussions of Āmulī, Ibn Turka, Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Ahsā'ī, and Nasafi above in this Part II-A.   Jāmī's work here is distinguished primarily by its more systematic and scholastic presentation of the 'rational' (*'aqlī*) formulations of each of those earlier key Islamic intellectual traditions.

[663] See n. 108 above for H. Corbin's edition and translation of the *K. al-Mashā'ir. The volume of editions of al-Durrat al-Fakhira* and the related commentaries and Persian translation (No. XIX in the 'Wisdom of Persia' Series, Tehran, 1980) is also note-worthy for the long introduction by the Persian editor, A. Mūsavī Behbehānī; it is a philosophically serious and creative attempt to rethink the issues which have traditionally been taken to distinguish the schools in question, and thereby to go beyond the standard repetition of stereotyped scholastic descriptions. That sort of original, philosophically independent viewpoint is relatively unique among the traditional (i.e., non Western-educated) Iranian philosophers dealing with these schools of later Islamic thought.

language and problematic is so deeply rooted in the study of Ibn ʻArabī—a historical development we are fortunate enough to be able to follow in some detail only through the coincidence of that area's relative insulation from direct colonization, plus the devoted efforts of a handful of more recent scholars. However, when one looks at the actual location of *manuscripts* of works by Jāmī or any of the other writers (including Ibn ʻArabī himself) discussed above—or at the even greater multitude of poets and literary figures who transmuted their contributions into so many Islamic languages—it is clear that their influence, at least up to the 19th century, was probably at least as great and diverse in the higher culture and among the Sufi orders both of the Ottoman empire and the Muslim regions of India, Central Asia, and even China and Indonesia.[664] In other words, our relative ignorance of those later developments in those far-flung Islamic regions reflects factors other than any lack of written sources. If the Sufi writings of ʻAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʼirī (d. 1300/1883) discussed in the following section appear to us today as a sudden, mysterious 'renaissance' of the creative study of Ibn ʻArabī in the Arabic world,[665] that is simply a reminder of how much research remains to be done in this (and so many other) areas of later Islamic thought.

VI.   ʻAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʼirī (1222/1807-1300/1883) is today no doubt most widely known, at least in the nations immediately concerned, as the leader of Algerian resistance to the gradual invasion and colonialization of that country between 1832 and 1847. However, the two recent French translations of parts of his *Kitāb al-Mawāqif,* a vast work including his lectures, meditations, and a sort of 'spiritual diary' from the decades of his exile in Damascus (1857-1883), present a very different aspect of his character and historical persona: an extraordinary Sufi writer and teacher who—if these selections can be taken as representative—was not only responsible for reviving the teachings of the Shaykh al-Akbar, but was also himself in many ways a sort of Ibn ʻArabī reborn.[666] Compared to the relatively 'scholastic'

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[664] A case in point is Prof. Richard's mention of a commentary on the *Lawāʼih* by one of Jāmī's disciples which was recently discovered in a library in *Beijing* (**details on p. 29).**

Equally far afield is the Indonesian Qādiri Sufi and Malay poet Hamza al-Fansūrī (late l0th/16th century), who 'belonged to the school of mysticism characterized by names like Ibn al-ʻArabī and ʻIrāqī' (article 'Hamza Fansūrī' by P. Voorhoeve in *EI,* III, p.155). We may also mention the study by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamza al-Fansūrī*, Kuala Lumpur, 1970, cited in A. Schimmel, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

Another, historically quite influential example would be the later Kubrāwī Sufi ʻAlī al-Hamadānī (d. 786/13115), author of still another commentary on the *Fusūs al-Hikam,* who played an important role in the establishment of Sufism (and Islam more generally) in Kashmir; see H. Corbin, *Histoire…,* Part II (n. 3, Part II), pp. 116-17, and additional bibliographic references in the article "ʻAlī Hamadānī' by S. M. Stern, *EI*, I, p. 392.

[665] See n. 4, Part II-A above, for recent studies of the 18th-century Moroccan Sufi Ibn ʻAjība, for whom Ibn ʻArabī seems to have played a role that more fully reflects the broad range of the Shaykh's actual writings and activities—although it is difficult to know how far one can generalize from this single case.

[666] Among the significant biographical facts noted in the translator's Introduction *(Écrits spirituels,* full references below), proceeding from the outward signs inward, are his having lived several decades in

traditions discussed above, 'Abd al-Qādir's work (like Ibn 'Arabī's) consistently conveys a striking, unmistakable sense of true originality, of the fresh and compelling expression of immediate spiritual experience, grounded in the most profound personal reflection on the Qur'an and hadith as well as extensive study of the works of Ibn 'Arabī and their commentators. That impression of immediacy and authenticity is no doubt a reflection both of 'Abd al-Qādir's distinctive personal virtues and at the same time of his indebtedness to a broader (not merely literary) Sufi tradition of the study and application of the Shaykh's writings in a practical, effective spiritual context.

All of these features are carefully explained in Michel Chodkiewicz' remarkable introduction to his selection of shorter chapters from the *K. al-Mawāqif (Ecrits spirituels.* By Emir Abd El-Kader. Pp. 226. Paris: Editions du Seuil. 1982.], a text which is itself a mine of valuable historical references. To begin with, in recalling the successive external stages of 'Abd al-Qādir's own spiritual initiation—his youthful reception of the *khirqa akbariyya* from his own father, himself a Qādiri master;[667] his encounter with the noted Shaykh Khālid al-Naqshbandī during his first pilgrimage and visit to Damascus (at age 20); and his mature study with the Shādhilī shaykh Muhammad al-Fāsī at Mecca (in 1269/1863)—Mr. Chodkiewicz clearly brings out an indispensable dimension of Ibn 'Arabī's influence and spiritual function which is at once more fundamental and yet inherently less visible than its occasional 'historical' or literary manifestations.[668] However, in 'Abd al-Qādir's own exceptional case—again, not unlike Ibn 'Arabī's—

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same the house where Ibn 'Arabī died in Damascus, his being buried next to the Shaykh there (until the quite recent removal of his remains to Algeria), his reception of the *khirqa akbariyya* (**see also n. 113 below)** from his father, named 'Sīdī Muhyī al-Dīn,' and his repeated compelling visions and encounters with the 'spiritual reality' (*rūhāniyya*) of the Shaykh al-Akbar. See the discussion of these incidents, with full references to the specific passages in the *Mawāqif,* in M. Chodkiewicz's book, pp. 28 and 187-88.

The deeper resemblance of 'Abd al-Qādir's writing to that of Ibn 'Arabī, both in style and content, is discussed in detail below.

[667] It is important to note, as the translator stresses, that the *khirqa akbariyya* (which 'Abd al-Qādir's grandfather had earlier received in Egypt) did not distinguish a separate Sufi 'order,' but was transmitted by certain shaykhs of several *tarīqa*s, including (at least most recently) the Naqshbandiyya and Shādhiliyya. Especially interesting in this regard is the long historical note (pp. l83-84) on Ibn 'Arabī's own *silsila*s or chains of spiritual initiation (of which the note lists five, three going back to the Prophet and two to Khizr); it also mentions the initiatic *silsila*s from Ibn 'Arabī down to 'Abd al-Qādir, all of them beginning with Qūnawī. (Again, see Qūnawī's central role in the lines of direct transmission of the *Fusūs* outlined by O.Yahia, *Histoire...,* II, Appendix B.)

[668] Especially valuable in this regard is the extensive information (pp. 35-38 and accompanying notes), drawn largely from still unpublished sources and recent studies by Egyptian and Syrian scholars, on the influences of 'Abd al-Qādir's teaching and personal example on contemporary Sufi Shaykhs in his time (primarily of the Shādhilī and Naqshbandī orders) and their successors down to the present. On another level, but no less important, the translator also notes (p. 35) that it was 'Abd al-Qādir who financed the first publication (in Cairo) of the complete text of *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya.*

the usual forms and methods of the Sufi path (the spiritual combat of the *murīd,* the 'one who desires' union) appear to have only supplemented and confirmed a special vocation for the more direct and relatively effortless path of 'ecstatic illumination' *(jadhba)* that typifies those rare individuals 'chosen' by God (the *'murād').*[669] Yet as the translator indicates (pp. 25-26), it is perhaps even more characteristic that having had this transforming experience of enlightenment (with the concomitant insight and passion that illuminates all these *mawāqif),* 'Abd al-Qādir should subsequently return to follow the guidance of a more traditional master (the Shādhilī shaykh M. al-Fāsī, at Mecca) and to carefully retrace all the accustomed stages and states of the more 'normal' path, in order to perfect his own insight as spiritual guide and teacher,[670] the activity that largely occupied the final decades of his life.

On the historical plane which is our main focus here, this introduction also offers a valuable summary (with lengthy references in the notes) of three salient issues in the long controversy surrounding Ibn 'Arabī and the *Fusūs al-Hikam* (**see n. 5, Part II-A**, and a number of other related passages above). The questions discussed here (pp. 32-35) are the 'faith of Pharaoh,' the 'eternity' of punishment in Hell, and the 'universality' of the Shaykh's spiritual outlook. Each of those points is treated, with reference to both Ibn 'Arabī and 'Abd al-Qādir, with a clarity and concision that makes this section useful even for those who are not already acquainted with these disputed sections of the *Fusūs.*

[669] 'Abd al-Qādir speaks of his own unusual path and draws the distinction between these two ways— while underlining the dangers and advantages of each—in some quite revealing autobiographical remarks in *Mawqif* 18, the second selection (pp. 46-49) translated here. The distinction of *murād* and *murīd* alluded to here, as M. Chodkiewicz points out (referring to Ibn 'Arabī's brief *Istilāhāt*)*,* is taken over from the Shaykh. There is a more complete and extremely clear discussion of this same distinction at the end of Ibn al-'Arabī's *Mawāqi' al-Nujūm,* summarized by Asin Palacios, *l'Islam Christianisé* (French translation discussed **in Part I above), p**. 319. [Ibn 'Arabī's *Istilāhāt al-Sūfiyya*—the full range of titles is given in O.Y., *Histoire...*, no. 315—a short work he also included, in inverse order, within the actual *Futūhāt* (II, 128-34 = chapt. 73, question 153), has been recently translated by R. T. Harris (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society* III, 1984), in a popular version with a minimum of notes or explanations; it should he used with extreme caution in reading other works of the Shaykh, since the 'definitions' given here often touch on only one limited aspect or a single meaning among the multitude of senses that a given technical term may have elsewhere in his own writings.]

Although 'Abd al-Qādir's own reference to a special divine 'attraction' or *jadhba* in the passage just mentioned would allow one, in purely linguistic terms, to call him *'majdhūb'* we must stress that there is nothing either in his writings or in what is described here of his life that would suggest the sort of pathological characteristics (sometimes rather euphemistically called 'divine madness') that are often associated with the term *'majdhūb'* in many Islamic countries. Such a usage could be highly misleading: see, for example, 'Abd al-Qādir's typically 'sober' remarks concerning al-Hallāj's relative 'madness' or intoxication, pp. 45, 88, etc. (Fortunately—and quite exceptionally among the French translations dealt with in this review article—this book is provided with an excellent Index!)

[670] Again (**see n. 112)** the year and a half 'Abd al-Qādir spent in Mecca and Medina was marked by an extraordinary set of symbolic 'coincidences' mentioned by the translator (pp. 25-26, citing the biography

Certainly it is this unifying practical aim of spiritual pedagogy (rather than either Sufi 'apologetics' or theoretical elaborations pursued for their own sake), an intention constantly illumined and guided by immediate personal experience and insight into the issues in question, that typifies 'Abd al-Qādir's writings (or at least the texts translated here) and distinguishes them so strikingly from many of the interpreters discussed above.[671] The central metaphysical/theological problems and intuitions, and even the technical vocabulary, are all essentially the same as in Ibn 'Arabī and such commentators as Qūnawī and Kāshānī—and Mr. Chodkiewicz stresses and elaborately documents 'Abd al-Qādir's profound debts to those particular authors[672]—but they are treated here in a practical spiritual perspective whose immediacy and universality (and resulting coherence) are far more directly accessible to non-specialist readers. In sum, 'Abd al-Qādir is not so much 'commenting on' Ibn 'Arabī (or his successors) as actually recreating the Shaykh's deepest intentions. The difference of perspective is palpable, and makes this work itself an excellent introduction to the study of Ibn 'Arabī's own writings, given its relative simplicity and clarity of exposition.

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by the Emir's son which is one of the main sources for this introduction). In Medina, he lived and kept his spiritual retreat on the site of the house of Abū Bakr, adjoining the mosque of the Prophet; he achieved his culminating, 'highest degree of illumination' while meditating in the cave of Hīra site of the Prophet's first revelation.

For the significance of this careful 'retracing' of the spiritual Path normally followed by most individuals, in relation to the specific title of this work, see **n. 119 below.**

[671] It is important to recognize that 'Abd al-Qādir's *Mawāqif* are for the most part directed toward a very different audience than many of the works in the school of Qūnawī, Kāshānī, etc. That is, they are not trying to convince, defend, or persuade a larger public; not trying to 'explain' a text in systematic and continuous fashion; and not directed toward other *'ulamā'* in general; but rather are intended for sincere and 'practising' seekers. The similar clarity and directness one finds in certain of the works of Jīlī (see above) may also reflect the same sort of conditions. In any case, the relatively intimate spiritual nature of these texts, more immediately grounded in experience, means that there is relatively less need for explanation and preliminary background for modern readers.

[672] For the more explicit references to Ibn 'Arabī and his works, see the Introduction, pp. 27-31 and index under the appropriate headings, plus the elaborate notes—based on the *Fusūs, Futūhāt, Istilāhāt,* and other works—detailing his direct borrowings and debts to the Shaykh al-Akbar. However, as the translator suggests, 'Abd al-Qādir has so perfectly recreated the problematic and guiding insights of Ibn 'Arabī that the mere enumeration of explicit quotations or allusions is in itself quite misrepresentative. An anecdote he recounts (p. 31) suggests something both of 'Abd al-Qādir's special devotion to the Shaykh and his deep concern for the exactitude of his teaching: he once sent two of his close disciples to Konya to verify certain readings in his own text of the *Futūhāt* by comparing them directly with Ibn 'Arabī's own autograph manuscript preserved in a library there (the same manuscript which is the main basis for Osman Yahia's new scientific edition).

The thirty-nine shorter 'halts' (often only two or three pages long) translated in this selection[673] usually begin with a short Qur'anic citation (or occasionally a saying of the Prophet) illustrating and illuminating a particular spiritual insight or problem and guiding a more extended reflection—sometimes didactic, sometimes quite personal and even ecstatic—on its metaphysical, moral, or theological implications. The result, at its best, is neither a sermon nor formal (even mystical) exegesis, but something much more intimate and direct, namely, the communication of what 'Ibn 'Arabī often calls an *ishāra,* the 'allusion' or inner meaning that applies specifically to one's own immediate spiritual condition. This aspect of the *Mawāqif* is especially apparent in the more intimate, autobiographical passages (e.g., sections 1 and 36-37 here)—a sort of writing relatively rare in Arabic mystical *literature,* but revealing the very essence of the spiritual work and relation between master and disciple—in which 'Abd al-Qādir recounts his own repeated experiences of what he calls (again following Ibn 'Arabī) *'ilqā',* that is, the direct inner awareness of the 'projection' into one's awareness of a passage of the Qur'an together with the specific meaning uniquely appropriate to one's spiritual state at that moment.[674]

The majority of these selections, however, are comparatively more didactic and impersonal. Often reflecting 'Abd al-Qādir's own teaching activity (including daily lectures in his later years at Damascus), they all revolve around the central transforming insight into the transcendent Unity of Being (*wahdat al-wujūd*) and the apparent paradoxes and potential misunderstandings that inevitably result when the awareness of that reality is approached as an external 'theory' rather than the expression of an inner

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[673] Chosen from among almost 400 in the original work, most of them evidently much longer, since the Arabic edition takes up three large volumes. There is a concordance (p. 221) of the French translation and numbering of sections here, related to the corresponding numbering and pages of the Arabic text.

The significance of the title is carefully explained at pp 27-28. More important than any allusion to the work of the same name by the famous early Sufi Niffārī, as M. Chodkiewicz notes, is its characteristic usage by Ibn 'Arabī, for whom *mawqif,* in the context of the spiritual path, is the 'halt' or 'stopping' place between two spiritual stations *(manzil* or *maqām)* where the traveler *(sālik)* receives the guidance or instructions that enable him to realize fully and in detail the spiritual understanding appropriate to the following station. There is thus a profound inner connection between the 'spiritual itinerary' traced out in detail in these writings and 'Abd al-Qādir's decision (**see n. 116 above) t**o return and retrace in full the different stages required of most spiritual wayfarers.

[674] See especially 'Abd al-Qādir's revealing description of this phenomenon in the opening *Mawqif* (= section 36, p.157 in the translation), where he states that 'everything in these *Mawāqif* is of this nature.' Other explicitly autobiographical allusions to this phenomenon can be found here in sections 2-4 and 9.

One is reminded of Jāmī's related statement at the beginning of the *Lawā'ih* (see above) that he is *only a 'translator' (tarjumān,* in the sense of one who grasps and conveys the true, intended meaning, without coloring it with anything of his own addition)—a statement that evidently refers mainly to his poetry in that work. (See also Ibn 'Arabī's own famous reference to his function as *tarjumān*—in this very specific sense—in his introduction to the *Fusūs al-Hikam;* the *Futūhāt* contains many more detailed explanations of the importance of this awareness and fundamental human process of 'mediation,' in regard to the roles both of the prophets and the 'saints' [*awliyā'*].)

realization.[675] Formally speaking, both the problems and the responses offered here had for the most part long been classic in the 'school' of Ibn 'Arabī. But what so powerfully distinguishes 'Abd al-Qādir's writing, even on the most apparently abstract metaphysical topics, from that of Kāshānī, for example— and what at the same time so strikingly unites him with Ibn 'Arabī—is his constant contact with and reference to the immediate vision, the experiential Source underlying those formulations, and (scarcely distinguishable from the preceding point) his fresh, authentic realization of the reality and intentions of the Qur'an and the Prophet (via hadith) as they are grasped precisely at that level of immediate perception.[676]

This intuitional, often ecstatic ground of 'Abd al-Qādir's (and Ibn 'Arabī's) spiritual insight—reminiscent, in its most direct lyrical expressions, of a sort of *shath,* or of the rhapsodic *ghazals* of Rumi—is even more directly apparent in some of the nineteen poems from his Introduction to the *K. al-Mawāqif,* translated by Charles-André Gilis *[Poèmes Métaphysiques.* By Émir Abd al-Qādir l'Algérien. Pp. 80. Paris: Les Editions de l'Oeuvre. 1983.], which form an excellent complement to the more expository prose of the preceding work (without which, one should add, they would often be difficult to understand).[677] A few of these poems are complex, but relatively conceptual summaries of metaphysical issues and paradoxes using a traditional Sufi imagery (Majnūn-Laylā, etc.); as such, they are often reminiscent of the elaborate metaphysical verses that usually open the chapters of the *Futūhāt* and the *Fusūs.*[678] But the best and most powerful of them, transcending and transforming those traditional poetic forms,

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[675] Although the translator has attempted to divide these selections concerning Ibn 'Arabī's teaching topically—according to such themes as the 'unity of Being' 'theophanies,' 'God and gods,' 'intermediate causes,' and 'the Prophet'—the controlling focus of 'Abd al-Qādir's interest and insight is so great that one scarcely notices the intended transitions from one subject to another.

[676] In this volume, the 'ecstatic' element is most openly expressed in the closing poem (section 40, p.177, the only selection taken from his poetic *Dīwān)* and in the opening *Mawqif.* It is almost as though the translator intended the rest of the work, generally more elaborately 'doctrinal' and theoretical, to be taken as a sort of commentary on those two framing selections—and for them to stand for the indispensable *basis* of what comes between. (As noted below, the poems from the Introduction to the *Mawāqif* are often in this more openly ecstatic key.)

[677] The translator's very brief introduction, which tells us virtually nothing about either the *Mawāqif* or their author, appears to assume considerable previous acquaintance with both—a background which is fortunately supplied by the preceding work. Likewise, the broader doctrinal or theoretical context of the poems—which may well have been supplied in the intervening prose sections of 'Abd al-Qādir's Introduction, about which we are told nothing!—is again apparently taken for granted, since the notes are limited mainly to identifying the most evident Qur'anic quotations and allusions.

[678] It is interesting to note that the poems of this sort are distinguished by 'Abd al-Qādir's addressing his reader in the second person, like a teacher with his students (as in the more prosaic parts of the *Mawāqif* mentioned above). But the more intimate—and convincing—verses are those in the first person or in immediate dialogue with God, often with complex allusions to the corresponding Qur'anic modes of addressing the Prophet.

directly express that decisive unitive—and truly universal—insight which is at the core of all of 'Abd al-Qādir's (and Ibn 'Arabī's) writing, through daring reference to the theophany of the divine 'I', or in an intimate dialogue of the soul with God that cannot but recall similar poems of St. John of the Cross. In translation, at least, these verses are surely as fresh and evocative as the more celebrated poems from Ibn 'Arabī's own lyrical *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq.* And if their underlying unity of insight and perception is such that they could hardly be distinguished, in that respect, from the works of the Shaykh al-Akbar, 'Abd al-Qādir is clearly far from being a 'disciple' in the sense of an epigon. One's impression here, as throughout the *Mawāqif,* is not so much of dependency or derivation, but rather (to borrow his own language) of two equals drinking from a common Source.

Finally, the recent translation of a public letter of 'Abd al-Qādir to the *Societé asiatique* (written in 1855 from Bursa in Turkey, where the Emir first lived after being released from imprisonment in France) [*Lettre aux Francais: Notes brèves destinées à ceux qui comprennent, pour attirer l'attention sur des problèmes essentiels.* Tr. René R. Khawam. Pp. 279. Paris: Phébus. l977.],[679] brings out a very different aspect of his thought—his acquaintance with the traditions of Islamic philosophy, and more particularly of *political* philosophy, transmitted (in his case) through such central figures as Avicenna, Tūsī, and Ibn Khaldūn. This work, in its more philosophical sections, is a brief (and relatively unoriginal) paraphrase of the basic conceptions of those authors concerning the nature and perfection of the human being as 'knower,'[680] and of the essential guiding role of the prophets and the communities they establish in

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[679] The original title of the public letter is that translated as the subtitle of this translation. We should also note the recent republication (Editions Bouslama, Tunis, n.d.) of the *original French translation* (in 1858) by Gustave Dugat, *Le livre d'Abdel Kader. . .,* which is revealing of the prejudices of his day (as Mr. Khawam points out at great length), but which is also provided with extensive notes and an index (pp. 187-370) which show some serious effort (based on the very limited knowledge available at that time) to acquaint the 19th-century reader with the traditions of Islamic philosophy underlying 'Abd al-Qādir's letter. R. Khawam's translation is somewhat closer to the Arabic, and gives a useful chronology (pp. 35-59, primarily political, but with some interesting biographical details) and a selection of accounts (pp. 241-76: 'Abd el-Kader en France') by French contemporaries that aptly convey the perception of the dignity and spiritual force of the Emir's personality even by overtly hostile witnesses.

However, neither translation gives much inkling of the actual content of the traditions of Islamic thought (and especially the Islamic political philosophy of Avicenna, Tūsī, and Ibn Khaldūn) underlying and informing 'Abd al-Qādir's 'brief remarks.' (One revealing and grimly humorous example is when 'Abd al-Qādir's allusion to the Mahdi's unifying humankind 'by the sword'—a detail specified in numerous *hadith,* frequently commented on (but in a very different direction!) by Ibn 'Arabī—is treated as a prescient 'prophecy' (p.164) of the FLN's liberation of Algeria.) The modern translator's frequent impassioned asides, while symptomatic of the consequences of the contemporary ignorance of the complexity and universality of the diverse intellectual traditions underlying 'Abd al-Qādir's letter, are in revealing contrast with 'Abd al-Qādir's own serene and—for those aware of the traditions in question— closely reasoned discourse.

[680] 'Abd al-Qādir's own Sufi commitments and understanding are most evident here in his allusions to the relevant sorts of metaphysical 'knowledge' (*'ilm*) considered as our highest human end, and in his

helping enable humanity to realize that perfection. What is remarkable here is 'Abd al-Qādir's matter-of-fact reliance on that (reputedly extinct) intellectual tradition, apparently in no way felt to be incompatible with his Sufism or 'alien' to Islam, and the extraordinary clarity and serenity with which it helped him to comprehend and come to terms with the dramatic historical changes that marked his own life and times. As such, it is an appropriate reminder of other, no less universal and humanly significant dimensions of later Islamic thought which have since become, if anything, even more unknown (and misunderstood) than the manifold contributions of Ibn 'Arabī and his interpreters.

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statement at the end of his discussion of prophecy (p. 164, translated here from the French): 'If someone came to me wishing to know the way of the truth, and provided that he knew my language perfectly well, I would lead him to the way of the truth without difficulty—not by pressuring him to accept my ideas, but simply by making the truth appear before his eyes, in such a way that he could not avoid acknowledging it.' If nothing else, such words suggest the spirit with which he approached the *Mawāqif.*

The Continuing Relevance of Qaysari's Thought: Divine Imagination and the Foundations of Natural Spirituality

> *…And were it not for God's defending some of the people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which the Name of God is often remembered would surely have been destroyed. Certainly God helps whoever helps Him….* (Qur'an 22:40)

The question I would like to speak about today is simple and straightforward.   Why should people today, who are not specialists in the history of Islamic philosophy and theology, continue to be interested in the writings of Da'ud al-Qaysari (and by extension, in the Shaykh al-Akbar, Ibn 'Arabi, who was his central subject and inspiration)?   In a way, this is a question we are obliged to ask about any significant thinker, artist or religious thinker. And as I tell my own students whenever they are discovering such creators and thinkers for the first time, the real test of understanding the work and deeper intentions of such creative thinkers is "What would that person be doing or creating—that is, how would they be *communicating*—here and now, today, in our own culture and civilization?" After true understanding comes communication and transmission: anything less than that is idolatry and passing illusion.

My own experience with Da'ud al-Qaysari began in Iran more than two decades ago, working with Toshihiko Izutsu and Jalaloddin Ashtiyani, where I first encountered his remarkable accomplishments as a pedagogue and the foremost commentator of Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam*. I quickly discovered that his was the most useful and exacting of the classical commentaries on the mysteries of the *Fusus*, and his famous Introduction (*Muqaddima*) to that commentary was a masterful philosophic summary and persuasive elucidation of Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual insights and often poetic allusions. What was also clear in those celebrated works of Qaysari was the centrality of his personal creative focus on the divine/cosmic Imagination (*khayal*)—even if the deeper reasons for that emphasis of his were not so apparent to me at the time. Today, however, returning to view Qaysari in light of this international Symposium and its focus on him as an important historical actor and creator in his own right, I am struck by his wider significance as an activist, politically engaged and creative Islamic philosopher-theologian in a way that recalls the tradition of such classical Muslim philosophers as Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd and Nasiruddin Tusi— even if the philosophic and theological positions Qaysari was "defending" (to recall the Qur'anic verse with which we began) were often radically different from the more worldly theses of those "Peripatetic" thinkers.

In short, it is my impression that the deeper, unifying reasons underlying Da'ud al-Qaysari's writing and teaching are not really that different today than in his own time: that is, to defend and explain the common philosophic grounds of what the Qur'an repeatedly calls *Din al-Haqq, Din Allah,* or *ad-Din al-Qayyim*—the central Qur'anic postulate of a natural, universal human spirituality, and all the wide-ranging practical and political conclusions flowing from that—against a series of perennial limitations and dangerous misunderstandings. In terms drawn from within later Islamic tradition, we would say that the *'irfan-e nazari* (the "theoretical spirituality") of Qaysari and his fellows can best be understood as a prologue to—and a necessary defense and explanation of—the much wider realm of *'irfan-e 'amali,* of the multitudinous practical spiritual forms of the later Islamic humanities in all their creative richness and diversity.   Qaysari's writing, like his practical teaching and institution-building, was directed at the intellectual and religious elite of his day, at students who—having already integrated the traditional

Arabic religious sciences of Islam—would soon be called upon to guide, direct and arbitrate the many competing and often conflicting paths, methods and institutions that had come to flourish by that point in Islamic history. Against that practical and historical background, his philosophic work—building on Ibn 'Arabi's--can be seen to provide a comprehensive, over-arching "meta-theology" of Islamic faith and practice whose particular virtue was to leave some positive, even indispensable spiritual role for the full diversity of human spiritual types, and by extension for the full range of religious institutions, methods and practices which corresponded to that spectrum of unique needs and (potential) contributions. Although I do not have sufficient historical knowledge of that period to judge Qaysari's indirect influence, through the ongoing work of his own students and disciples, one can at least hypothesize that such a remarkable breadth of vision and understanding, when translated into ongoing historical practice, had at least some part to play in the remarkable endurance and ongoing religious diversity of the Ottoman empire in subsequent centuries.

Now if we translate what was just said into contemporary terms, one could say that Qaysari is articulating a "*meta-philosophy of religions,*" an integrative, comprehensive understanding of the multiple dimensions of reality and of human nature which clearly recognizes both the common, universal aspects and the necessary diversity and specificities of each of the revealed world religions—a complex understanding which again remains grounded in a profound acquaintance with the realities and "ever-renewed creation" of actual spiritual life. Allowing for the change of historical circumstances, it is not difficult to extend the field of Qaysari's thought from the competing Islamic sects, schools and tariqas of his own day, to their cognate forms of spiritual life in our own time. Indeed, for those historians who know how incredibly diverse and creative the Islamic humanities were in the centuries immediately preceding Qaysari's work, one may even wonder whether the spectrum of religious and spiritual activity in our own time is actually any greater than it was in the Dar al-Islam of those earlier centuries.

In any event, the cornerstone of Qaysari's religious and philosophic thought is his articulation and defense of the key metaphysical and spiritual role of *Imagination* (*khayal*)—at once divine, cosmic, and as experienced by each human being—and the resulting necessary *individuality* of each and every soul's relation with the Divine. The practical, political implications of that insight highlight the indispensable spiritual role of each individual's inalienable *freedom* and *responsibility*, and of the far-reaching *diversity* and *creativity*—in every area of human activity--which are the natural consequences of acknowledging and supporting those dimensions of human being. In a word, the world of Imagination is ineluctably and profoundly *democratic*. In the universe of ever-renewed, always unique theophanies (*mazāhir*), "Signs" (*āyāt*), and divine "Presences," that is elaborated in Qaysari's metaphysics, no phenomenon can be excluded or eliminated as somehow "other-than-God": the very possibility of *tawhīd*, of the One underlying all existence, demands this comprehensiveness. Within that context, the ongoing movement of each human soul from its initial basharic state to its realization and ultimate fulfillment as the theomorphic *Insan*, the polished mirror of all the divine Attributes and names—the path of spiritual perfection leading to true responsibility and "co-creativity" with God—requires the constant **freedom** to learn the inner reality of God's infinite creative Compassion (*rahma*, and all of the divine Attributes contained within that Name) through our own countless mistakes and through experiencing daily, on every plane, the educational consequences of our own mistakes.

From this perspective, as the Qur'an repeatedly insists, it is only through the recurrent, universal yet necessarily individual experience of spiritual *trials* or "tests" that human beings individually rediscover the central spiritual virtues of Islam and all the revealed religions: '*iman*, *taqwa*, *sabr*,

tawakkul, *shukr* and all the other virtues epitomized in the lives of the prophets and the Friends of God (the awliya'). And as Qaysari has so clearly and comprehensively explained, the theater for all those trials—as for all the spiritual virtues and other inspirations that we only discover through them—is none other than the Imagination. For when one looks at the individual spiritual learning process of trial and purification more closely, it is readily apparent that it is necessarily and intrinsically universal for all human beings, not limited to any particular religion, culture or historical setting ; secondly, that this process is artfully and masterfully controlled and articulated by God— hence the central Qur'anic themes of Destiny, Providence, Grace and acknowledgment of the divine Lordship—in all-pervasive, transcendent ways that (at first appearance) relentlessly dwarf all our human efforts of manipulation and control, until we learn to sail with the Spirit's wind; and finally, that this process takes place on the stage of soul and spirit, in that infinite expanse Qaysari and his fellows called the divine "Imagination" (*khayāl*)….

Now at this point those who are not philosophers or metaphysicians by training might understandably—and truthfully--object that these central concerns of Qaysari's thought do not seem all that original or controversial, that they are simply rephrasing and elaborating insights and assumptions that are at the very heart of the Qur'an and other revealed teachings. I would certainly agree. But what such an objection does highlight is in fact the essentially political and theological nature of Qaysari's work, as one sort of necessary "defense" of the spiritual life and its political preconditions alluded to in the famous Qur'anic verse with which we began. Those wider political dimensions of Qaysari's work only appear clearly when they are contrasted with the perennial use (or abuse) of religious symbols—all over the world, and at every time that we know of—as vehicles for various political and social ends, for the construction of ethical and communal orders, where those symbols quickly become reduced to expressions of the basharic passions of anger, fear, resentment, envy and despair. There should be no need here to catalogue the recurrent forms and destructive consequences of this perennial reduction of religion to limited political and passional ends, in Qaysari's day or in our own time.

Against that background, we can perhaps see more clearly that the practical consequence of Qaysari's focus on the realm of Imagination and its central, inalienable role in spiritual life was to highlight the existence of a truly *universal common ground* for spiritual growth and understanding and creativity: a common ground rooted in the most intimate individual domains of experience, trials, mysteries and revelations--in what the Irish poet W.B. Yeats called "the rag-and-bone shop of the Heart." The essential political consequence of that emphasis—among the most educated and influential 'ulama' of Qaysari's day—was to *defend* the diverse aesthetic, social, religious and political expressions of that insight in the Islamic civilization of his time, from the masterpieces of the Islamic humanities developed by poets like Rumi and Yunus Emre, to the multitude of spiritual paths and methods pioneered by saints both celebrated and unknown—and beyond all of those visible historical forms, to turn his readers' attention toward the multitude of deeper, invisible forms of spiritual influence and attraction that continue to work on and through each of our souls. In even broader terms, all of Qaysari's thought can be seen as a vision of that universal Reality the Qur'an calls the "Religion of Truth" (*Din al-Haqq/al-Din al-Qayyim*) as the common ground of reality and experience underlying all the historically created and structured "religions of man."

It is precisely at the level of this comprehensive vision, I would suggest, that Qaysari's thought continues to be a compelling and valuable contribution for people all over the world today. For in the rapidly shrinking world we all inhabit, more and more "ordinary people"—not just a handful of philosophers

and theologians—are daily forced to grapple with the perennial practical and political dilemmas of religious diversity and self-conscious spiritual direction. The media and their manipulators, from every direction, are only too happy to highlight the all too prominent signs of religious confusion, division, deception and strife—or to publicize "solutions" that are even more short-lived and illusory. Against that background, Qaysari's vision of the divine Imagination and its infinite human reflections—if we choose to put that vision into practice--can lead us toward an understanding of ever-deeper levels of awareness and unity, toward an awareness of the diversity of religious symbols *as symbols* (*amthal*/*ayat*) growing out of different life-worlds and cultural and historical traditions, but pointing to deeper underlying realities and divine intentions. If we take his vision seriously, we discover that human beings are profoundly united—beyond all the separations of time and space and culture—by the common tasks of (co-) creation and *com*-munication, and by the common political and social challenges of developing the conditions that will make that creation and communication possible.

In other words, if we take seriously the centrality of Imagination as articulated in Qaysari's thought, then we can see also see happening everywhere around us the compelling and heartening vision described in Sura 110:

> "…*When there comes the victorious-support of God and the Opening, and you see the people entering into the Religion of God in waves, then sing forth the praise of your Protecting-Lord and seek His forgiveness: surely He is ever-Returning.*"

Theophany or "Pantheism"?: Jāmī and the Importance of
 Balyānī's *Risālat al-Ahadīya*

The impact of books has little to do with their size. The first Western translation of a work attributed to Ibn 'Arabi, T.H. Weir's *"Whoso Knoweth Himself..."* ~~(1901)~~, was no more than a brief pamphlet,[681] and Michel Chodkiewicz' study of that same text, now correctly identified as Awhad al-dīn Balyānī's *Épître sur l'Unicité Absolue* ~~(Paris, 1982),~~ is still a short book. Yet it would be difficult to exaggerate the actual and potential significance of his study for bringing about a more adequate understanding of the true dimensions and contexts of Islamic spirituality, among both Western readers and younger, post-"traditional" generations in the new Islamic nation-states. Together with Professor Chodkiewicz' subsequent works on Ibn 'Arabī, this work has already contributed to bringing about a much-needed clarification and rectification of earlier widespread misunderstandings of "Sufism," of the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī, and of the purportedly "monistic" or "pantheistic" character of his doctrines and their ongoing reflection in the many movements of later Islamic thought and spirituality which remain inseparable from the wide-ranging influences of the "greatest Master," *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*.

In order to appreciate the surprisingly far-reaching importance of M. Chodkiewicz' remarks on this brief treatise, we must first explain the wider significance of the early translations of this *Risālat al-Ahadīya*—and especially of their repeated mis-attribution to "Ibn 'Arabi"—in first mirroring, and then eventually helping to shape, both popular and more scholarly Western conceptions of Islamic spirituality from their first appearance at least on into the 1970's. The detailed history of the formation of these distinctive modern Western notions of "Sufism" and "Islamic mysticism" remains to be written, but there is no doubt that those nascent cultural stereotypes were already marked, even before the appearance of Weir's and 'Abd al-Hādī's translations, by at least the following distinctive features:[682]

> 1. The assumption that these matters ("Sufism" or "Islamic mysticism," etc.) were essentially *intellectual, theoretical, or doctrinal teachings* that could be formulated and communicated, by literary or other means, without further reference to the practical dimension of spiritual "realization" (Ibn 'Arabī's *tahqīq*) and the host of very concrete questions, both individual and cultural, that are inevitably raised when one enters that dimension.

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[681]Originally published with the title "Translation of an Arabic Manuscript in the Hunterian Collection, Glasgow University" (*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 33:4, 1901); now available in a separate paperback reprint under the above-mentioned title. The subsequent Italian and French translations (1907 and 1910) by 'Abd al-Hādī (Ivan Agueli) are discussed in more detail at the beginning of M. Chodkiewicz' study.

[682]One has the initial impression that each of these stereotypes was more sharply developed in the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic evolution of these conceptions than in France—due both to the vagaries of radically differing colonial and missionary contacts, and to the equally differing receptivities of predominantly Protestant and Catholic intellectual settings—but the exploration of these significant differences, as well as the larger process of discovery-cum-creation of images of Islamic spirituality, must be reserved for another time.

2.   The assumption of a vaguely "pantheistic"—or at the very least, "immanentist"—focus on the locus and forms of awareness of the ultimate reality, usually seen (at least in the prevalent Anglo-Saxon conceptions)[683] as reflecting a radically "individualistic," personalistic perspective explicitly divorced from any essential social and cultural ties with ritual, authority, tradition, practice and the like.

3.   The assumption that the teaching or "wisdom" in question was essentially "universal"—or alternatively, vaguely "Eastern," "Oriental," "perennial," etc.—in such a way as to preclude any need for further reference to specific religious and cultural traditions, with their own concrete practical and intellectual demands.

While the *Risālat al-Ahadīya* did not by itself create those basic pre-conceptions—and especially the wider cultural notions of "mysticism" within which the initial non-specialist images of Islamic spirituality in the West were almost inevitably embedded—, its long tenure as the only completely translated and widely-available[684] work attributed to Ibn 'Arabi in the West certainly helped to cement and support those stereotypes. Even a cursory reading of that text—or of Jāmī's stories about Balyānī himself, as translated at the end of this article—will quickly make clear how accurately these broad conceptions are mirrored in this work and what we know of its (true) author's own life and teachings.

The second essential backdrop to the wider influence of M. Chodkiewicz' study has to do with an even broader and much more dramatic historical phenomenon: i.e., the ironic way that these recently created and historically quite anomalous Western stereotypes of "Sufism" and "Islamic mysticism"—and of the often mythical role attributed to Ibn 'Arabī in both—gradually came to be re-inserted into the ongoing polemical struggles of several generations of would-be "reformers" and "revolutionaries" seeking to shape and direct new nation-states and social realities throughout the Islamic world.[685]

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[683]It is important to note that the great majority of the preceding English translations of Islamic spiritual texts, whether from Persian or Arabic (or Malay, Hindi, etc.), were guided by sources and traditions rooted in the Eastern Islamic world, especially South Asia, rather than the Ottoman/Arab realms and contacts long reflected in French Islamic scholarship.

[684]While Nyberg's subsequent editions and commentary (1919) had a noticeable influence on later scholars writing on Ibn 'Arabi, they did not reach a wider public; and Asin-Palacios' pioneering works long remained either untranslated into other European languages or known mainly to specialists in non-Islamic fields (Dante studies, medieval history, etc.).   The increasing availability in more recent decades of translations (e.g., T. Burckhardt's *La sagesse des prophètes*) and then detailed studies (most notably, by H. Corbin and T. Izutsu) focusing on Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusūs al-Hikam* and its later Muslim philosophic commentaries did not in itself seriously call into question these same underlying pre-conceptions about Ibn 'Arabi and "Islamic mysticism."

[685]By discussing the anti-"monistic" polemics of Ibn Taymiyya and his earlier emulators in their actual historical contexts, throughout all of his writings on Ibn 'Arabī, Professor Chodkiewicz has helped to highlight the radically different nature and context of these modern polemics involving the name of Ibn 'Arabī, even when their language and themes are clearly drawn from earlier medieval discussions. Another of the particularly striking phases in this continually ironic process of cross-cultural

Whatever their ideological stance (traversing the whole spectrum from Marxist to Islamist!), those nationalist political and social reformers have almost everywhere tended to share a common distaste for the "corruption," "decadence," and other defects they typically associate with these same mythical stereotypes of "Islamic mysticism," "popular religion," and with the intellectual and cultural traditions and accomplishments of (at least) the preceding six centuries of Islamicate civilization—not coincidentally, the period during which Ibn 'Arabī's actual influence became so widespread, at every level of religious teaching and expression, in Muslim cultures from Africa to China and Indonesia.[686]

Against this background, then, the essential contribution of Michel Chodkiewicz' work on Balyānī, as with each of his succeeding and increasingly detailed studies of Ibn 'Arabī himself, has been to undermine and radically "de-construct" these far-reaching mythologies that have come to be symbolically associated with the name of Ibn 'Arabī, in both East and West. He has done so, like an authentic *ʿālim* in any culture, not by articulating some new, alternative mythology, but rather by conscientiously exploring and re-presenting the actual religious, cultural and historical contexts within which Ibn 'Arabī—and, in this case, Balyānī and the earlier Islamic figures who were his own inspiration, like Shushtarī and Ibn Sab'īn—were actually writing and teaching. In the study of the *Risālat al-Ahadīya*, in particular, Prof. Chodkiewicz began to develop three basic facets of that far-reaching effort of rectification and clarification which have been pursued in all his subsequent publications concerning the Shaykh.

The first of those facets, part of a much wider transformation in scholarship on Islamic subjects, has been to re-situate the "theoretical" writings and doctrines of figures such as Ibn 'Arabī (or Balyānī) within their original contexts, with all that implies for the relative weighting of religious, practical, literary, aesthetic and social dimensions that have typically been lost or forgotten when such texts came to be viewed only through a narrow philosophic, theological or political prism. The second key aspect of that scholarly effort, in some ways a subset of the first, has been to distinguish the actual teachings and writings of Ibn 'Arabī himself from the host of images and stereotypes with which his name has become associated—through the combined efforts of generations of "supporters" and detractors alike, in both Islamic and Western settings. One outstanding result of that effort, brilliantly illustrated in both of M. Chodkiewicz' subsequent books on Ibn 'Arabī, has been to restore appropriate emphasis to the absolutely central role of Islamic *scriptures* (Qur'an and hadith) and of spiritual *practice* throughout all of his writing and teaching, and specifically in his monumental *al-Futūhāt al-Makkīya*.

The third facet of this new approach, most strikingly illustrated already in this study of Balyānī, is that it has freed serious scholars and historians—too often distracted by the mythic dualisms of ideological

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"transmission" that M. Chodkiewicz has often highlighted in his notes to these studies is the remarkably far-reaching direct and indirect influence, throughout so many parts of the Islamic world, of the highly charged polemic images of Ibn 'Arabī and his "followers" (faithfully mirroring all the above-mentioned stereotypes) to be found throughout the writings of Louis Massignon.

[686]For the almost unimaginable extent of that ongoing historical influence, see the superb and densely allusive summary of the available research (by dozens of contemporary scholars) in M. Chodkiewicz' Introduction to *Un océan sans rivage: Ibn Arabi, le Livre et la Loi* (translated into English as *An Ocean Without Shore*).

polemics, past and present—to turn their attention to the *creativity* and *diversity* of Islamic religious and mystical *thought, practice* and *social expression* throughout the crucial formative period of the late 12th/6th to 14th/8th centuries.   As we indicated at the beginning, this is potentially much more than a merely scholarly or academic contribution. Simply recognizing the very fact of this diversity and creativity, and bringing it to the attention of those obsessed by the polemics and ideological orthodoxies of our own time, can help to open doors that unfortunately are too often closed throughout much of the Islamic world today.

Indeed it may have been in this same spirit and with something of the same far-sighted intentions that the celebrated Persian poet and philosopher of Herat, 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 1492)—commentator on the *Fusūs al-Hikam* and devoted lifelong student of all of Ibn 'Arabī's work—mentioned Balyānī (d. 1287/686) in his famous hagiographic work, *Nafahāt al-Uns*.   The practical opposition so visible in each of these anecdotes between Balyānī's radical spiritual individualism ("antinomianism" would be almost an understatement) and the far more sober, consistently Sharia-based injunctions underlying virtually all of Ibn 'Arabī's practical spiritual teachings is at least as dramatic as any of the multitude of doctrinal contrasts and disagreements between these two figures that are highlighted in M. Chodkiewicz' telling notes to Balyānī's treatise. But instead of "censoring" Balyānī, either by openly censuring him or by simply leaving him out of his work (as he surely did with other Sufi figures), Jāmī seems to have delighted in drawing attention to the eccentricities of his character and method and, by implication, to their inner connections with his more theoretical teachings. Each reader is left to draw the appropriate conclusions....

JĀMĪ'S DESCRIPTION OF ABŪ ʿABDALLĀH BALYĀNĪ[687]

His surname was Awhad al-Dīn, and he was one of the descendants of Abū ᶜAlī Daqqāq. Balyānī's lineage goes back to Abū ᶜAlī as follows: (he was) the son of ʿAbdallāh, son of Masᶜūd, son of Muhammad, son of ʿAlī, son of Ahmad, son of ᶜUmar, son of Ismail, son of Abū ᶜAlī Daqqāq—May God bless their innermost souls. Master Abū ᶜAlī [Daqqāq] had one son, Ismāᶜīl, and a daughter, Fātima Bānū, who was married to Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī.[688]

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[687]The actual author of the "Treatise on the (Divine) Unicity" (*Risālat al-Ahadīya*) often attributed to Ibn ᶜArabī, translated by T.H. Weir as "*Whoso Knoweth Himself...*". This text is the translation of his biographical notice in ᶜAbd al-Rahmān Jāmī's (d. 1492) renowned Persian hagiographic dictionary, *Nafahāt al-Uns* (Tehran, 1958), pp. 258-262. For additional historical background on Balyānī's probable historical connections with the "monist" Sufi school of Ibn Sabᶜīn and al-Shushtarī, drawn from discussions by Ibn Taymīya and other later sources, see M. Chodkiewicz' Introduction to his translation of Balyānī's *Epître sur l'Unicité Absolue* (Paris, les deux Océans, 1982), pp. 17-41.

[688]Daqqāq (d. 405/1014) and Qushayrī (d. 465/1074, author of the celebrated *Risāla*, perhaps the most widely read traditional Islamic work on the Sufi path) are two of the most important figures in the development of Sufism in Nishapur before the two Ghazālīs. Annemarie Schimmel (*Mystical Dimensions*

As for his chain of initiation, he took the *khirqa*[689] from his own father, Diyā' al-Dīn Mas^cūd, who is also known as "Imām al-Dīn" Mas^cūd. He received it from Shaykh Asīl al-Dīn Shīrāzī, [p. 259] who took it from Shaykh Rukn al-Dīn Sanjāsī, from Shaykh Qutb al-Dīn Abū al-Rashīd Abharī, from Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn ^Abd al-Samad Zanjānī, both of whom received it from Shaykh Abū al-Najīb Suhrawardī[690]—May God bless their innermost souls.

Balyānī said: "At the beginning (of my path) I sought to seclude myself from people, and I spent eleven years up on Mount Ligām. When I came down from the mountain, I kept company with[691] the ascetic (*zāhid*) Abū Bakr Hamadānī. He was a man with spiritual powers and true spiritual insight.[692] His personal form of worship (*wird*) was always as follows: every night he got up and placed an iron rod under his chin, and remained standing (in prayer) until day. With his assent, I likewise stood behind him; from time to time he would look back and encourage me, saying (mockingly): "Go and lie down somewhere!" I would sit down on the ground while he was occupied with his own (spiritual) task, and after a while I'd get up again. I emulated him until the time when his spiritual state also descended on me; at that point I (again) chose solitude. Zāhid Abū Bakr was so very happy with me that he called me "Gypsy". I heard that one day he said: "'Gypsy' came and took something from me and carried it off; now I don't know where he went!"

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of Islam, p. 427) mentions that Qushayrī's wife, Fātima-Bānū, also became famous for her learning and knowledge of hadīth as well as her piety.

[689]The "patched garment" (in actual practice often simply a cap or other symbolic object) symbolizing the spiritual "poverty" of the Sufi, bestowed in the formal initiation ceremony connecting a novice with a particular chain of spiritual teaching (*silsila*) usually traced back to the Prophet.

[690]Died 563/1168, the influential founder of one of the oldest surviving Sufi orders, the Suhrawardīya, and author of an early Sufi "rule", the *Kitāb Adāb al-Murīdīn* (trans. M. Milson, *A Sufi Rule for Novices*, Cambridge, Mass., 1975). He was an uncle of the equally famous Abū Hafs Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) mentioned by Balyānī later in this notice **(n. 14).** Most of the other shaykhs in this portion of Balyānī's *silsila* were influential enough to be mentioned elsewhere in Jāmī's work (e.g., al-Sanjāsī as master of the famous Persian poet and disciple of Ibn ^Arabī, Awhad al-Dīn Kirmānī, p. 588).

[691]This phrase loosely translates a key technical Sufi term (*suhbat*) referring to a person's regular, constant contact with a particular spiritual guide, in which they "learn" from all the actions and influences of the guide in question, not simply from formal teachings or specifically assigned disciplines. As can be seen from the remainder of Balyānī's story, it can sometimes be misleading to describe this often relatively informal process as a "master-disciple" relationship.

[692]*Karāmāt*, or "spiritual powers" [literally "acts of (God's) grace"], refers to the supra-normal psychic and psychokinetic powers possessed by certain saints. *Firāsat*, or "spiritual insight", refers to the specific type of *karāma* involving the ability to "see" into the heart, mind and general spiritual state of another person; it is mentioned in a famous hadīth: "Beware the *firāsa* of the person of faith, for they see with the light of God!"

After some time I went back to see him. "Where were you", he asked, "and what did you bring?" I modestly said nothing. After we'd sat together for an hour Zāhid asked me a question, in answer to which I responded that "I am not other than God." Zāhid said: "So you've brought the saying of Mansūr (al-Hallāj)?!"[693] "With a single sigh that I make," I answered, "I can find a hundred thousand (God-intoxicated souls) like Mansūr!" As soon as I said that, Zāhid picked up his rod and threw it at me. I jumped aside, and that rod just missed me. Zāhid cursed me roundly and said: "They crucified Mansūr and *he* didn't run away, but you fled from this little stick!" "That's because Mansūr wasn't yet spiritually perfect (*tamām*)," I replied, "or else he would have run away. For with God—May He be exalted and sanctified—all things are one." Once I'd said that, Zāhid said: "Maybe you've eaten some (psychedelic) plant?" "Yes indeed," I replied: "I have eaten a plant, but from the meadows of Reality!" "You've eaten bliss and you've eaten well," he declared, "so come sit on the prayer-carpet and preserve that (through prayer)!"

Later Zāhid asked me: "What you said concerning Mansūr (al-Hallāj), that it was because of his (spiritual) imperfection that he didn't run away and was crucified—what is your reason for saying that?" "My reason," I replied, "is that if a rider who claims to know horsemanship [p. 260] doesn't let go of the reins when he gallops his horse; or if, when he does drop the reins, he's still able to restrain the horse, then such a person is rightfully called a skillful rider. But if he's not able to stop his horse, then he's said to be imperfect in horsemanship." After I'd said that, Zāhid agreed with me. "You spoke correctly," he said: "I've never seen anyone more perspicacious than you."

Balyānī also said: "They told me that one of the companions of Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn [Abū Hafs ᶜUmar] Suhrawardī[694]—May God sanctify his spirit—called Shaykh Najīb al-Dīn Buzghush[695] had come to Shiraz. I was very happy at that, because I had already attained all of the (spiritual) stations and states of the Sufis about which I'd learned, and I was seeking (to discover) something more. Indeed my own father used to say: "Whatever I requested from God I gave to (my son) ᶜAbdallāh; what (God) opened up for me like a little peephole, He opened up for (my son) like a wide-open gate." So I got up and traveled to Shiraz in order to meet Shaykh Najīb al-Dīn.

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[693]I.e., *Anā al-Haqq*, "I am God (the Truly Real)", the notorious "ecstatic saying" (*shath*) which—along with many other related acts and public teachings—eventually led to the celebrated voluntary martyrdom of al-Hallāj. See the exhaustive four-volume study by L. Massignon (trans. H. Mason), *The Passion of al-Hallāj* (Princeton, 1982)

[694]This celebrated and politically influential master (d. 632/1234; nephew of the Abū Najīb Suhrāwardī mentioned at **n. 10 above**) was the author of the famous Sufi "handbook", *ᶜAwārif al-Maᶜārif*, and played a key role in spreading the chivalrous "*futuwwa*" movement initiated by one of the last Abbasid caliphs, al-Nāsir. (See A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 244ff.) His biography is on p. 472 of the *Nafahāt*.

[695]According to Jāmī's notice (pp. 473-474), this devoted disciple of Suhrāwardī returned to his native Shiraz (in the aftermath of the Mongol invasions?), established a flourishing khanegah there, and died in 678/1279.

I told him quite a few things about my own spiritual states and stations and extraordinary experiences. He listened to everything very politely and didn't say anything in response. I sat there for an hour and then went outside, but suddenly I felt absolutely compelled to return. "Let's go back and see Shaykh Najīb al-Dīn," I thought to myself, "to find out what he says."

When I reached the door of his house, they told me: "He's in the inner (private) rooms. Go on in and sit down in that outer room where the shaykh usually sits (in public audience) until he comes back." Now when I sat down there, I noticed that just in front of his prayer-carpet was (a paper with) everything that I'd just told him written down on it. "Aha!," I thought to myself, "so the shaykh needed that so much he even wrote it down! Now I know what sort of fellow he is and to what lengths he'll go!" I immediately got up and went outside. But when I reached Kāzarūn[696] I reproached myself, and I found a certain (spiritual) ambition (had returned) within me. I began a spiritual retreat (*khalvat*), and during that retreat God gave me whatever I asked Him for in (only) five days.

One day when he was in Shiraz, he went into the khānegāh of Shaykh Sa ͨdī.[697] Shaykh Sa ͨdī took a handful of pennies and set them next to (Balyānī). "Say (a prayer over these)," he said, "so that we can give this blessed offering (to buy) a meal for the dervishes."[698] "O Sa ͨdī," he replied, "(instead of) bringing out those pennies, go take that jar with the 62 silver coins you put in it, and use that for the dervishes' supper!" Shaykh Sa ͨdī immediately went and brought back the jar, just as [p. 261] he had said (and found the money in it).[699] Then he sent it out and had a wonderful meal prepared for the dervishes.

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[696]An important trading city about 70 miles west of Shiraz, on the traditional route to the gulf port of Bushahr, home of the important Kazaruni ("Murshidī", "Ishāqī") Sufi order founded in the early 11th century. (See the related articles in *EI*², vol. IV, 850-51, which mentions an Amīn al-Dīn Balyānī as "reviver" of that order in the 7th-8th/13th-14th century.)

[697]Presumably the celebrated Shirazi poet (d. 1292) and author of the *Gulistān* and *Būstān*. However, it should be added that modern historians have tended to question the authenticity of many of the later stories about Sa ͨdī's life and travels drawn from his works, including Jāmī's own brief notice later in the *Nafahāt*.

[698]It is not entirely clear from the context whether Sa ͨdī is simply asking Balyānī for his additional blessing on the money to be used for buying the meal, or whether instead it is understood—as in a similar anecdote told about a poor but respected saint by Ibn ͨArabī in his *Sufis of Andalusia*—that the pennies blessed by a famous saint will actually fetch a much higher price because of their protective, talismanic value.

[699]Again it is not clear whether the "miracle" (*karāma*) intended by the story is simply that Balyānī was supernaturally aware of the exact amount and location of money Sa ͨdī had once put away (and then forgotten?), or whether he was actually able to materialize that particular sum in that location. (Both sorts of supernatural phenomena are frequently mentioned in hagiographic works.)

The Shaykh had a disciple who was a cook; he sold soup in the bazaar. Whenever the Shaykh passed by that disciple's shop he would take a bowl of his soup and eat it right there, standing up. One day he had a bowl of soup in his hands when a (would-be) dervish came up with great ceremony, dressed in a multi-colored Sufi robe,[700] and greeted him. "I would like for you," he said, "to point out for me the way to God. Please tell me what would be helpful for me to do so that I can act according to (your instructions)." The Shaykh handed him the bowl of soup he was holding in his hands and said: "Part of the foundation of your work is to take this and eat it." So the dervish took the soup and ate it, and when he was finished eating the Shaykh told him: "Now wipe off the soup that spilled on your hand on your Sufi robe, and do the same thing whenever you eat something." "But master," he said, "I can't do that! Can't you suggest something else for me to do!" "Since you aren't even able to do this much," the Shaykh said, "you wouldn't be able to do anything else I'd tell you to do either. Run along; you aren't cut out for this work!"

One of the Shaykh's disciples had sought out a secluded place on the mountain, when a poisonous snake came along. He tried to pick up the snake, but it bit him and his limbs became inflamed and swollen. The news of this reached the Shaykh and he sent a group of people to bring back the disciple. "Why did you pick up that snake," he asked the disciple, "so that he could bite you?" "But my master," the disciple replied, "*you yourself always said that there's nothing other than God*! I didn't view that snake as being other than God, and that's why I bravely picked it up." The Shaykh declared: "Whenever you see God in a terrifying form (*libās-i qahr*), run away and don't go near Him! For if you don't act like that, He'll do exactly what happened to you just now!" After that he put his hand under the disciple's head and helped him to sit up and said: "From now on don't do anything so rash until you *know* that He[701] is good." Then he said a prayer and blew on the disciple, and the swelling went away and he was cured.

He once said: "Being a real dervish[702] isn't ritual prayer and fasting, and it isn't spending the night in prayerful vigil. All those things are (just) the accouterments of servanthood, while being a real dervish means suffering offense and affliction.[703] If you really attain that, you've arrived."

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[700]By the 13th century, with the international spread of both organized Sufi orders (*tarīqa*, pl. *turuq*) and wandering, mendicant dervishes throughout the Islamic world, their adherents in many regions had developed special robes, headgear and other distinctive apparatus (e.g., the *kashkūl* or beggar's bowl; different forms of prayer beads; the *tabarzīn* or two-headed hatchet; etc.) to distinguish their particular status and affiliation.

The *khirqa hizār-mīkhī* ("thousand-nailed" *khirqa*) mentioned here was no longer the poor beggar's cast-off rags, but a splendid, artistically sewn patchwork of hundreds of tiny strips of multi-colored material—an ostentatious sign of wealth and social pretense rather than of inner or outward poverty.

[701]Or "it": it is unclear whether the reference is to the manifestations of God—and especially the well-known distinction between the divine theophanies of Beauty (*jamāl*) and Majesty (*jalāl*)—or to the more mundane distinction between poisonous and harmless snakes.

[702]Or simply "(spiritual) poverty": *darvīshī*, the Persian equivalent of the Arabic term *al-faqr,* glorified as the epitome of Muhammad's own spiritual path in the celebrated hadīth "Poverty is my pride", *al-faqr fakhrī*.

He also said: "Know God—but if you don't know God, then don't know yourself either! Because when you don't know yourself, *then* you come to know God."

Then he said: "I say that there's something even better than that [i.e., than knowing God]: *Be* God! But if you aren't God, then don't be yourself—because if you aren't yourself, then you are God."

One day he had gone on pilgrimage[704] to (the tomb-shrine of) Shaykh Rūzbihān Baqlī[705]—May God bless his innermost self—and Shaykh Sadr al-Dīn Rūzbihān [p. 262] was seated at the head of his father's tomb. When Shaykh ᶜAbdallāh (Balyānī) stood in front of Rūzbihān's tomb, Shaykh Sadr al-Dīn stood up out of respect for him, remained standing for a while, and then sat down. And again he stood up and remained standing for a while, but Shaykh ᶜAbdallāh didn't even notice him! When (Balyānī) had finished his visit, Sadr al-Dīn said to him: "I've been standing up (in respect for you) all this time, and you didn't even notice me!" "Shaykh Rūzbihān had handed me a pomegranate," he replied, "and I was busy eating it with him."

Among his poems is the following:

> We're totally God, most absolutely:
>> We're not from fire, wind, water and earth!
>
> We've become forever naked with regard to being
>> or not-being; our clothing is torn.
>
> The Truth: you can't see any other than God,
>> for no doubt both worlds aren't other than Him!

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[703]The Persian term here (*ranjīdan*) is probably used as an equivalent of the Arabic Sufi technical term *malāma*, or intentionally "drawing blame" upon oneself in order to avoid the forms of hypocrisy often accompanying the reputation of piety and the spiritual "insincerity" (and insecurity) often underlying an unusual reliance on acts of piety and devotion. From a very early period, the true *malāmatīya*—accomplished mystics who carefully concealed their powers and accomplishments—were often considered the highest rank among the Sufis: see the references and discussion in A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 86-88, and R. Deladrière's recent translation of Sulamī's influential *R. al-Malāmatīya, La Lucidité Implacable: Épître des Hommes du Blâme*, Paris, Arléa, 1991.

[704]*Ziyārat*, literally "visit": the technical term in many Islamic languages for the pilgrimages to the tombs or shrines of saints, Imams, prophets and the family and Companions of Muhammad which are a central feature of religious life in every part of the Islamic world.

[705]One of the most celebrated of the many saints of Shiraz (d. 606/1209), whose works have been edited and translated by a number of modern Western scholars: see Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, pp. 255-258, and A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, index s.v.

We don't say the world is Him; nor (do we say)

    that it's wrong to make that connection:

He isn't the world, nor is the world Him:

    to see *all* as Him in this way is not mistaken.

And this quatrain:

Until I saw *Haqq* with my own two eyes every instant

    I never stopped seeking with each breath.

They say God can't be seen with our own two eyes: so

    they're like that, and I'm like *this* at every instant.

He passed away on the day of ʿAshūrā,[706] in the year 686 [March 4, 1287].

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[706]The tenth day of the lunar month of Muharram; for Shiites the final day of mourning commemorating the martyrdom of Husayn (grandson of Muhammad and son of Alī and Fātima) at Kerbala.

Rhetoric, Philosophy and Politics in Ibn Khaldun's Critique
of Sufism and Ibn 'Arabi

Thoughtful and informed students of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima* are well aware that in many places his masterwork is anything but a straightforwardly objective or encyclopedic summary of the available histories and other Islamic sciences of his day. Instead, his writing throughout that unique work illustrates a highly complex, distinctive rhetoric which is constantly informed by the twofold focuses of his all-encompassing political philosophy. The first and most obvious interest is discovering the essential pre-conditions for lastingly effective political and social organization—a task which involves far more than the outward passing forms of power. And the second is his ultimate end: the effective reform of contemporary education, culture and religion in directions which would better encourage the ultimate human perfection of true scientific, philosophic knowing. In both of those areas, any understanding of Ibn Khaldun's unique rhetoric—with its characteristic mix of multiple levels of meaning and intention expressed through irony, polemic satire, intentional misrepresentation and omissions; or through equally unexpected inclusion and praise—necessarily presupposes an informed knowledge of the actual political, cultural and intellectual worlds and corresponding attitudes and assumptions of various readers of his own time. Hence it is not surprising that so many modern-day students have overlooked or even more gravely misinterpreted many of the most powerful polemic elements and intentions in his writing—elements which originally were often as intentionally provocative, shocking, and "politically incorrect" (indeed frequently for very similar purposes) as the notorious writings of Machiavelli were in his time.

One striking illustration of these two key dimensions of Ibn Khaldun's writing, both throughout the *Muqaddima* and in his earlier *Shifā' al-Sā'il*, is his profoundly critical approach to both the intellectual and the manifold wider popular influences and expressions—especially the wider socio-political ramifications—associated with what modern writers often conveniently term "Sufism": i.e., a vast complex of far-reaching creative currents in Islamic cultures and religious life in Ibn Khaldun's time which were often closely associated with, or at least symbolized by, the distinctive terminology and teachings of Ibn 'Arabi and his later popular interpreters. Recent historical research has highlighted and begun to illuminate in historical detail the ways those same creative developments, so fundamentally and consistently criticized by Ibn Khaldun throughout his life, were to become central in the spread of Islamic culture into Central Asia and China, South Asia and Indonesia, while inspiring many of the most distinctive cultural contributions and religious forms of life in the great empires of the Ottomans, Moguls and Safavids. Unfortunately, the very different emphases and ideological presuppositions of twentieth-century Arab and other Muslim intellectuals have frequently tended to obscure the manifold ways Ibn Khaldun's own Mamluk Cairo was itself participating centrally in those world-historical developments which are such a central and recurrent target of his critical endeavors.

This study is devoted to outlining and explaining both the intellectual and the diverse social and political dimensions of Ibn Khaldun's criticisms of contemporary Sufism. The first focus of our discussion is his devastating criticism—closely following classical philosophic approaches in the writings of Ibn Sina, Ibn Tufayl and Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī—of any and all *epistemological* pretensions and corresponding claims to true religious authority in the writings of Ibn 'Arabi and many other influential Sufi writers. The second, inherently more disparate, subject is his careful indications for the philosophical and learned elite among his readers of the potential *practical* "uses and abuses" of Sufi rhetoric and language in various religious and political contexts, often expressed through sharply contrasting emphases in his discussion of central historical characters (the Prophet, Umayyads, etc.) and symbolically key religio-political

events. In particular, since much of Ibn Khaldun's rhetoric in those more practical contexts coincidentally—but for radically different reasons—parallels the familiar traditionalist language of Ibn Taymiyya and his later followers, we have highlighted the profoundly different political and social motives and ultimate intentions which actually guide Ibn Khaldun's superficially similar criticisms and often damning faint praise in this domain.

EPISTEMOLOGY AS POLITICAL THEOLOGY: KEY FEATURES OF LATER "SUFI" THOUGHT

We have frequently placed the words "Sufi" or "Sufism" in quotation marks here because for the vast majority of even scholarly readers who are not specialists in later Islamic thought, that generic term as it is commonly used today is not likely to suggest anything remotely approaching the immense *new complex of interrelated intellectual, cultural and socio-institutional forms* which, in the rapidly expanding post-Mongol "East" (*mashriq*) of the Islamic world, were typically associated with the extraordinary spread of Islam as a truly world religion. As we can now see in retrospect, those far-reaching historical developments definitively transcended in fundamental ways the earlier, much more exclusively "Arab" (linguistic, cultural, and institutional) historical forms and assumptions which still largely determine the guiding depiction of Islamic history and culture throughout Ibn Khaldun's work. Over the past two decades, growing multi-national research by intellectual and religious historians from the many areas concerned has begun to reveal the central underlying role of the writings of the key figure of Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240), as they were developed, systematized and popularized by a host of remarkably creative and lastingly influential theologians, poets, teachers and reformers, in continuing to provide the indispensable intellectual framework and religious justification for this much wider complex of new cultural and social forms.[707] In many ways, those ideas have both reflected and helped to shape the intellectually, culturally and politically dominant self-conceptions of Islam among most of the world's Muslims from the 13th on down to at least the 19th century. Indeed nothing could be more alien and fundamentally contrary to *this* history than the familiar ideological symbolism of "decline", "corruption", and (negatively understood) "innovation" that has typically shaped the rhetorical presentation—and no doubt the underlying appeal—of Ibn Khaldun's writings among so many Arab Muslim thinkers from the 19th century onward.

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[707] The relevant bibliography is so vast, only a few representative English titles can be mentioned here. One of most striking and readily accessible illustrations of these phenomena, in the case of Islam in China, is S. Chittick's *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light,* supplemented by the forthcoming proceedings of the Kyoto conference (2001) on the Influences of Ibn 'Arabi in Asia, in *Journal of the History of Sufism*, V (2006) which brings together contributions many of the international scholars actively publishing in this area. (Similar conferences on the "legacy of Ibn 'Arabi" have been held in recent years in Spain, Morocco, Syria and the UK, reflecting at the very least the growing awareness of the ongoing contemporary significance of the issues and opportunities raised by this debate. One of the broadest and most detailed recent volumes on this subject, albeit almost exclusively from the standpoint of other Muslim *critics* of these same historical developments (mostly in recent centuries, despite its title), is *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*. Finally, a readily accessible recent study suggesting many of the widespread dimensions of Mamluk popular and learned Sufism attacked by Ibn Khaldun is E. Homerin's *'Umar Ibn al-Fārid: Sufi Verse, Saintly Life* (New York, 2001).

Since, as we now understand in considerable historical detail, the Mamluk Egypt of Ibn Khaldun's own time was already profoundly marked by the same spectrum of cultural, institutional and religious phenomena increasingly typical of the post-Mongol Islamic world, it is extremely important not to limit the referents of the word "Sufi" throughout this study simply to the phenomena of the increasingly widespread and often politically powerful Sufi orders (*turuq*); to the wider transformations of the poetic, visual and architectural arts reflecting and inspiring the practices and norms of those visibly institutionalized Sufi groups; nor even to the more pervasive spread of the multiple forms of popular piety, devotion, festivities, endowments and monuments associated with the religious roles of the saintly "friends of God" (the *awliyā'*).   In many places the educational and politically critical institutions of Islamic learning and law, and the corresponding norms of religious authority, were also being simultaneously transformed—or at the very least, were the scene of an ongoing series of polemics and struggles for domination—which we can now see reflected in the writings and effective political and institutional efforts of such historically influential later figures as Qaysarī, Jāmī, Mullā Sadrā or Shāh Walīullāh. Now if the eventually lasting influences and domination of these new intellectual and cultural interpretations of Islam, which found their primary inspiration for centuries in the voluminous writings of Ibn 'Arabi, were not yet clear in Ibn Khaldun's time, they were certainly prominent enough in the Cairo of his day (and no doubt among the intellectual elite of the Maghrib, as with figures like Ibn al-Khatīb) to form one absolutely central target for the ambitious project of intellectual and socio-political reform expressed in his *Muqaddima*.

Against that wider background, it is certainly no accident that so many of the key aims and assumptions of Ibn Khaldun's philosophic and political project stand out as diametrically opposed to the corresponding positions that were typically closely associated with the thought of Ibn 'Arabi and his subsequent Muslim interpreters. Now the usual intellectual forum for expressing such differences of perspective, within the scholarly Islamic tradition, was through learned discussions of epistemology: of how we human beings come to know, and what we can and should know. Formally speaking, of course, those controversial philosophic discussions—on all sides—always managed to arrive at a mutually agreeable rhetorical assertion of the reality and primacy of "divine prophecy" and its necessarily "revealed" forms of knowing. But that common formal assertion was simply a polite—and safe—way of underlining each party's in fact radically different and irreconcilable positions concerning the fundamental epistemological and political question of true religio-political *authority*: i.e., of who it was now—with no divine prophet present—who could actually and reliably interpret that prophetic legacy in terms of *true* humanly accessible and reliable knowledge.

Within that context, and against the conflicting claims first of kalām theologians and then of increasingly pressing representatives of avowedly spiritual forms of knowing, earlier rationalist Muslim philosophers and scientists—most influentially, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Tufayl and Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī—had already composed a well-known series of treatises, whose key ideas and well-worn rhetorical expressions are taken over almost verbatim by Ibn Khaldūn in both the *Shifā' al-Sā'il* and his *Muqaddima*. Those distinctive philosophical approaches were designed to demonstrate (i.e., in terms of the particular norms and procedures of the philosophers) that *only* the intellectual procedures and norms of philosophy could arrive at genuine knowledge—and therefore a genuinely authoritative interpretation and understanding—of the prophetic legacy. Of course the explanation of that scientific philosophical epistemology, from Avicenna onward, included the ambiguous rhetorical acknowledgment that procedures of spiritual purification and ascesis might possibly, in rare cases, lead to results coinciding with what was knowable philosophically. However, those explanations also made it quite clear that the

only reliable and publicly demonstrable way of truly knowing—and hence of properly interpreting and applying—such interpretive claims was necessarily through the process of philosophical inquiry and reasoning.

In contrast with those familiar philosophic norms so consistently accepted and defended by Ibn Khaldun, the underlying models of knowledge, religious authority, human perfection and the ultimate aims of human endeavor are all radically different in the thought of Ibn 'Arabī and his later interpreters. Since we cannot realistically assume in today's readers an extensive knowledge of those positions which are the primary targets of Ibn Khaldun's intellectual criticism of Sufism, it may be helpful to mention summarily a few of the most fundamental points of difference underlying Ibn Khaldun's critique. Simply listing these points is enough to suggest the profound ways in which the philosophic and religious issues at stake go far beyond disputes about particular aspects of those limited social and institutional forms that people today normally associate with Sufism. The following list, moreover, is simply for illustrative purposes, and should in no way be construed as an exhaustive description of the religious and philosophic matters involved in this dispute:

- A central emphasis in the thought of Ibn 'Arabī and his interpreters is on the absolute universality of the processes of human spiritual life and growth, rooted in every person's awareness and understanding of the infinite divine Signs "*on the horizons and in their souls*" (Qur'an 41:53). While this process of spiritual growth and transformation certainly involves relative ranks of spiritual realization, its inherent universality is radically opposed to the fundamental distinction between demonstrative knowledge and mere opinion which underlies both the epistemology and the political philosophy of Ibn Khaldun and his philosophical predecessors.

- The process of spiritual development, being universal, is also necessarily and irreducibly *individualistic*—and hence radically "democratic", in the modern sense of that term. In other words, that process of ethical and spiritual purification which is central to *Dīn* (the key Qur'anic expression for this primordial and universal religious process) necessarily involves all people, and it proceeds by ascending stages whose forms are individualized and particular in each case. Unlike philosophy and science (as Ibn Khaldun understands them), this individualized, intrinsically experiential "knowing" can neither be taught nor transmitted according to any scholastic, publicly demonstrable model.

- This universal spiritual process is essentially manifested and grounded, like the divine "ever-renewed creation" that underlies it, in an open-ended *diversity*, *multiplicity*, and ongoing *creativity* of individual and collective expressions.

- Within this process, there is a fundamental role—for all human beings—of subtle aesthetic and spiritually ethical modes of perception, whose experiential roots are necessarily within *every* individual, prior to the intellectual, cultural and logical interpretation and manipulation of those perceptions.

- One basic cultural expression of this distinctive epistemology is the central spiritual role, as effective vehicles for spiritual self-discovery and creative expression, of poetry, music, calligraphy and all the other related visual arts and disciplines.

- On a very practical level, the essential human models, exemplars and facilitators of this process of spiritual perfection are living and accessible, but most often *immaterial*, mediator-figures (the root sense of *walī*) who are either no longer bodily in this physical world (as with the vast majority of the prophets and saints), or who even in their brief bodily time here are often outwardly almost invisible or even egregious "failures" (as Ibn Khaldun frequently points out) if judged by the usual worldly criteria of social, intellectual or political accomplishment, nobility and inheritance. Even more practically and socially, of course, this central understanding of spiritual mediation was reflected in the eventual profusion of tomb-shrines, pilgrimages (*ziyāra*) and associated popular rituals and devotional practices throughout the later Islamic world.

- Intrinsic to this spiritual process is the necessary co-existence and intrinsic good of an ever-expanding multitude of paths, religious vehicles, saintly figures (*awliyā'*), and other spiritual guides. This extends to all the consequent social and cultural expressions of the fundamentally creative spiritual virtue (as described in the famous "hadith of Gabriel") of *ihsān*: of first perceiving, and then actively manifesting, what is truly "good-and-beautiful".

- Within the open-ended creative perspectives opened up by Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of Islam, along with its wider philosophic underpinnings developed by his later interpreters and commentators, it is clear that the role of *tarīqas* or any other particular historical of social and cultural forms can only reflect a very limited expression of this wider divine imperative.

- Within the multiple revelations illuminating this universal process, the necessary role of particular historical and cultural forms—such as the scriptural languages of revelation—lies above all in their necessary, but relatively limited role in allowing the "decipherment" of the divine prescriptions and symbolic teachings transmitted by the prophets. But from this spiritual perspective, that initial decipherment is itself only the beginning of the active, necessarily creative process—and irrevocably individual responsibility—of *translating* those revealed prescriptions into their appropriate, spiritually effective expressions in constantly shifting situations and new contexts.

This brief catalogue may have one other use beyond helping us to grasp the fundamental issues underlying Ibn Khaldun's critique of the more philosophic claims of Ibn 'Arabi and his later adherents and interpreters. For it may also help to explain just why Ibn Khaldun's own extraordinarily creative and challenging philosophical writings—with their thoroughgoing articulation and vigorous polemic defense of the Arab roots and forms of the particular cultural and intellectual heritage he sought to renew—apparently failed to find even a minimal foothold in those flourishing, prolific "Eastern" centers of post-Mongol Islamic cultural and intellectual life which were so profoundly shaped in response to the widespread popularization of those radically contrasting ideas of Ibn 'Arabi that we have just outlined here.

Ibn Khaldun's profoundly critical attitude toward contemporary Sufi movements, on both the practical, socio-political and the theoretical, intellectual planes, is carefully—if somewhat cryptically—summarized in the following *fatwā*:[708]

> The path of the so-called Sufis (*mutasawwifa*) comprises two paths. The first is the path of the Sunna, the path of their forefathers (*salaf*), according to the Book and Sunna, imitating their righteous forefathers among the Companions (of the Prophet) and the Followers.[709]
>
> The second path, which is contaminated by (heretical) innovations, is the way of a group among the recent thinkers (*muta'akhkhirūn*) who make the first path a means to the removal (*kashf*) of the veil of sensation, because that is one of its results. Now among these self-styled Sufis are Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Sabʿīn, Ibn Barrajān, and their followers among those who traveled their way and worshipped according to their (heretical) sect (*nihla*). They have many works filled with pure unbelief and vile innovations, as well as corresponding interpretations of the outward forms (of scripture and practice) in the most bizarre, unfounded and reprehensible ways—such that one who examines them will be astounded at their being referred to religion (*al-milla*) or being considered part of the Sharia.
>
> Now the praise of these people by someone is certainly not a proof (of the validity of their views), even if the person praising them has attained whatever excellence he may have attained. For the Book and Sunna are more excellent and a better testimony than anyone.
>
> So as for the legal judgment (*hukm*) concerning these books containing those beliefs which lead (people) astray, and their manuscripts which are found in the hands of the people, such as the *Fusūs al-Hikam* and *al-Futūhāt al-Makkīya* of Ibn ʿArabī, the *Budd* [*al-ʿĀrif*] by Ibn Sabʿīn, and Ibn Qasī's *Khalʿ al-Naʿlayn*: the judgment concerning these books and

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[708] Reprinted at the end of M. al-Tanjī's edition of the *Shifāʾ al-sāʾil li-tahdhīb al-masāʾil*, (Istanbul, 1957), pp. 110-11; translated here in its entirety. (Many students of Ibn Khaldun, including al-Tanjī, have placed the composition of this otherwise undated text in the years immediately preceding the first stages of writing the *Muqaddima* and the *K. al-ʿIbar*.)

[709] Readers who may be struck by the verbal similarity of this passage to Ibn Taymiyya's famous "*salafī*" outlook and criticism of popular Sufism in his time (and to the various permutations of his views in a wide range of modern radical "reformist" movements) should be cautioned that the resemblance here is at a purely verbal, rhetorical level. As we shall see, both the philosophical principles and the intentions underlying Ibn Khaldun's criticisms are in fact fundamentally different from the superficially similar rhetoric of these modern political ideologies.

> their like is that they should all be eliminated wherever they are found,
> either through burning them in fire or by washing them with water until
> all trace of the writing is effaced, because of the general positive benefit
> (*maslaha*) for Religion through effacing unsound beliefs. Therefore it is
> incumbent on the public authority (*walī al-amr*) to burn these books in
> order to eliminate the general cause of corruption (which they
> constitute), and it is incumbent on whoever is able to do so to burn
> them.

Now this straightforward public legal statement of Ibn Khaldun's position as a Maliki *faqīh*, which also summarizes much of his more popular and practically oriented critique of contemporary Maghrebi Sufism in his relatively early *Shifā' al-Sā'il*, is not that different from the views later expressed—only from a more openly philosophic perspective—throughout his more famous *Muqaddima*. In particular, one can already see here (1) his recurrent basic distinction between the wider *practical* political, social and ethical consequences of various forms of Sufism, and their more *theoretical* literary expressions and justifications; and (2) his acknowledgment of the widespread popular appeal and the powerful or learned contemporary defenders of the different forms of Sufism, on both those levels. In fact, it is precisely the interplay of these two basic concerns and considerations that explains both the centrality of his critique of Sufism in the *Muqaddima* and the rhetorical ambiguities and subtleties of expression, regarding particular Sufis and different dimensions of Sufism, that have often puzzled or misled more recent interpreters of that work.

However, since those modern commentators—usually relying on a superficial reading of a few key passages in the *Muqaddima* concerning prophetic epistemology and angelic or mystical inspiration[710]— have often persisted in considering Ibn Khaldun as a Sufi or at least a sympathizer with some forms of Sufism, the following passage from that work may be helpful in suggesting its fundamental continuity with the profoundly hostile attitude and understanding already so evident in his *Shifā' al-Sā'il*. This passage is particularly important because it occurs in the middle of the key section on different kinds of "supernatural" knowledge that supposedly outlines Ibn Khaldun's "mystical" epistemology, and thereby beautifully illustrates the biting irony and often sardonic humor with which he so often touches on the characteristic practices and claims of contemporary Muslim mystics:[711]

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[710] In the sixth prefatory discussion to chapter I and the prefatory sections of chapter VI on human and prophetic knowledge, as well as the corresponding sections of the section specifically devoted to Sufism in chapter VI.

[711] Q I 201-202, in the middle of the sixth "prefatory discussion" in the opening chapter. Ibn Khaldun stresses that "the course of our discussion caused us to insert the preceding section" (i.e., immediately after his discussion of purported claims to mystical knowledge). The length of this essay does not permit us to quote the passage in full, or to point out the recurrent irony and ambiguities throughout all of his expressions here. Textual references to the *Muqaddima*, throughout this essay, are to the old edition of E. M. Quatremère (*Prolégomènes d'Ebn Khaldun*, Paris, 1858), followed by volume (Q I-III) and page numbers; this allows readers without Arabic to refer easily to the corresponding sections in the full Rosenthal (Bollingen) translation. The actual translations throughout this study are our own.

> Among the followers of the Sufis are a group of simple fellows (*bahālīl*) and idiots who resemble the insane more than they do rational people, although despite that they do possess the stages of sainthood (*walāya*) and the states of the righteous saints (*siddīqūn*).... These people do not lack rational souls, nor have they been ruined, as with the insane....

> Now you should know that the state of these people is sometimes confused with that of the insane.... But there are distinctive signs by which you can distinguish them: One of them is that these simpletons never stop their *dhikr* and acts of worship (*'ibāda*) at all, although they don't do them according to the legally prescribed conditions. Another distinguishing sign is that they were created idiots from the very first, while insanity befalls (previously healthy people only) after part of their life....

> Another distinguishing sign is the extensiveness of their activity and influence among men, for both good and bad, because they do not have to depend on (legal) permission, because (legal) responsibility (*taklīf*) does not exist for them; but the insane have no (such) influence.

In light of this revealing passage, Ibn Khaldun's manifold criticisms of Sufism, both in its more popular and learned expressions, can all be understood as efforts to limit what he saw as the damage and negative results of this inevitable "foolish" activity, and to channel its unavoidable popular expressions into what he considered to be a more positive and constructive direction.[712] The following section is therefore devoted to a brief survey of his direct and implicit criticisms of beliefs, practices and religious ideals associated with contemporary Sufi movements. Against that background, we can then go on to explore the apparent contradiction between this typically wide-ranging critical outlook and the supposedly "mystical" elements in his prophetic epistemology, while also considering a few of the earlier attempts at resolving this puzzle. In fact, that supposed contradiction can easily be resolved on the basis of both the clues provided in the *Muqaddima* itself and their well-known historical antecedents in the writings of earlier Islamic philosophers.

From that programmatic philosophic perspective, we can then understand more accurately the actual aims of Ibn Khaldun's critique and the complex interplay between the practical and intellectual facets of his argument and the particular audiences he was addressing in each case—including the way those aims were also consistently illustrated in what we know of his own active public life and self-conception. Finally, we have concluded with a few observations concerning the potential wider relevance, for all students of the *Muqaddima*, of the rhetorical devices and philosophical intentions illustrated in Ibn Khaldun's multi-faceted criticisms of contemporary Sufism.

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[712] The forms of public and religious "folly" criticized in the *Muqaddima* are certainly not limited to Sufism (see, for example, Ibn Khaldun's equally critical portrayal of *'ilm al-kalām*, or of various educational practices of his day), but contemporary Sufism is certainly far more frequently the object of Ibn Khaldun's criticisms than any other Islamic science, sect or interpretive tendency.

The central concern in Ibn Khaldun's critique of contemporary Sufism—just as with his wider critique of other Islamic sciences (e.g., *'ilm al-kalām*) and educational practices—is in fact nothing less than identifying the truly qualified "authorities" for interpreting and applying the Prophetic legacy: i.e., for interpreting it both with regard to popular religious beliefs and practices, and with regard to its potential implications for human beings' ultimate, intellectual perfection and the repertoire of philosophic sciences and associated methods which Ibn Khaldun took to be necessary for achieving that perfection. Thus Ibn Khaldun's constant focus (explicitly in the *Muqaddima*, and less openly in the *Shifā' al-Sā'il*) is on the interplay, in both directions, between what he views as certain dangerous intellectual tendencies in Islamic thought, and related wider socio-political developments which can be seen as both consequences of and contributing conditions to those unfortunate intellectual movements. That twofold intellectual and practical political focus is likewise reflected in the central notion of historical "lessons" (*'ibar*) in the overall title of this work: those edifying lessons are both a form of knowledge *and* knowledge with compelling implications for right action.

Now there can be no doubt that in Ibn Khaldun's time by far the most influential and flourishing competitors with philosophy (as he conceived of it) for this central role as the arbiters and authoritative interpreters of religious revelation, in all the relevant domains, were constituted by Sufi institutions and practices, and by their intellectual expressions and justifications claiming their own philosophic universality and comprehensiveness.[713] It is no accident, then, if so many of Ibn Khaldun's arguments against contemporary Sufism, in all its manifestations, echo Averroes' earlier vigorous philosophic critiques of Ghazālī and kalām theology.[714] And just as with Averroes' critiques, the fact that Ibn

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[713] Both the passion and the rhetorical centrality of Ibn Khaldun's criticisms of Sufism (whether in the *Shifā' al-Sā'il* or the *Muqaddima*) can only be understood against the background of the pervasiveness of Sufi themes in both religious literature and practice in his historical milieu. Therefore, as can be seen in many of the illustrations below, the distortions, inaccuracies and omissions in his treatment of Sufism are normally not signs of ignorance of the authors and practices in question, but rather of certain self-conscious rhetorical—often pointedly polemical—intentions, whose critical dimension would be most evident precisely to his contemporary readers well acquainted with the intended targets of that persistent criticism.

[714] The rhetorical structures of both Averroes' *Decisive Treatise* (with its legalistic presuppositions closely resembling the procedure of Ibn Khaldun's *Shifā' al-Sā'il*) and his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* are especially interesting in this regard. It is important to keep in mind that the science of kalām in Averroes' own intellectual and political situation, given the recent history of Ibn Tumart—whose ideology was putatively inspired by Ghazali—and the Almohad movement, had something of the wider public significance and impact of Sufi writings in Ibn Khaldun's time.

An even closer analogy can be seen in Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzān*, which revolves around precisely the contrast between the ostensibly "mystical" and rational philosophic understandings of Avicenna's "Oriental Wisdom" and the same intentionally ambiguous rhetorical treatments of prophetic and mystical epistemology in Avicenna's works which have led to such recurrent misunderstandings of Ibn Khaldun's intentions.

Khaldun often phrases his criticisms in a legalistic form and context should certainly not lead us to view him simply as an unthinkingly conservative, rigorist defender of the prerogatives and presuppositions of Maliki fiqh, much less of some more radical "traditionalist" (*salafi*) ideal.[715]

The other side of the pervasive spread and influence of Sufi institutions and ideas and their increasing support by political authorities—at least in Ibn Khaldun's Mamluk Egypt[716]—was the considerable sensitivity of direct public attacks on those activities, a point which is already suggested implicitly in the defensive tone of parts of the *fatwā* translated above. Not surprisingly, then, Ibn Khaldun in the *Muqaddima* only rarely alludes openly (as in the long passage quoted above) to what he clearly saw as the tragic waste of scarce public and human resources in the Mamluk support of so many "simpletons" and their dangerously misguided activities. But instead of attempting to convert or suppress such individuals and institutions directly, his critical intentions in the *Muqaddima* are usually conveyed on a more learned, literary level either by allusions to reprehensible "excesses" or "heresies"—especially *Shiite* ones[717]—which the attentive reader could easily apply to contemporary Sufi movements and writings, or by the pointed omission or ironic inversion of standard Sufi interpretations and citations (especially of hadith or particular Qur'anic passages favored by Sufi authors) which he could assume to be familiar to most of his educated readers. Those religious and legal scholars who could grasp those allusions and their deeper motivations, Ibn Khaldun seems to have assumed, could also eventually be counted on to help channel the inevitable activity of the mass of uneducated "simpletons" in a more positive direction.

Once one becomes aware of this recurrent rhetorical procedure and its underlying principles and presuppositions—all of which are unfortunately almost invisible to modern readers unfamiliar with the work's wider literary and cultural background—it turns out that the *Muqaddima* is permeated by a fascinating play of sardonic humor and irony, of constantly ambiguous, potentially critical expressions in

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[715] In fact, one could argue that the primary *practical* aim of the *Muqaddima* is not simply a reform of the science of history, but rather a more fundamental rethinking of the presuppositions and aims of Islamic religious law.

[716] Since Ibn Khaldun was apparently writing before the widespread institutionalization of popular "maraboutism" in the Maghrib, the relative openness of his criticisms of Sufism in the *Shifā' al-Sā'il* and the *fatwā* cited above may not be unrelated to the relative lack in the Islamic West of a socio-political "establishment" of Sufi institutions and ideas comparable to the situation already prevailing in Mamluk Egypt. The widespread public support and institutionalization of Sufi thought and practice in Egypt, frequently alluded to in Ibn Khaldun's autobiography and in the *Muqaddima*, is of course substantiated by a wide range of historical sources already for several preceding centuries.

[717] Ghazali's Seljuk-sponsored anti-Fatimid polemic writings and Ibn Taymiyya's anti-Imami/Mongol polemics provide two other dramatic and accessible illustrations of this longstanding rhetorical pattern of using ostensibly anti-Shiite criticisms—in writings intended for an almost universally Sunni class of learned scholars—as a powerful indirect means of sharply criticizing more familiar and powerful developments in their own respective socio-political milieus. Modern interpreters of Ibn Khaldun have rarely even suggested the pervasiveness (or even the very existence) of this familiar and longstanding rhetorical procedure in his *Muqaddima*.

which there are few "chance" or even simply objective phrases.[718] Thus, as in the representative case of his treatment of Ibn 'Arabi, what may appear to us to be merely innocent summaries or uncontroversial historical observations frequently turn out to be intentional misrepresentations or pointedly self-conscious suggestions of "guilt by association", whose rhetorical character—and more immediate practical intentions and motivations—were no doubt readily apparent to most of Ibn Khaldun's educated readers. This is especially evident in his recurrent polemic accusations of "Shiite" influences or tendencies, a handy scapegoat which—quite apart from any question of its actual historical validity in each case—frequently allows him to criticize indirectly central features or intellectual underpinnings of Sufi movements and activities in his own immediate environment.[719]

IBN KHALDUN'S *DIRECT* CRITICISMS OF SUFISM**:**

 The relatively open and explicit objects of Ibn Khaldun's critique of contemporary Sufism (or of its ostensibly "Shiite" counterparts) can be summarized under the following five points. In each of these cases (with the partial exception of the third category), it is worth noting that the target of his criticism appears to be much less the truth and theoretical validity of the belief or activity in question—whether by traditional religious criteria, or with regard to demonstrative philosophic norms—than what he implies are the *dangerous practical social and political effects* of such widespread popular beliefs in the society around him.

(1) One of the most common targets of Ibn Khaldun's criticism is the common popular belief in a redeeming "Mahdi"-figure (or other related forms of messianism), typified in his long section (Q II 142-201) debunking both the hadith foundations of such beliefs and their further development in Shiite and Sufi contexts.[720] The main aim of his criticisms there is not so much the intellectual pretensions

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[718] Again, this approach is by no means limited to Ibn Khaldun's treatment of Sufism, and is equally evident in his treatment of subjects relevant to our understanding and application of *fiqh* or *kalām*, for example.

[719] In addition to the earlier Sunni precedents mentioned above, we may note in passing the very comparable way later leading Iranian philosophers (such as Mulla Sadra) under the Shiite Safavid dynasty and its successors, right down to the present day, have typically used vehement attacks on the views of the notoriously Sunni *mutakallim* and pseudo-philosopher Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī as a thinly veiled criticism of comparable outlooks and ideas among the increasingly powerful and intolerant Shiite clerics and jurists in their own milieu.

[720] *Muqaddima*, Q II 142-201, summarized at II 171: Such beliefs and deluded actions are all based on "juggling of words, imagined things (*ashyā' takhyīliyya*) and astrological judgments", so that "the lives of the first and the last of them are all wasted in this (nonsense)." Here, even before the separate chapter on Sufism, Ibn Khaldun already attempts to derive all the typical notions of "modern" (contemporary) Sufism from earlier "extremist" Shiism (Q II 164-172), focusing in each case on the common *ideological* function of each religious idea in terms of its popular political implications and effects. Thus, for example, the metaphysics of "union" (*wahda*) is treated here solely as a theological justification for the idea of divine "incarnation" (*hulūl*) ostensibly claimed by the Imams (and presumably by later Sufi saints); the belief in the spiritual hierarchy of the saints (*qutb*, *abdāl* and other *awliyā'*) is related back

underlying that belief, as it is the recurrent political delusions flowing from the popular spread of such ideas among those he calls "common people, the stupid mass", which have led so many Mahdist pretenders—both sincere and fraudulent—into fruitless uprisings and revolts without any hope of successful and lasting political consequences.[721] Typically enough, Ibn Khaldun elsewhere stresses the critical importance of such popular messianic beliefs in the successful political efforts of both Muhammad and the later Fatimid Shiites, and even acknowledges the sincerity and sound ethical intentions of certain Mahdist figures closer to his own time. Thus it becomes clear that his primary intention in such passages—in light of those earlier successes and notorious failures (as well as his own repeatedly unsuccessful youthful political undertakings)—is to draw the attention of his thoughtful and attentive readers to the deeper, indispensable practical, political and intellectual preconditions for any effective and lasting political activity and reforms.

(2) A second basic feature of Ibn Khaldun's critique is his denial, which is more often implicit than explicit (except with regard to Shiism), of the existence of the "Pole" (*qutb*) and other members of the spiritual hierarchy,[722] and—what is again more practically important—his constant care to avoid any allusion to the relevance or necessity of living saints or spiritual intermediaries as guides to the awareness and understanding of the ultimate ends of religion and revelation.[723] The absence of any allusion to such widespread claims and associated religious practices is all the more striking in that some such belief seems to have been virtually universal in Ibn Khaldun's own society—underlying the public respect, at least in Egypt, for the saints and popularly esteemed holy men manifested by most political authorities of the day—, without any perceived contradiction of the authority and competence of the learned scholars of the religious law within their own limited domain. In Ibn Khaldun, this silence cannot be explained by some *salafī*-type abhorrence of "innovation" and fantasized notion of the perfection and eternal adequacy of the outward expressions of the original revelation, since he goes to great pains, in both the *Shifā' al-Sā'il* and the *Muqaddima*, to stress the necessity of a rightly guided historical evolution and adaptation of the revelation in order to realize the concrete, this-worldly benefits (*masālih*) actually intended by the prophetic Lawgiver. The corresponding claims of many charismatic Sufis—or the popularly assumed spiritual powers of so many deceased prophets and saints—to provide

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to earlier Alid political claims for the *nuqabā'*; assumptions regarding Ali's spiritual superiority to the other Companions are reduced to simply another *political* claim; and the science of letters (*jafr*) and astrology are treated only in light of the practical usefulness of their purported "predictions"—whether sincere or simply as useful propaganda—for concrete political purposes.

[721] See the representative cases cited at Q II 172-176, which so strikingly resemble a long series of more familiar recent "Mahdist" movements throughout the Islamic world.

[722] See notes 11 and 13 above for his repeated references to the supposed "Shiite" and "extremist" (*ghulāt*) origins of widespread popular beliefs in the role of such spiritual intermediaries.

[723] In his discussion of the role of the Sufi shaykh in the *Shifā' al-Sā'il*, Ibn Khaldun carefully sticks to the question of the practical need for such an individual guide in maintaining the disciple's psychic equilibrium, and makes no mention at all of any wider social, political or religious functions or authoritative claims of saints or spiritually perfected individuals (apart from the Prophet and Companions).

such guidance and insight in the spiritual realm are not really criticized, so much as they are totally, and quite intentionally, *passed over in silence*.

(3) The third recurrent object of Ibn Khaldun's criticism—although here that term is perhaps too mild, in light of the public book-burning unambiguously prescribed in his *fatwā* quoted above—are all the philosophizing and intellectual tendencies in later Sufi thought.[724] Not only does he carefully avoid quoting any of those influential works directly, although their more poetic and popular religious expressions were certainly familiar to all his educated readers. But the very terms in which he does allude to such writings (and to their authors, especially Ibn 'Arabi) are carefully designed to dissuade any curious reader who might otherwise be tempted to find them intellectually and philosophically interesting. In this particular case, at least, Ibn Khaldun's hostility and thoroughgoing misrepresentation can hardly be explained simply by the supposed practical dangers and implications of such recondite texts. Rather, he goes out of his way to avoid the suggestion of any other sound intellectual, philosophic alternative to his own Peripatetic ontological and epistemological premises which are repeatedly presented throughout the *Muqaddima* (and in more allusive summary form, already at the beginning of his earlier *Shifā' al-Sā'il*).

(4) A fourth basic feature of Ibn Khaldun's hostile treatment of Sufism involves his repeated emphatic discussion of it (and especially of later, relatively contemporary Sufi writers) within the context of magic, astrology and sorcery—i.e., either of deluded prediction of future events, or in treating the external, this-worldly wonders or miracles worked by saints and holy men. Again, what is practically most important here is not whether Ibn Khaldun really thinks that all such supposedly "supernatural" phenomena are in fact frauds, products of chance, or the result of sound practical wisdom and

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[724] See Q III 65-79, where Ibn Khaldun briefly discusses the—in his view, both philosophically and religiously unsound—intellectual views on ontology and cosmology of "modern" Sufi thinkers and poets (including notably the famous Egyptian mystical poet Ibn al-Fārid), in light of both scientific knowledge and "sound" religious belief. His summary division here into contrasting later Sufi intellectual schools of divine "Self-manifestation" (*tajalli*) and "Union" (*wahda*) may also allude to Ibn Taymiyya's earlier critiques of many of the same "modern" Sufi writers. As in the hostile *fatwā* quoted at the beginning of this essay, he carefully distinguishes in this passage the irreparable *intellectual* and theological errors of these writers from the politically more useful, or at least potentially tolerable, *practical* and pietistic aspects of Sufi "folly."

It is worth noting that Ibn Khaldun's intellectual criticism of these "modern" Sufis and what he presents as their dangerous confounding of religious beliefs and true philosophy is paralleled by his equally vociferous, if perhaps slightly more subtle, attacks (following Averroes) on any intellectual pretensions of post-Ghazalian *kalām* in the immediately preceding section of chapter VI. The order of presentation and the historical analysis offered there strongly suggest that he—like Ibn Tufayl and Averroes before him—considered Ghazālī (through his monumental *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*) to be largely responsible for the subsequent spread and eventual respectability of these later reprehensible "Sufi" mixtures of philosophy and theology in Sunni Islam.

insight.[725] What is really crucial, as with the preceding point, is what is left out: i.e., the unsuspecting reader is intentionally left with the highly misleading impression that such problematic activities and claims are in fact central aims and practices of Sufism, or at least somehow encouraged and justified by later Sufi writings—while Ibn Khaldun could easily have cited hundreds of Sufi works (including especially the particular "heretical" books explicitly condemned in his own *fatwā*) criticizing such pretensions and focusing on the true aims and presuppositions of human spiritual life, as developed at length in the Qur'an and hadith. Again, there is no sign that Ibn Khaldun's stress on this "magical", superstitious aspect of Sufism and popular religious belief is motivated by any Salafi-like desire to "reform" Islamic spirituality by entirely eliminating such popular and magical innovations. Instead, what is eliminated here—no doubt quite successfully—is any suspicion of an intellectually and philosophically serious alternative to Ibn Khaldun's own understanding of the proper forms and inter-relations of Islamic philosophy and religious belief.

(5) A final recurrent theme in Ibn Khaldun's criticism of contemporary Sufism (and in fact the central theme in the *Shifā' al-Sā'il*) is its supposed development of ways of life and practices involving a dangerous departure from what he portrays as the unreflective, purely active piety of the original Muslim community , along with—most importantly for his own time—later Sufism's alleged separation of conscientious religious and ethical life from active, intelligent participation in the wider socio-economic and political life of society. His repeated claims about this dangerous recent separation between purely contemplative and socially beneficial pursuits are illustrated, for him, by such typical later Sufi practices as *dhikr* and *samā'* (as opposed to supererogatory prayer and Qur'an recitation), spiritual initiation (the *khirqa*) and the initiatic role of the Sufi shaykhs (again accused of suspicious Shiite origins), and the widespread public institutionalization of Sufi centers and foundations (*khānigāhs*, *zāwiyas*, tomb-shrines and pilgrimage centers for saintly figures, etc.). Once again, a closer look at Ibn Khaldun's discussions of such "innovations" reveals that it is not really the religious departure from the unreflective, active piety of the Companions that he is criticizing—since he gives cogent natural and historical reasons why such complex social and ethical differentiation had to take place in settled agrarian and commercial societies in any case—but rather (a) the much more practical and down-to-earth consequences of diverting substantial societal and human resources to the pointless, imaginary distractions and pastimes of such large groups of "simpletons," as well as (b) the perhaps even more debilitating long-range consequences of their attempting to lead a moral and religious life somehow separate from what they allegedly viewed as the "corrupting" sphere of political and military power and authority.

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[725] In fact, Ibn Khaldun, carefully following Avicenna's classical philosophic treatment of such questions in the famous closing chapters of his *Ishārāt*, does go out of his way to eliminate both the necessity and even the very possibility of any "supernatural" explanations of such activities, while stressing the great *political* importance of popular *beliefs* in them. Note the typical illustration of his bitingly ironic discussion of the "mystical unveiling" (*kashf*) of Ja'far al-Sādiq in accurately foreseeing the failure of Alid uprisings against the Umayyads (at Q II 184); or his sarcastic remark at Q II 246 that astrologers "only give us the celestial cause for that, but they have yet to give us the *earthly* reason—which is what we've just mentioned concerning...."

IBN KHALDUN'S *INDIRECT* CRITICISMS OF SUFISM:

 With regard to each of these criticisms, however, what is even more striking in Ibn Khaldun's treatment of Sufism (whether in what he distinguishes as its "early" or "later" phases) and its underpinnings in the Qur'an and hadith is precisely what he does *not* mention: i.e., his careful, pointedly ironical omission of the fundamental scriptural themes and passages which were popularly understood to support the typically Sufi (and often more generally Islamic) forms of contemporary spiritual practice and interpretation. In fact, Ibn Khaldun's unmistakeably pointed omissions of central Sufi emphases on the metaphysical realities and spiritual teachings of the Prophet and his key disciples and successors— recurrent themes familiar enough to modern readers in any of the classics of later Sufi literature (such as Rumi's *Masnavī*)—are carefully conjoined with an equally specific focus on those things Muhammad and his Companions said and did which can instead be explained entirely in terms of political leadership and insight, practical wisdom, and exclusively this-worldly ends. The following is only a representative selection of a few such important passages from the *Muqaddima*, concentrating on examples clearly involving conspicuous implicit criticism of key contemporary Sufi tenets or practices.

The first, and perhaps the most ironic illustration of this typical rhetorical device occurs at the very beginning of this book, in Ibn Khaldun's invocation of the Prophet as "...him for whose birth *the existing world* was in labor before...."[726] In this single brief phrase—which the unsuspecting reader might initially tend to take as a stock allusion to the common later Sufi belief in the pre-eternity of the cosmological "Muhammadan Reality"[727] or Perfect Human Being (*al-insān al-kāmil*)—Ibn Khaldun actually manages to insist instead on both the normal humanity of Muhammad and, more importantly, on what he understands to be the fundamental philosophic thesis of the eternity and stable, causally determined structure of the present world-order, assumptions which form an essential basis for the rest of his new science and for the philosophic sciences in general. For the philosopher, what he says here is of course *equally* true of each and every natural being in that eternal world order, by no means just Muhammad.

A similarly trenchant irony is evident in Ibn Khaldun's striking claim near the beginning of his book (Q I 66) that "God inspired us with this (new science) through divine inspiration (*ilhām*), and He led us (in discovering and presenting it)," an assertion no doubt ironically echoing the widespread claim of many Sufis—perhaps most influentially in the key writings of Ibn 'Arabi—to special divine inspiration and validation for their works and spiritual insights. However, Ibn Khaldun's own philosophic understanding of the very different—i.e., true and false!—forms of "inspiration" in question, following Avicenna, is gradually made clearer in his *Muqaddima* (as detailed in our discussion of his epistemology below), until he himself stresses the universality and practical necessity of this sort of extremely *non*-mystical

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[726] Q I 2; emphasis ours.

[727] As expressed in such widely circulated hadith—both in Sufi circles and in popular Islamic literature more generally—as "Were it not for you (Muhammad), I [God] would not have created the spheres" (*lawlāka*...) and "I [Muhammad] was a prophet while Adam was between water and clay". The most extensive intellectual development of this central Sufi theme is of course to be found throughout the works of Ibn 'Arabi, whose writings—condemned to public burning in Ibn Khaldun's *fatwā* quoted at the beginning of this study—served as the basis for most subsequent elaborations of this theme.

inspiration for *all* scientific inquiry (i.e., as the source of the syllogistic middle terms in all human reasoning), at III 256-257.

Even more evident—and likewise emphasized already in the opening invocation of the book (Q I 2)—is Ibn Khaldun's single-minded focus on the visible historical factors of political success and group solidarity in Muhammad's prophecy. Among other things, that consistently political focus leads him to pass over in absolute silence the extensive body of Qur'anic verses and hadith stressing Muhammad's (and other prophets' and saints') special closeness (*qurba*) to God, along with all those related spiritual virtues and degrees of realization which, in prevailing Sufi conceptions, formed the common bond between the prophets and the *awliyā'* (the saints or "Friends of God"), and which constituted the spiritual hierarchy of the *awliyā'* as the authoritative spiritual interpreters of the Prophetic legacy in the Muslim community.[728]

Not only does Ibn Khaldun studiously ignore the comprehensive presence of such themes throughout the Qur'an and hadith, but he even repeatedly goes out of his way to explain away apparent criticisms of this world and the quest for political authority attributed Muhammad and the early Imams (Q I 364-367; Q II 107), focusing instead on a solitary and unusual hadith insisting that "God sent no prophet who did not enjoy the protection of [or: wealth among] his people."[729] Passing over in silence the host of extremely well-known hadith suggesting the contrary and the multitude of repeated Qur'anic (not to mention other scriptural and historical) references to prophets and saints—Muhammad included—who were rejected and despised precisely *by* their own people, Ibn Khaldun repeatedly reminds his readers instead of those recurrent factors which visibly do account for the worldly political success or failure of any "prophet" or would-be leader and reformer.[730]

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[728] Ibn Khaldun takes up the connection of *qurba* and *walāya* only once and very briefly in his section on Sufism—without any reference to the Prophet at all—and there carefully avoids mentioning any metaphysical or spiritual significance of such notions.

[729] The same rare hadith is repeated *three more times* at I, 168, 268, 364. The powerful and indeed often intentionally shocking effect of Ibn Khaldun's use and personal selection of hadith throughout his *Muqaddima* can only be appreciated in light of what is in fact the overwhelming denigration of attachment to this world and of the this-worldly pursuit of power and wealth throughout the Qur'an and the standard hadith collections, not to mention the central elaboration of those same spiritual themes throughout all forms of later Sufi tradition.

[730] In fact, throughout the *Muqaddima* the same criteria of political, worldly success are explicitly applied to saints and religious figures as to would-be political reformers in general: e.g., at Q I 286-290, with regard to Ibn Qasī and other religious reformers, as well as "deluded" Berbers claiming to be the Mahdi; or at Q I 390-391, where Ibn Khaldun stresses that the same politico-religious "delusions" were shared by the Shiite leader Husayn, in his attitude toward the Umayyad Yazīd. In contrast, Ibn Khaldun never even mentions the fundamental religious conception (shared by Sufis and many other Muslim groups) that the properly religious function of saints and other spiritual guides—quite distinct from their visible reforms and political aims—lies in their witnessing, often precisely through their "lost causes", to

Another particularly significant case of this typical ironic approach to the widespread Sufi understanding of key hadith and Qur'anic passages—both in what Ibn Khaldun openly emphasizes and in what he fails to mention—is his peculiar use of the famous Prophetic saying that begins: "I was given six things (not given to any prophet before me)...."[731] What is important in this wider polemic context is not simply that Ibn Khaldun mentions *only one* of those six things—i.e., the *jawāmi' al-kalim*, which he pointedly takes to refer only to Muhammad's effectively unmatched Arabic rhetorical gifts and influence—but that his interpretation is once again an unmistakable and absolute rejection of Ibn 'Arabi's central theory of the "Muhammadan Reality" as the eternal spiritual totality of all the noetic divine "Words" manifested in the various prophets (and saints), both regarding its intellectual expressions and its far-reaching practical spiritual consequences.

The purpose of revealed religious Law, Ibn Khaldun insists (at Q I 352) is "*not* to provide blessings," but rather to promote specific this-worldly public interests (*masālih*). As a jurist, he takes pain to identify concretely those visible worldly interests exemplified in many different instances of Prophetic prescriptions. Thus his major argument for the superiority of religious laws over "governmental, restraining laws" (at Q II 126-128) has to do purely and simply with their *practical efficacy*, without any mention of their possible spiritual or other-worldly ends: they are more effective, he explains, because of the enforcing influence of shared popular belief in posthumous rewards and punishments, and because of what he stresses as their "more comprehensive" popular inculcation as an unconscious moral habitus, rather than through each individual's rational calculation or fear of worldly exposure or punishment.

A particularly important and revealing passage (at Q I 403-404) is Ibn Khaldun's admission that some "men mentioned in Qushayrī's *Risāla*" may be considered among the true "heirs" of the Prophet, presumably alluding to the famous hadith that "the learned (or 'knowers':*'ulamā'*) are the heirs of the prophets." Now later Sufi writers and apologists, including Ibn 'Arabi, had gone to great lengths to demonstrate that the genuine Sufi saints (*awliyā'*), and not the historically learned legal scholars or theologians, were the truly "knowing" heirs intended by this hadith. So the inattentive reader could easily take Ibn Khaldun's reference to Qushayrī here (and in a similar passage earlier in the *Shifā' al-Sā'il*) as an apparent defense of that central Sufi claim.[732] But in fact, a moment's attention to the actual

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the reality of the immortality of the soul and the afterlife, thereby pointing to the eternal importance of caring properly for the soul despite all worldly temptations and obstacles.

[731] This hadith is quoted and commented repeatedly by Sufis such as Ibn 'Arabi, and was no doubt at least vaguely familiar (in that context) to most of Ibn Khaldun's educated readers. The same sort of heavy irony is of course also constantly present in Ibn Khaldun's characteristic exclusively this-worldly use, throughout the *Muqaddima*, of a large number Qur'anic verses normally understood in a spiritual and other-worldly manner, even without open reference to any explicitly "Sufi" framework of interpretation.

[732] Likewise, three further references to "men mentioned by Qushayrī", in the much later chapter on Sufism (at Q III 64, 67, and 79), all turn out to be thinly veiled *criticisms* of fundamental concerns and presuppositions of contemporary Sufism—as indeed of many of the renowned Sufi saints and ascetics mentioned by Qushayrī as well.

larger context of this statement in the *Muqaddima* makes it clear that (a) he is actually praising only the Companions' and early Muslims' restricting their religion simply to unreflective practice, to a pure moral *habitus* without any deeper claim to universal spiritual or theoretical knowledge; and (b) the practical moral *habitus* he describes has little or nothing to do with particularly spiritual virtues or corresponding practices, but a great deal to do with the communal qualities and politically powerful "group feeling" (*'asabīya*: a term definitely not in *any* Qur'anic or other traditional list of spiritual virtues) that help explain the worldly political successes of the early Arab-Muslim community.

> In order to drive this point home and dispel any possible pietistic and spiritual misconceptions of the explicitly non-spiritual "virtues" he has in mind, Ibn Khaldun repeatedly chooses to cite the father of al-Hajjāj Ibn Yūsuf (at Q I 46-48 and 231-232) as a model of this peculiar sort of internalized religious knowledge. Once again, the ironic significance of this particular illustration can only be grasped against the background of the widespread popular (and by no means exclusively Sufi) conception of al-Hajjāj himself—whose life and historically successful political activity for the Umayyad cause does exemplify many of the practical political insights at the heart of Ibn Khaldun's guiding concern—as something of an exemplar of the unbridled injustice and arbitrary cruelty that had come to be popularly associated in Islamic learned traditions (not without some reason) with almost all ruling political authorities. This is indeed one of the most characteristically "Machiavellian" allusions in the entire *Muqaddima*.

Another especially revealing passage is Ibn Khaldun's treatment (at Q II 96ff.) of the central Islamic theme of injustice (*zulm*), which he carefully and pointedly restricts to the political actions and consequences of rulers, going out of his way to deny the legal applicability of this concept to other individuals. In making this strange restriction, not only does he pass over the repeated Qur'anic discussions of "injustice" precisely with regard to each human *soul's* relation to itself, which is one of the fundamental bases of spiritual practice, whether Sufi or otherwise. But his discussion of the supposed lack in Islamic law of religious "deterring punishments" for that sort of unseen, inner psychic injustice even more revealingly leaves out of account the whole central Qur'anic discussion of each soul's complex 'accounting' of rewards and punishments—precisely for such inner, socially invisible actions—in the next or spiritual world. Indeed Ibn Khaldun's continuous studied *silence* on the eschatological, post-mortem dimensions of the soul and spiritual human being[733] certainly goes to the heart of his repeated criticisms of later Sufism and of those broadly Neoplatonic philosophic currents with which Sufi philosophizing (like much Shiite spiritual thought) was often associated.

Ibn Khaldun's discussion of singing and music (Q II 352-361) as the "last" craft to develop in civilization—rather than as one of the primordial expressions and realizations of humanity's spiritual nature and origin—is again a most revealing sign not so much of any religio-legalistic opposition to music or its

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[733] I.e., as actual realities. This is radically different from Ibn Khaldun's consistent focus on eschatology—e.g., at Q II 126-128, and wherever he discusses related matters—solely in terms of popular *beliefs*, purely on the level of imagination (not of genuine knowledge), insofar as such shared beliefs practically reinforce the deterrent functions of this-worldly rewards and punishments, and thereby encourage the popular practice of and obedience to established religious precepts.

"innovative" uses in Sufi practice,[734] as of a more essential philosophic deafness to realms of meaning and *cognitive* dimensions of beauty or harmony (whether musical or otherwise) which did not easily fit into his own conception of philosophy. In contrast, those same aesthetic and spiritual dimensions and practices—as was highlighted in our opening summary of key points in the thought of Ibn 'Arabī and his interpreters—constituted one of the central appeals of Sufi thought and metaphysics in both its speculative and its more popular ritual expressions in poetry, lyric, music and all the manifold forms of *dhikr*.

Finally, Ibn Khaldun's pervasive hostility to Sufism extends even to his ostensibly "aesthetic" judgments on Arabic mystical poetry, as in his revealing remark (at Q III 339) that:

> To the degree that a poem gets closer to nonsense, it is further from the level of eloquence, since they are two extremes. Because of this [i.e., because it *is* nonsense!] poetry on divine and prophetic matters (*rabbāniyyāt wa nubuwwāt*) is generally not very accomplished.

This is also, he goes on to add, because such spiritual poetry—typified, in Arabic-language spiritual contexts, by the still powerfully influential devotional songs of al-Busīrī or the mystical lyrics of Ibn al-Fārid—deals with commonplaces "spread among the masses (*al-jumhūr*)."   Here it is interesting that his criticisms about the "triteness" of such poems and their supposed "lack of meaning" really translate his own attitude toward their *contents*, rather than their aesthetic qualities, since such criteria would in fact apply even more strongly to many of the other Arabic poetical genres that he goes on to discuss at great length and often with informed passion. Again, we may note the significance of his careful avoidance of even citing such popularly beloved, almost omnipresent Arabic mystical poetry in this literary section, although—or perhaps precisely *because*—such lyrics were surely far more influential in popular religious devotional practice and ritual than the learned Sufi intellectual treatises that he wanted to have burned.[735]

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[734] While Ibn Khaldun has failed to include a separate chapter on music in his discussion of the quadrivium (among the philosophic sciences), there is no indication that his omission in this case flows from any particular religio-legal position against music as such. Of course, as illustrated by Ibn Taymiyya's attacks on the Sufi practice of *samā'*, among others, there were plenty of deeply rooted traditional legal precedents for such criticisms of music (as for similar religio-ethical criticisms of Arabic poetry, which he also carefully avoids mentioning), if he had wished to emphasize that particular point.

[735] The only mention of particular Arabic mystical poets at all is the brief, disdainful allusion to Ibn al-Fārid and two other more minor figures (including Ibn 'Arabi's student al-Tilimsānī) at Q III 69 and 72, in the context of Ibn Khaldun's general dismissal—closely echoing Ibn Taymiyya's influential earlier judgments—of the heretical, "crypto-Shiite" notions of pantheistic "union" and "incarnation" supposedly permeating their works. It is of course likely that this relative silence is a concession to—or at least an indirect acknowledgement of—the widespread popularity in Cairo of a poet like Ibn al-Fārid (or al-Busīrī).

Apart from this one exception, it is remarkable that Ibn Khaldun, in his long separate discussion of genres of Arabic poetry, does seem largely to abandon the characteristic combination of religious and

In light of the pervasive presence of this critical reaction to contemporary Sufism throughout the *Muqaddima*, what is no doubt most surprising is not that a few modern writers have nonetheless persisted in presenting Ibn Khaldun as a "Sufi" or some kind of mystical sympathizer—a view which at least does have a certain (albeit purposefully ambiguous) textual basis in his work—but rather that so many recent commentators have treated the entire subject of Sufism as at best only a marginal detail, limited to the handful of short sections explicitly devoted to that subject. Of course, just as with the similarly widespread neglect of the fundamental place of classical Islamic philosophy in all of Ibn Khaldun's work (despite the classic, foundational study of that comprehensive dimension by Muhsin Mahdi), this oversight can only be explained by more contemporary readers' general historical ignorance, in this case, of the central socio-political role of Sufi-related conceptions and practices in the understanding of Islam throughout all levels of Islamic society, from the Maghrib to southeast and central Asia, during Ibn Khaldun's time. That far-reaching intellectual and historical ignorance is of course further complicated by the radically different social and intellectual problematics assumed by most modern Muslim thinkers encountering Ibn Khaldun. For indeed if, as pointed out throughout this study, the *Muqaddima* itself must largely be understood as a complex, ongoing debate between the two very different opposing conceptions of Islam—on all the relevant levels of theory and practice— suggested by Ibn Khaldun's own guiding Aristotelian philosophy, in contrast to those highly influential Sufi thinkers (such as Ibn 'Arabī) whose works he explicitly wished to eliminate, then one can only wonder what is left when *neither* side of that primary philosophical discussion is adequately taken into account.

In any event, some more attentive readers have at least remarked on the apparent contradiction between the recurrent criticisms of contemporary Sufism which we have noted in Ibn Khaldun's *fatwā*, parts of the *Shifā' al-Sā'il*, and most of the *Muqaddima*—a thoroughly critical, often fiercely hostile attitude which is fully corroborated by what we know of his actual life and autobiography—and what might initially seem to be a quite positive appreciation and acceptance of mystical and prophetic spiritual knowledge, apparently going "beyond" what can be known by purely rational and demonstrative means, that is curiously outlined in the two complementary discussions of prophetic epistemology and its ontological underpinnings that are provided at the beginning of Chapters I and VI of the *Muqaddima*. Now it is important to stress that the apparent contradiction we are discussing here, if one reads these epistemological sections in a naive and historically uninformed way, is really quite glaring and unavoidable. It is not just a sort of personal moral or practical inconsistency, as though Ibn Khaldun (like so many other religious and philosophic thinkers) had himself simply failed to carry out in his own life something which he had allowed for in theory. In fact, on the one hand he does clearly seem to suggest in those two peculiar sections the wider possibility of some kind of supra-rational inspired knowledge and spiritual "unveiling" (*kashf*); while on the other hand he misses no occasion,

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philosophic categories applied to all the other preceding Islamic and Arabic arts and sciences in favor of more autonomous (and phenomenologically adequate) aesthetic and descriptive criteria. This peculiarity is worth noting, also, because the philosophic commentaries of Averroes, for example, did offer him a model of a more rigorously ethical, political and rhetorical approach to Arabic poetry, which Ibn Khaldun had in fact applied to other (especially religious) forms of Arabic literature in a number of earlier passages.

throughout the rest of his *Muqaddima*, to combat any and every theoretical claim and practical attempt to realize and act on the widespread Sufi and other claims to such privileged spiritual knowledge. Before going on to outline, under the following two headings, a more adequate interpretation of these two key passages and their complex rhetorical intentions, it may be helpful to examine briefly two earlier detailed attempts at actually resolving this seeming contradiction.[736]

Miya Syrier, in a long article on "Ibn Khaldun and Islamic Mysticism,"[737] attempted a chronological explanation of this problem, based in part on a study of the different recensions of the *Muqaddima*. Ibn Khaldun's intellectual interest in Sufi thought and his "undeniable leanings toward Absolute Monism," according to this theory, came mainly later in his life, during his stay in Egypt, and therefore remained largely on the theoretical plane. Apparently, according to this hypothesis, he did not have the time or sufficient motivation to carry out that interest in practice or even in an appropriate revision of the earlier, more forcibly rationalistic and Aristotelian views which—as the author does admit—are also so evident in most other parts of his work. There is no sign, in this case, that this commentator was even aware of the complex and likewise intentionally ambiguous traditional treatment of precisely these same key epistemological questions by Avicenna and Tūsī (and among earlier Islamic philosophers more generally), which in fact provided the immediate intellectual and rhetorical background for Ibn Khaldun's problematic discussions of Sufi claims regarding prophetic and mystical epistemology.[738]

Eric Chaumont's subsequent thesis on the *Shifā' al-Sā'il* and Ibn Khaldun's "critique of philosophy"[739] developed an even more radical position. Systematically taking issue with the guiding arguments and

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[736] Alexander Knysh, in chapter 7 ("Ibn 'Arabī in the Muslim West") of his *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, 1999) deals in greater detail with the case of Ibn Khaldun's famous friend and mentor, the Grenadan vizier Ibn al-Khatīb, stressing the concrete political dangers associated with contemporary Sufi movements and writing in the Maghrib. While that earlier lived political context does vividly illustrate Ibn Khaldun's criticisms of the popular effects of Sufi ideas (already discussed above), we find little evidence that those particular events somehow led Ibn Khaldun to adopt an attitude of prudential concealing of his real positive interest in Sufi thought, as Prof. Knysh sometimes seems to suggest.

[737]*Islamic Culture* 21, 1947. (This essay does not deal directly with the *Shifā' al-Sā'il*.)

[738] See the detailed epistemological discussions in the following two sections below.

[739] Summarized in "La voie du soufisme selon Ibn Khaldūn: présentation et traduction du prologue et du premier chapître du *Shifā' al-Sā'il*" (*Révue philosophique du Louvain* 87, 1989). Some of the author's main ideas were more briefly developed in an earlier article, "Notes et remarques autour d'un texte de la "muqaddima", ibn khaldûn et al-ghazâlî: Fiqh et tasawwuf" (*Studia Islamica* 64, 1986). This work is cited here only as perhaps the most extreme illustration of what still remains probably the most common description of Ibn Khaldun's approach to both Sufism and Islamic philosophy in the *Muqaddima*, including the accounts in most historical surveys of Islamic philosophy and in the vast popularising Arabic literature devoted to Ibn Khaldun.

broader philosophical interpretations of Muhsin Mahdi,[740] he maintained that Ibn Khaldun, like Ghazali, was in fact somehow a Sufi and devout Muslim believer who totally rejected all the claims and approaches of the Islamic philosophers: hence his "refutation of the philosophers" in chapter VI of the *Muqaddima* is to be taken in a literal and absolute sense. In this view, any apparent traces of a philosophic outlook in the *Muqaddima* have to do only with the narrower heuristic assumptions of historical science, but Ibn Khaldun personally believed in the superiority of Islamic revelation and spiritual inspiration on all planes, going beyond what could ever be given by philosophy in every respect. Needless to say, the thoughtful reader is left wondering why this Ibn Khaldun so manifestly failed to act on his own supposedly positive view of Sufism (as in the vociferous book-burning *fatwā* already discussed), why he devoted so much energy to actually criticizing Sufism in essentially all its contemporary manifestations, and why he demonstrated such a great interest in the repeated, and usually quite positive, restatement of the far-reaching claims, premises and methods of the Islamic philosophers throughout the *Muqaddima* (as indeed already in summary form in his earlier *Shifā' al-Sā'il*).

Our own hypothesis is that these apparent contradictions can be readily resolved in light of what Ibn Khaldun himself assumes—and carefully explains in many other places throughout his *Muqaddima*—concerning (1) the basic distinction between the distinctively human *theoretical*, speculative understanding (with its corresponding sciences and intellectual methods) and the manifold *practical* and deliberative functions of reason; and (2) the necessarily complex relations between the application of human practical reason and the universal political and ethical functions of revelation, with regard to grounding belief and practice of the religious Law.[741] In fact, as illustrated in the following section, the resolution of this contradiction also clearly reveals more positively the essential interconnection between the explicit theoretical contributions and clarifications provided by Ibn Khaldun's new science of society in the *Muqaddima*, and the more problematic question of the practical aims and motivations of those reforms.

However, the possibility of actually resolving these apparent contradictions, as Ibn Khaldun himself points out, also depends on two or three basic abilities or predispositions which were certainly not shared by all of his potential readers. The first of these is close attention to the seven valid reasons which he carefully outlines for why someone would ever bother to write a *scientific* book in the first place.[742] The second key ability, and certainly the most important, is what he describes as the

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[740] Most elaborately developed in his *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History* (Chicago, 1964) which is still the most thorough and profound study of Ibn Khaldun's thought and intentions in the *Muqaddima*.

[741] The best summary account of these fundamental issues is to be found in the two related articles on Ibn Khaldun by M. Mahdi, in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M. M. Sharif, (Wiesbaden, 1963), pp. 888-904 and 961-984; the detailed documentation of those perspectives in the *Muqaddima* itself is to be found throughout the same author's book-length study cited in the preceding note.

[742] Q III 242-248 (chapter VI, section 32). This key section opens with a critically important reiteration of the Aristotelian epistemology underlying Ibn Khaldun's understanding of the universality and uniformity of the philosophic sciences and of the reasons for the contrasting diversity of the religious and historical sciences. (The clearest earlier exposition of these principles is at Q II 385-386.) While Ibn Khaldun's illustrations of these sound reasons for writing a scientific work are taken from non-philosophic,

distinctively human ability to think "several steps ahead",[743] an ability which is certainly required if one is to grasp the reasons underlying the many apparent contradictions or non-sequiturs which are intentionally spread throughout the *Muqaddima*, on virtually every page. And the indispensable third factor, at least for readers who would want to pursue the multiple suggestions in the *Muqaddima* concerning the true intellectual perfection of human beings, would be some acquaintance with the writings of earlier Islamic philosophers,[744] especially Avicenna, Averroes, and Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī.[745]

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religious literatures, all of his first six reasons are directly applicable to his own justifications and motivations for composing the *Muqaddima* and, even more revealingly, to his understanding of this "new science" in its relation to the pre-existing philosophic sciences and Arabic historiography.

However, the most important point in this section, with regard to Ibn Khaldun's critique of Sufism (and more particularly of Sufi literature, both doctrinal and poetic) is his concluding forceful insistence (at Q III, 247-248, *repeated three times* in a few lines, and attributed to the ultimate scientific authority of Aristotle) that "everything else...is ignorance and impudence" involving either "exchanging what is untrue for what is true, or bringing in what is useless"—clearly "going astray from the path set out by the inquiry (*nazar*) of the truly intelligent (*al-ʿuqalāʾ*)."

[743] Q II 367 (ch. VI, sections 1-2). This short discussion of the distinctively "human power to think"— even more concisely summarized at the beginning of the *Shifāʾ al-Sāʾil*—is in fact the key to Ibn Khaldun's treatment of all the different "sciences" (including speculative, dogmatic Sufism), and ultimately to the structure and intentions of the entire *Muqaddima*.

[744] The critical link for Ibn Khaldun's knowledge of Avicenna and the rationalistic (and often political) conceptions of Tūsī was almost certainly his own master in philosophy, al-Ābilī. See the brief discussion by N. Nassar, "Le Maître d'Ibn Khaldūn: al-Ābilī" (*Studia Islamica* 20, 1964). That article contains some suggestive ideas on Ābilī's possible influence on Ibn Khaldun's radical pedagogical reforms and criticisms developed in chapter VI of the *Muqaddima*, and points to the importance of Ibn Khaldun's youthful work, *Lubāb al-Muhassal*—since Rāzī's *K. al-Muhassal* was a central target of Tūsī's philosophical polemics—but without analyzing the latter work. What is most decisive here (apart from the other references to Ābilī's mastery of the philosophic sciences) is Ibn Khaldun's own indication (in his description of that teacher in his autobiography) that Ābilī actually spent years in the company of masters of the Avicenna-Tūsī philosophical tradition *in Kerbala*, a notorious center of Shiite and intimately related philosophical studies. This key role of al-Ābilī can be contrasted further with Ibn Khaldun's account in the *Muqaddima*, Q II 378, of the way Rāzī's dogmatic works reached the Maghrib, through the Tunisian religious scholar Ibn Zaytūn (d. 691/1292) and his students.

With regard to the subject of this study, Ibn Khaldun's most important indication of the decisive importance of Tūsī and Avicenna—and of the probingly critical, political focus of Avicenna's *Ishārāt* as read and understood within this Eastern philosophic tradition—is in an "aside" in his description of one of his childhood teachers in his autobiography [*Al-Taʿrīf bi-ibn khaldūn wa-rihlatihi gharban wa-sharqan*, ed. M. al-Tanjī, (Cairo, 1951), pp. 62-63]. This autobiographical passage—which also stresses the important role of both Avicenna's *Shifāʾ* and the Aristotelian commentaries of Averroes in the general philosophic teaching of al-Ābilī—mentions how one of that teacher's most accomplished students, who

already "had a perfect knowledge of the *Ishārāt*" and the other works of Avicenna and Averroes, once studied "the section on Sufism [= the key final chapters of the *Ishārāt*]" from that work with the famous chief Qadi of Tunis, but only "*alone with him in his house*." Ibn Khaldun's stress on the extraordinary secrecy surrounding this private study—which would have been entirely pointless if those two famous concluding chapters were understood as simply another apologetic for by then widespread Sufi claims and practices—becomes much more understandable when one is aware of the actual focus of Tūsī's commentary on these sections of the *Ishārāt*. For Tūsī there takes up extremely delicate questions of the *political* nature, aims and methods of "prophecy" (understood in an explicitly universal manner) and the "imaginary" nature (and political functions) of religious beliefs in the afterlife, in a way which—just as throughout Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima*—clearly situates the apparently "Sufi" language of those concluding chapters within the strictly rationalistic, ethico-political context provided by the earlier chapters and the rest of Avicenna's technical works.

[745] Tūsī's philosophical writings are almost certainly the major immediate philosophic "source" or predecessor for Ibn Khaldun's understanding of Islamic philosophy and its relation with the religious sciences (including the claims and methods of later Sufism). The key work in this domain (as explained in the preceding note) was Tūsī's highly influential, lengthy life-long commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*, which is in fact constructed as a careful, point-by-point refutation of what he considers the repeated theological abuses of Avicennan thought by the *mutakallim* Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. (Tūsī himself, writing at the end of his tumultuous, politically active and influential life, refers to this as his major life's work, which he had continued to perfect for more than 40 years.) There one finds clearly and explicitly stated virtually all the major themes in Ibn Khaldun's rationalistic, distinctively *political* understanding of prophecy (and of the supposedly "mystical" passages in Avicenna's *Ishārāt*), usually developed through Tūsī's polemic against Rāzī. While there was also a vast ongoing subsequent Eastern Islamic literature of learned "adjudications" (*muhākamāt*) of this fundamental quarrel between philosophy and kalam theology, Ibn Khaldun's own personal opinion is no doubt summarized in his pointed remark (at Q III 274) that Tūsī was *better than any other* later Iranian scholar.

Ibn Khaldun's great philosophic esteem for Tūsī (despite his lifelong Shiite affiliations and key political role under the Mongol invaders, which is sufficient to explain the lack of other openly positive references in the *Muqaddima*)—along with his fierce disdain for Rāzī's attempted replacement of Islamic philosophy by a revised version of Ash'arite *kalām*, which comes out most openly in the section of chapter VI on theology—is most clearly stated (with a typically "Khaldunian" ironic use of the Qur'an) at Q III 117: "Tūsī...disputed many topics with the Imam (Rāzī), and he more perfectly resolved his inquiries and disputes, for *'above everyone with knowledge there is a true knower'* (12:76)."

This same passage of the *Muqaddima* (at III 117, in the brief section on the Aristotelian sciences of physical nature) also has a crucially revealing statement of Ibn Khaldun's understanding of the relations of Avicenna, Averroes and Aristotle:

> It was *as though* (Avicenna) differed with Aristotle in many of his topics and stated his own opinions (*arā'*) concerning them, whereas Averroes summarized the books of Aristotle in his commentaries, following him (exactly) without differing with him. And

Readers who approached the *Muqaddima* without all three of these essential prerequisites—a group probably including the vast majority of Ibn Khaldun's potential audience—might be momentarily bothered by some of the apparent contradictions or unexplained assertions in this book, but, just like many uninformed modern commentators, they would most likely come away relatively secure in the same set of unexamined beliefs and attitudes which they had brought to their reading in the first place.[746]

THE DISTINCTION OF BELIEFS AND DEMONSTRATIVE KNOWLEDGE:

However, even for readers without any prior knowledge of philosophy, Ibn Khaldun gives a more than adequate explanation of the basic grounds for his critique of contemporary Sufism in his repeated explanations of the fundamental distinction between beliefs or *opinions* ("religious" and otherwise), on the one hand, and demonstrative *knowledge*, on the other.[747]

Beliefs, opinions and social norms serve above all to orient action and volition, both individually and collectively, and most of the discussions of Islamic subjects (including Sufism) throughout this book are clearly meant to be understood from this very practical and clear-sighted perspective. As Ibn Khaldun illustrates at great length throughout the actual historical sections of his *K. al-'Ibar* (and not simply in the

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> although the (philosophically unqualified) common people (*al-nās*) composed much about that since him (= Averroes, or Avicenna?), nevertheless these ones (i.e., Aristotle's and/or Averroes' books) *are renowned to this day and are the ones truly esteemed in this craft (of philosophy)*" [emphases ours].

This critically important passage clearly reveals Ibn Khaldun's own suspicion, discussed below (and following earlier famous Maghribi examples in key writings of Ibn Tufayl and Averroes, as well as Tūsī), that many of Avicenna's apparent Neoplatonic "departures" from Aristotelian (and Farabian) principles should be properly understood in terms of prudential public rhetorical adaptations to his specific Islamic religio-political context and intentions—especially in relation to the competing intellectual and practical claims of *'ilm al-kalām* and speculative Sufism.

[746] Although there are many more explicit and detailed allusions to the premises, aims and divisions of Aristotelian philosophy throughout the *Muqaddima* (amply discussed in the classical study by M. Mahdi already cited) than in the *Shifā' al-Sā'il*, still those allusions are almost certainly not enough to give an idea of the pervasive influence and indispensable presuppositions of Islamic philosophy for readers encountering Ibn Khaldun's work without some serious prior knowledge of the philosophic sciences. However, those allusions are certainly more than sufficient to suggest necessary further directions of thought and inquiry for any curious, attentive, and properly prepared reader.

[747] This fundamental distinction is brought out most openly, in its application to the religious and philosophic sciences of Ibn Khaldun's time, at Q II 385-386 (chapter VI, section 9). It is again summarized—but in a more inconspicuous manner—after his survey of these two radically different groups of sciences (and their spurious imitators) at Q III 274 (chapter VI, 43), where he straightforwardly insists that the philosophic, rational sciences are all "matters of the intellect", while the Islamic so-called "sciences" (*'ulūm*) and laws "derived from the Qur'an and Sunna" are "*all matters of the imagination*".

Muqaddima), such popular opinions vary greatly through history and various communities, and what is politically essential about them is not whether they are true or false—categories which are properly applicable only to matters of reality subject to philosophical demonstration—but rather whether they are widely believed and followed, and are therefore *practically effective* in assuring the common socio-political ends of human laws.[748] One of his most significant remarks in this connection is his insistence (at Q I 72-73) that prophecy does not exist by natural necessity, but rather *through religious laws*, whose efficacy and very existence depend above all on the persuasive powers of imagination in creating the politically indispensable supporting ground of popular belief and consensus.[749]

Since so much of the *Muqaddima* is devoted to a careful analysis of the political effects of various Islamic beliefs and the corresponding forms and presuppositions of effective rhetorical persuasion, with the evident aim of distinguishing the positive or useful from the dangerous and destructive,[750] this same perspective can readily account for the two recurrent points of intentional ambiguity so apparent in Ibn Khaldun's discussion of Sufism. First, the widespread popular belief in the direct spiritual inspiration and mediation of the Sufi saints can be conceived as "good" insofar as it had come to be perhaps the

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[748] See Ibn Khaldun's explanation (at Q II 126-128) of the greater effectiveness of religiously supported laws—vis-à-vis local governmental, outwardly restraining laws—due to the additional factor of popular Muslim beliefs in posthumous rewards and punishments. The opening chapters of the *Muqaddima* are replete with references to the "anarchy" and natural "evil tendencies" (e.g., at Q I 233) of people whenever they are not restrained by their belief in religious or governmental laws, and Ibn Khaldun consistently presents Muhammad's "transformation" of the "savage" Arabs (see especially Q I 270-275) as an archetypal illustration of the political effectiveness of that decisive religio-political influence on the popular imagination.

[749] To take only a few examples, see Q I 235-236 on the importance of the "imaginary" (in the uses of tribal and genealogical pedigrees) in moving the passions and imagination to create group feeling, discussing the ways that Muhammad and 'Umar both encouraged this; or Ibn Khaldun's strong insistence at Q I 244-245 (in an explicit criticism of Averroes' commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*) that the importance of rhetoric consists in swaying the beliefs and passions of (only) "those whose opinions count." This last point may help explain why Ibn Khaldun is so explicit and openly hostile in his criticisms of Sufi "theorists" writing for the politically influential *'ulamā'*, while remaining more reticent in his critique of Sufi metaphysical poetry directed toward the masses, which does at least reinforce their politically useful naïve religious faith and devotional sentiments.

This particular question of the "natural" grounds and political conditions of (religious) "prophecy," following Avicenna, was already developed in considerable detail in the above-mentioned philosophical polemics of Tūsī against the theologian Rāzī (see notes 38-39 above on their influential commentaries on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*), as well as in the long series of later philosophical "adjudications" (*muhākamāt*) of their disputes.

[750] Note Ibn Khaldun's problematic depiction of his own situation in the long earlier quotation (from Q I 201-202, at n. 5 above) concerning the many "simpletons and idiots" who devote themselves to Sufism, with its crucial emphasis on their widespread "activity and influence" for both good and bad.

primary underpinning of wider popular belief in the validity of Muhammad's mission and revelation in Ibn Khaldun's own society. This readily explains why Ibn Khaldun discusses the epistemological foundations of prophecy and Sufism in similar (and outwardly positive) terms, while at the same time he does everything possible to undermine and debunk—for his more perspicacious readers, at least—what were popularly taken to be the corresponding claims of the saints and certain living Sufi shaykhs to be the authoritative guides and interpreters of the Prophet's message. The same motivations even more clearly underlie his lengthy attempts, especially in the *Shifā' al-Sā'il*, to differentiate between what he sees as the positive ethical and political consequences of certain restricted forms of Sufi rhetoric— namely, those popularly inculcating strong inner habits of unconscious obedience and faithfulness to the general ethical precepts of the religious Law—and what he typically presents as the historically later and politically dangerous framework of individualistic practices and spiritual, other-worldly metaphysical interpretations which had become so widely associated with that supposedly "primitive," unquestioning moral state of belief ostensibly shared by all the Companions and earliest Muslims.

Ibn Khaldun's treatment of the *theoretical*, epistemological pretensions of contemporary Sufism is—as his unambiguously hostile *fatwā* would already suggest—far more radical and uncompromising. His entire survey of the intellectual scene of his time in Chapter VI is built on the fundamental distinction (at VI,9; Q II 385-386) between the *rational*, philosophic sciences, which are common to all civilizations where they are found, since they are based on human beings' intrinsic "ability to think" and on the corresponding regularities of the natural order; and the contrasting variety of *conventional*, traditional religious sciences (or more properly, "crafts"),[751] which are based on principles established by the effective political authority of a particular religious law. All of Chapter VI, when it is read carefully, can be understood as a detailed attempt to help thoughtful, critically-minded readers to distinguish the proper forms of both kinds of "science" from the wide range of misleading or degenerate pretenders and imitations which had grown up in both areas: within each category (i.e., of genuine philosophical sciences and of religiously-based "crafts"), Ibn Khaldun generally begins with the relatively sound and valid sciences, and then moves through increasingly distorted and dangerous pseudo-sciences— culminating in *both* cases with writings or practices he explicitly ties to contemporary Sufism.[752] The obvious conclusion—which he brings out explicitly in his summary at Q III 258 (ch. VI, 37)—is that Sufism in fact should not be included among either the religious crafts or speculative/philosophic sciences, since it is in fact a spurious, dangerously misleading attempted hybrid of both. However, by the end of this survey, Ibn Khaldun has made it quite clear to his more thoughtful readers that the very limited positive effects of contemporary Sufism have to do *only* with its indirect political and ethical impact on

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[751] The recurrent ambiguities in Ibn Khaldun's discussions throughout Chapter VI of the *Muqaddima* often turn on the convenient popular Arabic designation of all the Islamic religious crafts (and other hybrid imitations or pseudo-sciences, including, in Ibn Khaldūn's judgment, later Sufi speculative writings) as "sciences" (*'ulūm*).

[752] His intention and procedure here, although much more complex, often closely resembles that followed in Averroes' famous *Fasl al-Maqāl*—with the obvious change that the major object of criticism in this case is no longer the theology of *kalām* (although Ibn Khaldun is even more devastating in his analysis of its intellectual pretensions), but the works of contemporary Sufism.

popular religious beliefs, and have nothing at all to do with any philosophic or scientific validity of its more recent "theoretical" proponents.[753]

PHILOSOPHIC PROPHETOLOGY AND SPECULATIVE SUFISM:

The intentionally ambiguous language utilized throughout Ibn Khaldun's discussions of prophetic epistemology and its relations to Sufism (at the beginnings of both chapter I and chapter VI of the *Muqaddima*) had its classical Islamic expression throughout the works of Avicenna,[754] and had found its most elaborate earlier development—in the sense in which it is used here—in Tūsī's elaborate, highly defenses of Avicenna's rationalistic political outlook against Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī's theological criticisms of those same arguments.[755]   Since a detailed reading and analysis of these two key sections of the *Muqaddima* would require at least a short book, here we can only give a very brief summary of the basic features of Avicenna's philosophic interpretation of prophecy and the ways it is understood and applied by Ibn Khaldun, especially with regard to Sufism.

Avicenna's treatment of the specific qualities of prophecy (*khasā'is al-nubuwwa*), in each of his systematic works (including the *Ishārāt*), is divided into three areas, corresponding to three distinct powers or activities of the human rational soul. It is especially important to emphasize that for

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[753] Ibn Khaldun's refusal in ch. VI to give any more than the vaguest second- or third-hand account of the metaphysical teachings of Sufi writers like Ibn 'Arabi or Ibn Sab'īn, and his corresponding disingenuous attempts to associate those authors with such things as magic, astrological predictions, antinomian practices and the like, clearly flow directly and quite intentionally from his own philosophical judgment concerning the scientific invalidity and practical dangers of those texts. Neither position can be adequately explained either by simple ignorance of the authentic writings of the authors in question, or by the supposition that they were considered "suspect" or "heretical," given what we know of their preceding widespread diffusion (both directly and in more popular forms) for more than a century in North Africa and Mamluk Egypt. See also the recent broad historical study of that wider influence in the Arab world in this period—and the reactions against it—in the recent work of Alexander Knysh **cited at n. 30 above**. Indeed, as we have noted at the beginning of this paper, it is undoubtedly the wide-ranging popular influence of such Sufi writings that helps to explain the depth of Ibn Khaldun's opposition and concern throughout his *Muqaddima*.

[754] For a detailed study of the Avicennan ideas discussed here (and their philosophic roots in Avicenna's creative adaptation of Farabi's political philosophy), see our foundational article on "The Philosopher-Prophet in Avicenna's Political Philosophy," chapter 4 in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. C. Butterworth (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 142-188.   It should be stressed that although the rhetorical adaptation of Avicenna's theories to the Islamic context of Sufism is most fully developed in the final two chapters of the *Ishārāt* (as well as in his less well-known rationalizing commentary on famously "mystical" sections of the Plotinian *Theology of "Aristotle"*), the wider philosophic explanation and understanding of those phenomena (and their relation to prophecy), as summarized here, is in fact largely consistent throughout Avicenna's various systematic works composed at different periods of his life.

[755] **See notes 38-39 above.**

Avicenna—just as for Ibn Khaldun—these "prophetic" attributes and activities are in fact always explicitly grounded in an analysis of real, universal aspects of human souls as such.[756] In that perspective, the fundamental ambiguity of interpretation (scriptural or otherwise) has to do with showing how anyone can actually know and demonstrate that any particular epistemic claim or activity is in reality "prophetic" in a *true* sense. Most readers have naturally read—and still continue to read— these intentionally ambiguous sections of the *Muqaddima* simply as an apologetic philosophic justification or explanation of their own pre-existing beliefs in prophecy or in claims for the mystical inspiration and powers of particular holy individuals, without stopping to ask the more awkward—but practically and politically inescapable—question of what that explanation might actually imply about the possible reliable *verification* or true interpretation of any particular prophetic or mystical belief and truth-claim.

(1) The highest form of prophecy, for Avicenna, is the "intellectual" level which he defines in terms of his theory of the "sacred intellect" (*'aql qudsī*), a hypothetically extreme form of the process of "intuitional inspiration" (*hads*) by which the theoretical intellect in fact always arrives at the awareness of the missing middle terms (of the demonstrative syllogism) in its process of intellectual investigation. The critical implication of this theory, and ultimately its far-reaching motivating intention, is that it in fact positions the accomplished *philosopher*—i.e., that person who is actually consciously able to elaborate the chains of rational conception and demonstrative reasoning appropriate to any given field of knowledge—as *the only truly qualified interpreter* of any claims to a "prophecy" having any rationally knowable and demonstrable contents, whether those prophetic contents are presented in explicitly demonstrative form or (as is almost always the case) in the form of imaginary, symbolic representations.

Hence the archetypal representative—or at least the only truly qualified interpreter—of this specific cognitive, intellectual aspect or form of "prophecy" is none other than the accomplished philosopher, and more particularly Avicenna himself.[757] With regard to those ordinarily and popularly regarded as "prophets" (including Muhammad), the upshot of this theory is not to label as untrue the vast majority of their revelations which apparently do *not* qualify as rationally demonstrative knowledge, but rather to focus the thoughtful interpreter's attention on the alternative *practical* functions and aims of those popularly accepted historical "revelations" in providing precisely the sort of *politically and ethically necessary beliefs* and purely conventional or imagined premises whose understanding is the major focus of Ibn Khaldun's work. In fact Ibn Khaldun—like Averroes before him—in fact goes to some lengths to

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[756] Apart from the discussions of these prophetic attributes in the psychological sections (i.e., the *Kitāb al-Nafs*) of his longer works, Avicenna's supplementary treatment of prophetic questions and qualities in his sections on metaphysics has to do either with (a) establishing the existence and nature of the separate immaterial Intellects (as the ultimate source of the intellectual inspiration assumed in his epistemology), or (b) his brief discussion of the activity of the prophets—appearing at the very end of the metaphysical section in each of his longer systematic works—which presupposes the practical workings and effects of all three of the distinctive "prophetic" aspects of the human soul, just as is true in the two concluding (ostensibly "Sufi") chapters of the *Ishārāt*.

[757] As Avicenna boldly claims in his description of this theory in the *Dānish-Nāmih*, a claim that is explicitly corroborated by his disciple Bahmanyār in the corresponding section of his influential *K. al-Tahsīl* (see details in our study of Avicenna's political philosophy cited above**, n. 48).**

eliminate any possibility or suggestion of a deeper ontological grounding of those particular revealed principles which do *not* conform to the contents of rational demonstrative sciences, but which often do constitute guiding normative beliefs on the level of the collective popular religious imagination (*wahm*).

Already Avicenna, in the famous last chapters of the *Ishārāt* and in his commentary on sections of the *Theology of "Aristotle"* (a version of some of Plotinus' *Enneads*) favored by some Islamic mystics, had gone on to apply this epistemological schema to the claims of some Sufis to a direct experiential "witnessing" (*mushāhada*) of the Truth. Such inner witnessing, he concedes, might coincidentally happen to be true (*mushāhada haqqa*), but *only* when its contents in fact coincide with what can be rationally *demonstrated* by reasoning (*qiyās*)—although that rational criterion of truth, he stresses, certainly does not always coincide with the various complex emotions and sensations or imaginations popularly associated with such Sufi terms as *mushāhada* and the ecstatic visions and claims of mystics more generally. While Avicenna did not explicitly stress the negative and critical implications of his account—since he may well have wished to attract toward philosophy some of the support and interest of those initially drawn to speculative mysticism—, Ibn Khaldun is typically somewhat more forthcoming in underlining those negative epistemological consequences for his more thoughtful and attentive readers.[758]

Thus, in his version of Avicenna's understanding, the claims of the mystics and other famous religious figures to "unveiling" (*kashf*) of the future turn out to be, where valid, entirely explicable in terms of *rational* foresight and accurate analysis of normally understandable earthly conditions,[759] and he repeatedly ridicules any claims to inner knowledge of spiritual reality—beyond the philosophically intelligible regularities underlying all visible earthly phenomena—as clearly the product of vain

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[758] This subject is an excellent illustration of Ibn Khaldun's insistence, already noted above (from chapter VI of the *Muqaddima*), on the very different aspect which his book is intended to present for readers able to think several steps ahead. While readers of the sections on mystical epistemology might initially understand his remarks on *kashf* and *wijdān*—if taken in isolation—as a positive, almost apologetic support of Sufi epistemic claims, those same passages take on a radically different tone when viewed in light of the philosophic and ontological explanations provided elsewhere in his book. One scathingly ironical (although still outwardly ambiguous) illustration of this rhetorical approach is his pointed comparison (at Q I 192) of the claims of "Sufi" perceptions with the problematic visions of diviners, the sick, the dying and the insane.

[759] It is especially important to note the way in which all of Ibn Khaldun's illustrations of successful or meaningful "unveiled" perception of the "unseen" (*ghayb*) turn out to refer to future *this-worldly events*, and not to the symbolic and spiritual realities, on higher spiritual planes of being, which are the actual object of almost all Sufi writing and practice—and the very specific target of Ibn Khaldun's own epistemological criticisms. The particularly significant illustration of Ja'far al-Sādiq's mystical "unveiling" concerning the eventual failure of so many anti-Umayyad Alid rebellions has already been mentioned. The full irony of that illustration in the *Muqaddima* of course depends on its coming after a detailed historical analysis of the relative political and material strengths and weaknesses of the opposing parties.

imaginings.[760] Likewise, his frequent description of Sufi experiences as forms of *wijdān* ("ecstasy") must be understood in light of his application of the same term in describing the emotional effects of drinking wine (at Q II 300), and in portraying the *wijdānī* effects of military music (at Q II 42-43) as "a kind of drunkenness"—i.e., as combining what he clearly sees as typical of Sufism in general: a dangerously deluded combination of personal irresponsibility and mistaking one's shifting inner emotions and arbitrary imagination for divine knowledge.[761] As usual, what is fundamentally important in Ibn Khaldun's treatment of this question, within its wider polemic framework, is precisely everything that he does *not* deal with explicitly: i.e., the Sufis' actual preoccupation with levels and manifestations of a spiritual reality transcending the Aristotelian ontological schema he assumes; the elaborate philosophic schemas by which they sought to ground and explain those supra-sensory fields of spiritual reality; and the centrality of those spiritual questions—such as the immortality and post-mortem survival of each individual soul—for fundamental teachings of Islam in areas where the great Sufi teachers claimed to offer indispensable and authoritative guidance to the *trans*-historical intentions of the prophets. However, Ibn Khaldun's vehement insistence—in the *fatwā* with which we began—on the religious obligation to burn and utterly destroy some of the most intellectually sophisticated and influential Islamic treatments of these spiritual subjects should provide more than sufficient commentary on his systematic silence here in the *Muqaddima* concerning those fundamental Sufi epistemological and metaphysical claims.

(2) The second key aspect of Avicenna's treatment of prophecy—and of the corresponding associated claims and activities of Islamic mystics—has to do with his discussions of the activities and influences of the *imagination*. In this respect, much more than in first case of rational, philosophic knowledge, Avicenna explicitly emphasizes the universality of the phenomena in question. Thus, to the extent that our "imaginal" perceptions, whether in ordinary dreams or in prophetic visions, claim some intelligible knowledge content, he stresses the absolute necessity of a demonstrably reasoned interpretation (whether we call that *ta'wīl* for prophecy or *ta'bīr* for dreams and visions) grounded in what can be independently known by the rational sciences and their logical methods. However, once again what Avicenna does not so openly stress is the way this essential philosophic qualification or "description" of inspiration and revelation is not in fact a sound justification of popular beliefs, but rather an extraordinarily severe *limitation* of all prophetic claims. For in reality it does quite intentionally tend to

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[760] Two typical (and equally ironic) illustrations of this not too subtle debunking of mystical claims are Ibn Khaldun's ridicule (at Q I 18) of the "crazy talk" of those who claim to have had a mystical unveiling of the city of 'Ād "beyond sensual perception," or of "historical reports" (at Q I 57-60) concerning the existence of jinn, monsters, and the like. As usual, Ibn Khaldun's failure to extend these ironic and critical remarks explicitly to such fundamental religious and Qur'anic topics as the existence and descriptions of Heaven and Hell (and to the mystics' claims of perceptions relevant to their proper understanding) would inevitably be interpreted in ways mirroring each reader's own level (or lack) of intellectual understanding.

[761] Readers of traditional Sufi poetry, in Arabic or other Islamic languages, could also not help but be struck by Ibn Khaldun's pointedly ironic *reversal* here of the central symbolic, metaphorical/spiritual role of wine-imagery (based on obvious Qur'an and hadith antecedents) throughout those traditions of mystical poetry.

eliminate the pursuit of all "imaginary", symbolic and aesthetic means—clearly including most of the arts, as well as religion—as a viable and reliable way to true knowledge and to any sound authority based on claims to an objective knowledge of reality.

Practically speaking, what is far more important already in Avicenna's discussion of the religious dimensions of imagination—for example, in his many short epistles interpreting and justifying prayer and other basic religious practices—is his suggestion of its pervasive and far-reaching *ethical and political effects*, and especially of each prophet's remarkably lasting influence on the collective imagination of others: i.e., the ongoing mass of unthinking believers in the revelations of a particular religious lawgiver. This lasting political effect, he repeatedly suggests, is the *true*, historically tangible and self-evident "miracle" of each prophecy. It should not be necessary to underline the manifold ways in which virtually all the *Muqaddima* (and Ibn Khaldun's *History* more generally) can be conceived as an extended commentary on Avicenna's allusive suggestions concerning these more practical socio-political and ethical prophetic functions of imagination. What is perhaps most striking in this regard is his systematic avoidance, in this domain at least, of any of the publicly contending distinguishing criteria between the "revelations" of prophets and saints[762] (or between either group and true or false pretenders, social reformers, magicians and so forth), apart from the following two *politically* decisive points: (a) their ability to assure and maintain the lasting belief of their followers; and (b) their ability to direct and mobilize effectively the actions of the masses following from those beliefs.

(3) As for the third property of prophecy discussed by Avicenna, that of its "physical" (or "natural": *tabī'ī*) effects and influences in this world, that philosopher and his successors (especially Tūsī) had already stressed that (a) such activities are grounded in the natural order and corresponding powers of the soul, and (b) that those same powers (even in their more extraordinary forms) are widely shared by a multitude of human beings with *no* religious or mystical pretensions (e.g., magicians, sorcerers and diviners), who can and do use them for all sorts of good and bad ends. Once again, Ibn Khaldun likewise focuses in detail on the *this*-worldly effects and uses of those natural powers, while effectively and

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[762] The key passage here is at the very beginning of the *Muqaddima* (Q I 165-173), where he passes in review the various theories (including the philosophic ones, at I 170-172) about the "signs" effectively distinguishing true from false prophets—one of the major topics in the influential philosophical disputes between Tūsī and Rāzī (above all in Tūsī's seminal commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*). Not surprisingly, the treatment of Muhammad and the early caliphs throughout the rest of the *Muqaddima* elaborates only the essentially *political* criteria of the Avicennan philosophers.

Once again, Ibn Khaldun's single-minded focus on these practical political and social criteria is certainly not unrelated to his silence concerning—and vehemently attempted suppression of—some of the most influential Islamic religious books claiming to provide some insight into a more comprehensive spiritual hierarchy of values and intentions, or to his repeated criticisms of the contending prototypical representatives within his own community—key spiritual figures such as al-Hallāj, 'Ali or al-Husayn—of values calling into question the primacy of those strictly political criteria. As with Avicenna, it is no accident that the one potential criterion of value explicitly mentioned and left intact is that provided by the pursuit of those rational philosophical sciences which Ibn Khaldun repeatedly mentions as providing human beings' ultimate perfection.

systematically eliminating any possible "supra-natural" explanations or uses which might otherwise be taken to support the wider claims of contemporary Sufis and related popular devotional practices. Perhaps even more significant is his intentional attempt to portray the activities and claims of the most influential and prestigious Islamic mystics of his own era (such as Ibn 'Arabi) as in fact falling primarily into this very suspect territory of pseudo-astrologers, magicians and charlatans.[763]

A further indication that these core relations between Avicenna's and Ibn Khaldun's accounts of prophecy and mysticism—and Ibn Khaldun's detailed development of the thoroughly rationalistic implications of Avicenna's thought in this area—are not purely accidental is provided by Ibn Khaldun's careful silence concerning three more typically Neoplatonic features of Avicenna's thought which al-Ghazālī and later Sufi thinkers had repeatedly used in order to construct a pseudo-philosophic justification for the superiority of Sufism as a path to the spiritual Truth. (Not coincidentally, at least two of those novel theories are important features of Ibn 'Arabi's and other later Sufi adaptations of Avicennan philosophic themes, and all three were vehemently and repeatedly criticized by Averroes throughout his commentaries on Aristotle.)[764] The first of these was Avicenna's assertion of his own

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[763] As discussed above, Ibn Khaldun's repeated attempts to portray contemporary Sufism in this pejorative light cannot be explained by any ignorance (or popular suspicion) of the more intellectual and spiritual aspects of Sufism discussed in precisely the sort of works he wished to burn. Nor can they be explained by a pious religious desire for "reform" and "purification" of popular religious practices such as that which motivated Ibn Taymiyya, even when (as in the *Shifā' al-Sā'il*) Ibn Khaldun uses a superficially similar rhetoric.

The corresponding gross misrepresentation throughout the *Muqaddima* of the works of Ibn 'Arabi, which had come to provide the leading ideological justification (in Islamic terms) of virtually all forms of Sufism by Ibn Khaldun's time, is one of the more striking illustrations of the latter's rhetorical techniques. See, for example, the attribution to Ibn 'Arabi at Q II 196 of two obviously apocryphal prediction works (*malāhim*) and Ibn 'Arabi's implicit association, in the same context (II 197-201) with clearly fraudulent predictions by a later scandalously "fallen," swindling and antinomian Qalandar dervish (among the suspect "hippies" of Ibn Khaldun's day). Even more important, given the political centrality and notoriety of the claims flowing from Ibn 'Arabi's assertion of his own status as "seal of the Muhammadan saints"—and his corresponding theories and claims concerning the socio-religious roles of Sufi saints and masters more generally—is Ibn Khaldun's facetious presentation of that doctrine of the spiritual hierarchy and his citation of a supposed "forecast" of the Mahdi's advent, at Q II 165-167.

[764] These were undoubtedly the central points of difference involving Aristotelian "physics" (the *tabī'iyyāt*) between Avicenna, on the one hand, and Aristotle and Averroes on the other, alluded to in the key passage (partially translated in n. 39 above) in which Ibn Khaldun questions Avicenna's (political and rhetorical?) motivations for his apparent departures from Aristotle's positions and pointedly insists on the greater philosophic reliability of Averroes and Aristotle. In fact all three of these fundamental metaphysical differences are taken up in the "physical" books of Avicenna, and all three are pointedly *left out* in Ibn Khaldun's own accounts of that discipline and its results.

For the ways in which these three innovative aspects of Avicenna's philosophy were elaborated by later Islamic thinkers in order to provide a much more Neoplatonic and spiritualist account of being and a

metaphysics or divine science as a distinct field of knowledge *independent* of the conclusions of physics, and also necessary as a preliminary foundation to assure the truth of the other philosophic sciences. In contrast to this novel assertion of a foundational role of this "divine science"—which could easily be taken to justify claims for the extra-philosophical forms of metaphysical knowledge and investigation favored by many Sufis—Ibn Khaldun's accounts of the rational sciences always follow Averroes in stressing the key foundational role of physics (i.e., all the sciences of the natural world) and the *autonomy* of its investigation of all the natural orders of being.

Even more conspicuous by its absence in Ibn Khaldun's account is any reference to Avicenna's apparent support of the immortality and substantiality of each individual soul *per se* (i.e., quite apart from its purely intellectual perfection and gradual acquisition of the secondary intelligibles)—a theory which again would tend to provide a foundation in demonstrative philosophical "knowledge" for central religious and Sufi conceptions which Ibn Khaldun clearly prefers to deal with only in their more visible function simply as ethically and politically important popular *beliefs*. Closely related to this is Ibn Khaldun's emphatic insistence in the *Muqaddima*, at each ontological discussion of the "angels" whose existence is revealed by physical science, that these are *only* the pure intellects moving the heavenly spheres. This is a pointed and intentional denial of the controversial Avicennan theory of the existence of a separate order of corporeal (or "imaginal") angels associated with the bodies of each planet or sphere—a theory (again assumed by Ibn ʿArabi and his interpreters) which became frequently used in later Islamic thought to explain separate, higher realms of imaginal being and of spiritual influence and revelation *distinct* from ordinary human acts of intellection and their expression in practical intelligence.

THE CONSTRUCTIVE AIMS OF IBN KHALDUN'S CRITICISMS:

Hopefully the preceding discussion has brought out some of the ways in which *both* the intellectual and the more practical facets of Ibn Khaldun's criticisms of Sufism (as well as other Islamic religious sciences, such as *kalām*) have their deeper roots in his own understanding of Islamic philosophy. From that comprehensive perspective, the whole purpose of the *Muqaddima*, as of his new science of culture more generally, can only be fully understood in the larger context of the hierarchy of the philosophic sciences (both practical and theoretical) and the corresponding awareness of their practical and historical interaction with the new religious "crafts" and public beliefs in the Islamic context. We can envision that wider process more clearly by looking at (a) the aims and consequences Ibn Khaldun could expect his critique to have on various classes of readers; and (b) the ways that his far-reaching criticisms of contemporary Sufi claims, particularly to intellectual and religious authority, also seem to have been grounded and reflected in his own life and activity.

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metaphysical foundation for wider religious and Sufi beliefs, see the discussions and detailed illustrations in J. Michot's *La Destinée de l'Homme selon Avicenne: Le Retour à Dieu (Maʿād) et l'Imagination*, (Louvain, 1986). While this sort of thoroughly mystical interpretation of Avicenna's ideas cannot be easily reconciled with what we know of Avicenna's own life, works, disciples and philosophic antecedents—as argued in detail in our detailed study of his political philosophy cited **above (n. 48)—,** it does represent a highly influential current of later Eastern Islamic thought, and indeed corresponds precisely to the sort of Neoplatonic "Avicennism" (subsequently dominant in the Latin West, and historically connected with the influential works of Ghazālī) which was already being vigorously criticized by Ibn Tufayl and Averroes long before the time of Ibn Khaldun.

To begin with, for readers without the necessary rare intellectual qualifications and philosophic orientation described above, neither the *Muqaddima* nor the *Shifā' al-Sā'il* would be likely to lead to any radical change in their beliefs, although it might point them toward a renewed devotion and attention to their own practice of their particular form of Islam, and perhaps even to a renewed awareness of the this-worldly consequences of that practice. And if such readers happened to be among the group of jurists already deeply suspicious of Sufi claims and writings, they would find in Ibn Khaldun's works—including his unambiguous *fatwā* cited at the beginning of this exposition—ample further justification for their hostile opinions.[765] However, such limited aims would scarcely justify or explain the extraordinarily complex intellectual and rhetorical effort and intention so evident throughout his manifold criticisms of Sufism in this work. As such, they serve to remind us of the extreme seriousness with which Ibn Khaldun himself conceived of the intellectual dimensions of his work, and of the irreducible differences between his distinctively philosophical outlook and the modern Islamic reformist movements with which it has often been rather misleadingly compared.

 For more qualified readers, Ibn Khaldun's critique of Sufism could be expected to lead first of all to an intellectual clarification of the separate, legitimate and harmonious aims and domains of philosophy and religion—and to a corresponding re-situating of the various claims and activities associated with Sufism (along with other religious "pseudo-sciences" and dangerous hybrids of religion and philosophy), in both the theoretical and practical domains. Intellectually, that would certainly mean focusing their attention, in the most efficient possible manner, on those particular philosophic activities and sciences which Ibn Khaldun consistently describes as leading to human beings' ultimate perfection—and eventually on discovering and implementing the appropriate means for assuring the preservation and continuation of those essential philosophical sciences within the existing Islamic polities.

The further practical consequences of that philosophic awareness (as with Ibn Khaldun's own very practical *fatwā* cited above) would of course depend greatly on each reader's own degree of authority and ability to influence others.[766] We may mention at least three such further philosophic aims to which Ibn Khaldun himself devotes considerable effort and intention in the *Muqaddima*:

(1) The first such intended consequence is evident in his repeated efforts at the elimination of all competitors (including above all speculative or theoretical Sufism) for the philosophic sciences, in relation to the rare elite properly qualified to pursue such scientific disciplines. This aim is evident both in his clarification of the true principles and relations of each of the various pseudo-sciences (both religious and philosophic), and in his repeated allusions to their potentially dangerous, delusive effects on the mass of "simpletons and idiots" among the wider population. Thus in his own late autobiography, as throughout the *Muqaddima* itself, he continually points to the supposed results of such deluded pursuits in helping to eliminate serious religious and scientific scholarship in Maghrebi

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[765] One could of course add to these more immediate effects the eventual longer-term, indirect consequences of the creative actions of the rarer individuals in the second group (of qualified potential philosophers) discussed in the next paragraph.

[766] This can be seen, for example, in Ibn Khaldun's own legal and other activities mentioned below, or in the contrasting public writings and practical political activities of such philosophers as Tūsī, Averroes, or Avicenna (or the teaching efforts of Ibn Khaldun's own philosophic master al-Ābilī, cited above).

society, while alluding more delicately to their pernicious social and intellectual effects in Egypt and the Islamic East where, as we pointed out at the beginning, these Sufi understandings of Islam and human perfection were of course more thoroughly established.

(2) A second further intended consequence would be the appropriate rational ordering of education, time, manpower and material resources, not simply in the qualified reader's own life, but also in the surrounding wider society, in order to encourage others to reach human beings' ultimate (purely intellectual) perfection, and to enable others to follow the properly founded guidance of those true philosophers.[767] This process—at least on the level of the properly qualified and trained individual and that person's sphere of activity—need not be perceived as purely utopian. Indeed the concluding sections of chapter VI of the *Muqaddima* (immediately before Ibn Khaldun's final long treatment of Arabic poetry) contain essential discussions of the hierarchy and order of the sciences, and of the best pedagogical methods and assumptions needed to begin to fulfill more successfully the highest human ends.

(3) Finally, in order to assure the necessary practical preconditions for pursuing what Ibn Khaldun understands to be the highest human ends, the removal of the widely accepted "illusions" which he sees as typifying contemporary Sufism (and its ontological claims and presuppositions) would clear the way for a more flexible and effective interpretation and application of the accepted religious norms in light of what he presents as their *true* socio-political ends, and with a fuller practical appreciation of their actual limiting conditions and possibilities. Ibn Khaldun's own repeated emphasis on the practical political importance of effective, non-reflective internalized popular allegiance to "the law" is clearly not viewed here simply as some kind of religious or ethical end in itself, but as one of a number of equally necessary socio-political conditions for intellectual reform and renewal, including eventually more appropriate and realistic public interpretations of the religious laws themselves.[768]

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[767] It is important to note the full significance of Ibn Khaldun's brief reference (Q II 126-128) to the central philosophic theme (for both Averroes and Farabi) of the ideal "virtuous city" (*al-madīnat al-fādila*) and the timeless scale of real and potential human finalities it suggests—a far-reaching significance (for readers acquainted with Farabi's works and their profound impact on Islamic philosophy) that is not adequately reflected by the use of the term "utopian" in the existing English translation. See the related discussion of Farabi's political insights in the first chapter of our recent *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation*, pp. 14-40.

[768] Hence, as already noted, his criticisms of Sufism turn out to have an entirely different underlying motivation than in the case, for example, of a more public religious "reformer" like Ibn Taymiyya, who was clearly motivated by the ostensible religious "purity" and correctness of his ideal, rather than its likely worldly consequences. Ibn Khaldun's depiction of religious laws, Islamic or otherwise (and both in the *Muqaddima* and the *Shifā' al-Sā'il*), is not at all "literalist" and frozen, but instead focuses on properly understanding the process of their historical evolution and development in light of changing public political and social "benefits" (*masālih*). There is no sign with Ibn Khaldun (except in the occasional rhetorical appeal to certain popular beliefs) of any illusion of a "purification" or "return" to an ideal source as a magical formula for all circumstances, and everything in his hundreds of pages of

An essential test of our interpretation of the relations of religion and philosophy in Ibn Khaldun's written critique of Sufism—just as in the related cases of Avicenna or Tūsī—is its congruity with what we know of the rest of his life and activity. And in fact, not only is there no sign of Sufi practice, study or support in Ibn Khaldun's known career as a politician, court official, teacher and Maliki judge (exemplified most notably in the outspokenly anti-Sufi *fatwā* with which we began), but the same sort of pointed, thinly veiled critique even marks the very beginning of his own autobiography, where the political failures and retreat of his own father and grandfather, after centuries of familial prestige and public renown, is suggestively traced to the influence of a leading Sufi preacher of Tunis.[769]

Whatever the relevance of the personal connection he seems to make in that case, there can be little doubt that at least some of the recurrent passion in his denunciations of contemporary Sufism flows from his perception of an inner connection between its growing intellectual and socio-political influences in Islamic culture and the recent undeniable political and material decline of that culture (at least in the Maghrib and Andalusia), which is such a central theme in his new study of history. Many of his motivating concerns clearly have their own immediate, poignant roots in his own experience and actively involved political situation. This certainly includes such recurrent items as his criticism of various mahdist and messianic rebellions as obstacles to real lasting political reforms; his critique of the squandering of scarce societal resources on the "simpletons" populating the Sufi *zāwiyas* and *khānegahs* often lavishly patronized by the Mamluks and other Muslim rulers of his time; and his ironic account of the more profound misdirection of indispensable human and intellectual capacities into futile activities and pointless speculations, which is elaborated with such telling detail throughout his survey of the state of the contemporary Muslim sciences and education. A significant sign that Ibn Khaldun proudly practiced what he preached, even in the later Egyptian phase of his career, is the incident recounted near the end of his autobiography in which he exposed the misalliance between those he considered fraudulent Maghrebi muftis and "those of their race retired in zawiyas" for "so-called reforms," and eventually succeeded in getting such people "to leave their zawiyas and dry up their source of profits...."[770]

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historical and sociological analysis would argue against the dangers and pitfalls of such an illusion—at least when held by those with real political authority and responsibility.

[769] *Al-Ta'rīf*, page 14; the full weight of this turning "from the path of the military prowess and service (of the rulers) to the path of (religious) learning and spiritual retreat" comes from its following many pages (most of pp. 1-14) detailing centuries of martial and political exploits by Ibn Khaldun's earlier Arab ancestors—a forceful recapitulation, through his own family history, of the key themes of historical "decline" pervading the *Muqaddima* and his wider *History*. See also the excellent discussion of Ibn Khaldun's autobiography, focusing on its relation to the themes of this study, in the authoritative work of M. Mahdi cited above, n. 34. One might add that the implicit challenge of Ibn Khaldun's pointed contrasts here, as throughout the *Muqaddima* itself, between difficult contemporary conditions and past Arab glories and achievements suggests interesting rhetorical parallels with the role of recollections of earlier Roman glory in Machiavelli's writings.)

[770] *Al-Ta'rīf*. The same later sections of his autobiography also allude to some of the hostility, whether popular or learned, that such reforming actions and intentions seem to have aroused, and which may

The distinctive rhetorical methods and devices we have illustrated in this study with regard to Ibn Khaldun's criticisms of contemporary Sufism are by no means limited to that complex subject. Once the careful reader has learned to recognize the underlying motives and practical and intellectual concerns which guide his distinctive rhetoric, it soon becomes evident that those features apply equally to many other related areas of potential ethical, intellectual and religious concern. And just as in the case of Sufism, each reader's ability to discern this extraordinary literary craft almost always depends on having prior knowledge and awareness of the conventional wisdom and related competing conceptions of knowledge and proper practice that were once taken for granted by the learned Arabic readership of Ibn Khaldun's own time. In this regard, it may be helpful to conclude by mentioning specifically some further telling illustrations of four of the most important rhetorical devices which are to be found throughout the *Muqaddima*, devices whose prominence has become evident over the years in our seminars devoted to this work.

- **Telling Silence**: One of the most powerful—but also potentially most hidden—rhetorical methods in Ibn Khaldun's arsenal, which we have seen him use constantly in regard to contemporary Sufi writers, is his ability to pass over in complete silence key historical events, issues, actors, writings, and the like which were surely known to his educated readers, and which they would normally *expect* to be mentioned in a particular context. Among the most striking illustrations of that revealing approach is his apparent silence[771] regarding the major historical role of the Kharijite 'Ibāḍīs (of the kingdom of Tahert and elsewhere) and their Berber followers in the earliest process of "islamicisation" of the indigenous, *non*-Arab populations of North Africa. It is doubtful that this particular omission can simply be explained either by theological prejudices, since one key feature of the *Muqaddima* is Ibn Khaldun's wide-ranging fascination with the historical success of the Fatimids (despite the obvious sensitivity of Shiite theology and proclivities among his own primary audiences); or by the accidents of surviving historical documentation, since the existence of the North African 'Ibadis and their rule was well known and is at least mentioned by a considerable range of earlier Arabic historical sources. On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun's learned readers could be assumed to be well aware of the recurrently destructive political and historical consequences of what the Sunni (and also Shiite) learned scholars normally viewed as the relatively anarchic, sectarian, and troublingly democratic theological approaches and presuppositions of the full range of popular early Kharijite movements—tendencies which, like some of the later Sufis discussed in this paper, so radically challenged those later scholars' most basic shared norms of religious knowledge, authority and right order.

- **Moral "Shocks"**: As we have pointed out in a number of cases above, one of Ibn Khaldun's most obvious rhetorical methods—and probably the one which has particularly led a few modern Muslim interpreters to note remarkable resemblances to Machiavelli—is his pointedly "realistic" (in the

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help account for the relative brevity of Ibn Khaldun's appointments as a Maliki judge, despite his friendship with powerful Mamluk figures.

[771] Always subject to new manuscript discoveries, of course. For this illustration, we are grateful to our student Mr. Taliesin Davies, who carefully investigated the historical sources on the Ibadis of Tahert in preparing his recent M.A. thesis on that subject.

sense of *Realpolitik*) stress, in many different historical contexts, on the powerful contrast between what have been popularly judged to be the ethically or religiously right and just attitudes and behavior, on the one hand, and notorious cases of those more pragmatically a-moral attitudes and behavior which in fact proved to be politically effective and successful. That widespread popular religious attitude of unrealistic moral idealism—or at least, a morally *critical* standpoint toward the questionable actions and public policies of many politically successful earlier Muslim rulers and their actions—which he so explicitly and mordantly criticizes, is by no means limited to the ethical teachings associated with later Sufi writers.

In fact, students of a great many classical Islamic historians—including central figures like al-Tabarī, who were certainly familiar to most of Ibn Khaldun's learned audience—are of course quite familiar with the major, self-consciously ethical and religious role of the historical events they were discussing, especially the constantly contested, religiously paradigmatic events and actors of the first two centuries of the Islamic era. The same ongoing tensions between political realism and idealism were also powerfully highlighted in the appropriate sections of the canonical hadith selections (e.g., in the sections on the *fitan*, or civil wars) and—likewise often appealing to relevant hadith, among Sunni commentators—in the most influential works of Qur'an interpretation (*tafsīr*), for those verses where fundamental issues of political authority and responsibility are raised.[772] Thus *only* readers familiar with the consistently moral and often openly moralizing perspective largely shared by those classical Islamic texts and traditions can really begin to recognize Ibn Khaldun's thoroughgoing, consistently thought-provoking—indeed often openly provocative—undermining of what he so clearly views as their misleading confusion of unrealistic ethical ideals and practical political insights and imperatives. This intentionally highlighted contrast is most obvious in his treatment of the political and military successes and actual methods of the Umayyads and their agents (al-Hajjāj, in particular), whose unconcealed attempts to subordinate religion as an overt tool of politics—very much in line with their Byzantine and Sassanid predecessors, as with the philosopher-king ideal of Ibn Khaldun's own Islamic philosophic tradition—were rarely presented in a positive light by any of the later traditions of Islamic religious learning.

- **Ironic "mimicking" of traditionalist arguments**: If we have highlighted in this essay the various ways Ibn Khaldun often subtly hints at his thoughtful *disagreements* with popularly received opinions, norms and conventions, this should certainly not be taken to imply that even his most literal statements of ostensible, explicit agreement with popular beliefs and reasoning are meant to imply any deeper accord with the motives and assumptions that would ordinarily be taken as implicit in those particular commonplace formulae and expressions. A very typical example of this in fact highly problematic sort of "agreement" can be seen in his famous anti-Sufi *fatwā* quoted above, with its initial praises of the "path of the Sunna, of the *salaf*, according to the Book and the Sunna," and so on, and its contrasting condemnation of all heretical "innovations". Naïve modern readers, without any of the necessary background for understanding Ibn Khaldun's language and guiding philosophic intentions and assumptions, could certainly be forgiven for reading such a passage as only another example of the familiar traditionalist (*salafī*) rhetoric of an Ibn Taymiyya and his generations of imitators. Whereas of

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[772] Again, particular thanks are due here to the participants in our graduate seminars exploring Islamic political thought in the classical traditions of *ta'rīkh*, hadith and *tafsīr*.

course, as we have seen, neither tradition nor innovation have anything at all to do with the actual grounds of Ibn Khaldun's argument and its intended practical effects in this case.

- **Conscious Misrepresentations**: Finally, the various examples we have given here of repeated massive misrepresentations of key Sufi writers and their doctrines and teachings (so that Ibn 'Arabi, to take only the most egregious example, comes across almost exclusively in the *Muqaddima* as a would-be magician and soothsayer) should certainly not appear surprising to scholarly students of the rhetorical techniques and assumptions of classical Islamic intellectual traditions.[773]   After all, perhaps nothing about this work could be more extreme and intentionally problematic than the fact that this entire "new science" of culture—which is in so many ways the most elaborate and far-reachingly creative development of the Farabian tradition of Islamic political philosophy, in which virtually every single topic is meant to be understood properly *only* within that philosophical framework—nonetheless outwardly speaks directly of that foundational philosophical tradition within a section explicitly entitled "the refutation of the philosophers"!

What this long catalogue of such recurrent intentional misrepresentations should suggest, at the very least, is that it we should never imagine that Ibn Khaldun—at least in his *Muqaddima*—is simply speaking as a disinterested, objective historian and mere describer (or "encylopedist")[774] of the Islamic intellectual, artistic, cultural and religious traditions which he discusses. Machiavelli did not write his *Discourses* on Livy for scholars of Latin philology.

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[773] One need only recall the equally extreme, problematic, and often intentionally self-contradictory rhetoric of so many of al-Ghazālī's classical polemics—under Seljuk, anti-Fatimid patronage—against the philosophers and Shiite esotericists, for example.

[774] Unless those modern writers who have spoken of the *Muqaddima* as an "encyclopedia" are rather disingenuously thinking of the thoroughly polemic and highly political project of Diderot and his pro-enlightenment associates. That specific analogy is indeed relevant and illuminating.

Part Four

Ibn 'Arabi Today: Prospects and Challenges

Ibn ʿArabī in the "Far West": Spiritual Influences and the Science of Spirituality

The conjunction of the particular subject and locale of the conference for which this article was originally prepared[775] marked an especially fitting opportunity to dedicate it to the memory of Prof. Toshihiko Izutsu, whose life and works so beautifully illustrate all the complex processes of influence and transmission discussed below. While his *Sufism and Taoism* remains a classic, pioneering contribution to that vast project of comparative philosophy to which he devoted much of his later life, those who had the good fortune to have been able to study and work with him in person are poignantly aware of how much deeper and more wide-ranging was the knowledge and understanding that he was so uniquely able to communicate in every area of spirituality and metaphysics to which he turned his attention. That vivid contrast between this scholar's writings (as impressive as they are) and the vastly wider dimensions of learning and understanding so powerfully conveyed through his teaching and personal presence is a dramatic illustration of those manifold, recurrent deeper dimensions of spiritual 'influence' that are the subject of this essay. As much as any other scholar of his generation, Prof. Izutsu was certainly a true *majma' al-bahrayn*, a unique 'meeting-place of the two Seas' of the wisdom of East and West, as well as a uniquely living embodiment of that science of spirituality which is the concluding topic of this article.

Ibn ʿArabī in the 'Far West': Visible and Invisible Influences:

Let us start with an anecdote that illustrates many of the key points discussed in more detail below. A little more than a decade ago, several leading scholars of Ibn ʿArabī and Sufism were invited—along with many other leading authorities in Christian and Jewish mysticism—to participate in an international conference in New York on the medieval Spanish Jewish thinker and reformer Nachmanides; we had been asked to provide a wider philosophic perspective on parallels to Nachmanides' thought in the cognate Christian and Muslim traditions of medieval Spain, including those which are so profusely illustrated in Ibn ʿArabī's writings. At some point in those proceedings, after the name of Ibn ʿArabī and his ideas had been repeatedly evoked throughout the earlier discussions and debates, by scholarly specialists from every religious tradition, a famous professor of Christian mysticism sitting at our table leaned over and remarked: '*If Ibn ʿArabī didn't exist, someone would have had to invent him!*' (I.e., because his perspectives provided a common language that made the entire dialogue possible.) Now I have never forgotten that moment for two reasons, both of which are at the heart of all the following observations. First of all, that eminent scholar was simply pointing out publicly something that is historically quite accurate, even if the underlying actors and actual historical processes are not nearly so widely recognised: the academic field of the 'study of religions' as it is today practised and taught in the West (and more particularly in North America) owes a large part of its basic, most often implicit, premises and conceptual framework—above all where the spiritual dimensions of religious life and phenomenology are concerned—to writers and teachers whose thought was profoundly influenced by the leading ideas of Ibn ʿArabī (and therefore ultimately, one might add, by the conception of Religion [*Dīn*] developed throughout the Qur'an). But the second reason that professor's remark was so striking is that in reality the extent of Ibn ʿArabī's far-reaching influence in the West has remained for the most

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[775] Revised version of paper originally presented at conference on '*Ibn ʿArabī and the Islamic World: Spread and Assimilation*': University of Kyoto, Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, January 19-23, 2001.

part 'invisible' and unknown to all but a handful of scholarly specialists. Indeed, at the time that prescient remark was made, there was still no extended translation in English of any longer, representative sections of Ibn 'Arabī's magnum opus, the '*Meccan Illuminations*'; so the closest that particular professor (and most of his learned colleagues in that audience) were likely to have ever approached the actual words of Ibn 'Arabī was at best quite indirectly through the profound, but very partial, earlier studies by Professor Izutsu or Henry Corbin.

So my primary reason for discussing Ibn 'Arabī's recent influences in Europe and North America in the particular context of historical 'spread and assimilation' that was the focus of the 2001 Kyoto conference was that by pointing out the remarkable depth, scope and varied nature of those ongoing 'influences' of Ibn 'Arabī which we can all directly observe in our own short lifetimes—virtually none of which would even be discernible by the traditional philological methods of studying the historical spread of an author's books and direct citations and discussion of their contents—I may thereby suggest something of the actual, almost unimaginable richness of the unseen and still largely unexplored paths and fields of influence of Ibn 'Arabī's writings throughout the Islamic world in the past, a richness which can only be very remotely suggested when one focuses (as intellectual historians naturally do) on a handful of such visible, relatively well-studied figures as the famous commentators of the *Fusūs*, the poets Jāmī and H. Fansūrī, the philosophers Mulla Sadra and Shah Waliullah, or even Ayatollah Khomeini in our own time.

But before I begin mentioning specific figures and periods and the manifold paths of influence of Ibn Arabi in the 'West', it is surely helpful to stand back and notice one initial and extraordinary paradox: how can we even begin to speak of such influences, on an initially entirely 'non-Islamic' culture, by a thinker whose thoughts are expressed almost exclusively—indeed far more than any number of other Islamic philosophers, poets, artists and musicians—in terms and symbols expressly drawn from the Qur'an and the hadith, or from their even more unfamiliar elaborations in all the later Islamic religious sciences? Not surprisingly, much of the historical influence of Ibn 'Arabī throughout Islamic history can be explained precisely by that fundamental rootedness of his thought in every detail of the Qur'an and the Prophet's teachings: for as a result, Ibn 'Arabī has provided (and still does today) an indispensable and powerfully effective theologico-political instrument for defending and supporting creative spiritual movements of all sorts in predominantly Islamic cultural and political settings.[776] But one would normally expect that dense scriptural and symbolic allusiveness to form an almost impenetrable barrier to serious comprehension of his ideas by those from other civilisational and religious backgrounds. And indeed this paradox helps highlight and partially explains the mysterious—but certainly indispensable—

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[776] In addition to the various new case-studies included in this issue, see the following articles on different equally important facets of this long historical process: **'Ibn Arabī and His Interpreters', *JAOS* 106 (1986), pp. 539-551, and 107 (1987), pp. 733-756; 'Ibn 'Arabī's "Esotericism": The Problem of Spiritual Authority', in *Studia Islamica*, LXXI (1990), pp. 37-64;** 'Situating Islamic "Mysticism": Between Written Traditions and Popular Spirituality', in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics and Typologies*, ed. R. Herrera (New York, 1993), pp. 293-334; and '***Except His Face...: The Political and Aesthetic Dimensions of Ibn 'Arabi's Legacy', in *JMIAS*, XXIII (1998), pp. 1-13.*** These and a number of related monographs (some previously unpublished) and reviews are collected in a single extensive web-based volume, ***Ibn 'Arabi and His Interpreters: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Perspectives,* now freely available in downloadable .pdf format at *www.ibnarabisociety.org/ibnarabi.***

alchemical 'translation' of the Shaykh's intentions into more understandable Western terms and diverse creative expressions, in various domains of life, which typifies each of the much more recent seminal figures we shall briefly mention below.

At the same time, the extraordinary success of that process of 'translation', in so many different recent non-Islamic settings, surely has something to do as well with the essential intentions underlying and orienting all of Ibn 'Arabī's work. To begin with, one can say that the aim of all of Ibn 'Arabī's writings (or at least all those I have personally encountered) can be readily summarised as the unfolding development of spiritual intelligence: it is the joining of these two terms—of spirit *and* intellect—that is so unique in his work (whether considered within or beyond his original Islamic context); and it is their essential connection that basically explains both the perennial appeal of his writing for some, and its perennially troubling and subversive effects for others.[777] Islam, like other religions and civilisations, has produced uncounted exponents of practical spirituality, as well as a considerable number of articulate philosophic and scientific defenders of the universal dimensions of human intelligence. However, intellectually cogent proponents of the universality and intelligibility of spiritual life are far rarer; and few, if any, of those can match the self-consciously universal phenomenological scope of Ibn 'Arabī's writings. In other words, each of Ibn 'Arabī's writings is carefully designed to move his properly prepared readers from the experiential 'phenomena' of their spiritual life to an unfolding perception of the universal laws and regularities (the 'Reality', *al-Haqq* or *haqīqa*) underlying those phenomena.[778]

Once that necessarily personal and individual connection (between what the particular symbolic forms of what he calls the revealed divine 'paths' and their common ultimate Ground) has been made, the properly qualified reader of Ibn 'Arabī's works can immediately recognise the same phenomenological patterns in previously unfamiliar cultural and religious settings. So when that necessarily empirical, experiential process of lifelong spiritual discovery (what Ibn 'Arabī called *tahqīq*) has become sufficiently established, it leads to a concretely grounded realisation of three essential facts: (1) the *necessary individuality* and universality of the process of spiritual realisation, with all that recognition implies, including (2) the corresponding *multiplicity of paths* of realisation, at all times and under all circumstances; and (3) the ongoing, constant *necessity of creativity* (in practice, communication, and wider social and political organisation) which is required to support and encourage that process of realisation in each particular case and circumstance.[779] In other words, to be even more explicit, that process of realisation which is at the very core of Ibn 'Arabī's work is both radically subversive of attempts at socio-political indoctrination and delimitation of individual spiritual life, and at the same time radically activist and creative (and potentially quite political) in the responsibilities it unfolds for

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[777] See the extensive development of this perspective in our recent book, *The Reflective Heart: Discovering Spiritual Intelligence in Ibn 'Arabī's 'Meccan Illuminations.'*

[778] **See our detailed analysis of this distinctive aim and rhetorical form of Ibn 'Arabī's writing in the two-part study of 'Ibn 'Arabī's Rhetoric of Realisation: Keys to Reading and "Translating" the *Meccan Illuminations.'* Part I in *Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī Society*, vol. XXXIII (2003), pp. 54-99; Part II, vol. XXXIV (2003), pp. 103-145.**

[779] See the wider illustrations of these basic principles in our forthcoming volume ***Openings: From the Qur'an to the Islamic Humanities* (2006; publisher t.b.a).**

those who take it seriously. Once those three fundamental features of his work are clearly understood, the many obvious differences between the various individuals and movements mentioned briefly below can be readily grasped as the necessary unfolding of those same central demands of realisation according to the specific circumstances in which each of those creative figures have found themselves. The same principles are even more clearly illustrated, of course, when we look at any of the major past historical vehicles of his 'influence' discussed in the Kyoto conference and in this resulting volume of studies.

The Problem of 'Influences' and the Parameters of Communication :

By way of introductory background, it may be helpful to explain in more detail some of the different ways (and the underlying processes) in which one can speak of and discern different 'influences' of Ibn 'Arabī's writings, almost all of which are operative at any particular historical context. The underlying problem and most frequent source of misunderstandings in this regard has to do with the peculiar later historical phenomenon of the popular identification of the figure of Ibn 'Arabī with his 'Bezels of Wisdom' (*Fusūs al-Hikam*) and its long line of theological and philosophical commentators. More particularly, those recurrent misconceptions are deeply rooted in the strange conjunction of two very different (and often quite unrelated) sets of long-lived historical phenomena: that is, between (a) widespread later movements of Islamic philosophy and religious thought deeply rooted in the study and commentary of the *Fusūs* ; and (b) polemical 'images' and deeply distorted accounts of the Shaykh's ideas and intentions, ostensibly drawn almost exclusively from a few 'scandalous' phrases of the *Fusūs*, which were usually connected with the ongoing struggles for power and 'authority' (in all senses of that term) between competing social, intellectual and political interpreters of Islam from the 15th century down to the present day.[780] A further obstacle or distorting assumption more common in modern times is the additional identification of Ibn 'Arabī and his ideas and influences with the vast range of cultural forms, institutions and social phenomena vaguely associated by both friendly and hostile commentators, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, with what they happen to consider to be 'Sufism' (always taken to be somehow different from 'Islam' or other key areas of Islamic culture and religious life). So it may be important to start out by emphasising that the manuscript evidence for the study and transmission of Ibn 'Arabī's works—even in that most accessible body of evidence only partially provided (with an obvious emphasis on Turkish and Egyptian libraries) in O. Yahia's classic bio-bibliographic survey[781]—suggests that writings like the *Futūhāt* and especially his shorter treatises on spiritual practice have also been continuously studied by large numbers of Muslims over many centuries in virtually every area of

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[780] Many detailed, often pioneering studies of these polemics in various local historical contexts across the entire Muslim world are included in the collective volume *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*. In addition, see A. Knysh: *Ibn 'Arabi and the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*, and our review in the *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 27, 2000.

[781] *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabī.*

the Muslim world. The instances of a profusion of alternative descriptive titles for so many of his shorter, frequently recopied works are particularly telling in this regard.[782]

Perhaps the simplest way to confront these stereotypes and the resulting misunderstandings that can easily keep us from perceiving the full scope of Ibn 'Arabī's influences and intentions is to take up each of the most common misconceptions in turn and then to look at the corresponding actual state of affairs. In all of this, there is nothing particularly difficult or 'esoteric': each of the following points can be very quickly verified by anyone who takes up the practical challenge of communicating and explaining any particular writing of Ibn 'Arabī to a fairly diverse audience (whether of students or adults) with varying intellectual, artistic and spiritual sensitivities; different cultural, educational and religious backgrounds; and a fair range of ages and life experiences.[783]

1. To begin with, Ibn 'Arabī nowhere suggests that his writings are meant to be studied simply as 'literature', in separation from other equally indispensable contextual elements of practical experiential preparation and appropriate spiritual guidance and intention. On the contrary, all of his works that have survived are clearly intended as useful means or vehicles for actually understanding (a) the recurrent patterns and underlying meanings of our human spiritual experiences (the Qur'anic divine '*Signs on the horizons and in their souls*'); and (b) particular forms of revelation and scripture (and corresponding spiritual practice) precisely insofar as they are central practical keys to the deeper understanding of that necessarily individual experience.

2.   To put the same point slightly differently, Ibn 'Arabī nowhere suggests that study and intellectual comprehension of his writings (or of any other texts, including revealed scriptures) is adequate *alone* as an end in itself, without intimate ongoing interplay with the actual results and contexts of spiritual practice. (This point alone is certainly sufficient to distinguish him radically from many Islamic schools of philosophy and of theology.)   Even when he is discussing the most abstruse topics in logic, cosmology, ontology, kalām, etc., it is always quite clear from the context that the purpose of such discussions has to do with either dispelling recurrent illusions and obstacles on the spiritual path, or in clarifying the

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[782] In Yahia's repertoire of Ibn 'Arabī's extant writings, one finds that his classic shorter works on practical spirituality like the *R. al-Anwār*, *K. al-Nasā'ih*, and *K. al-Kunh* are each extant under literally dozens of descriptive or mnemonic titles. The extension of Yahia's work to so-called 'peripheral' areas of the Muslim world (China, South and Southeast Asia, the Balkans, etc.) would provide additional material for further illustrative studies; see in particular the new contributions to this Kyoto conference issue by W. Chittick, B. Ahmad, S. Murata and A. Matsumoto, summarising each scholar's essential research in some of those relatively unexplored geographical and cultural regions.

[783] Many of the observations below about the motivations and capacities of understanding Ibn 'Arabī's works among non-academic specialists are based on more than a decade of extensive classroom experience (using both my own and other English translations) with more than a thousand religious studies undergraduates at Princeton and Oberlin, and on more intensive workshop and seminar presentations in recent years, with at least as many adult participants, in Europe (France and UK), Morocco, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, and the U.S. The audiences in both those academic and non-academic settings have normally included a substantial number of Muslims from many different regional, cultural and sectarian backgrounds.

implications (and concomitantly, the limitations) of those forms of spiritual experience and illumination which each reader first has to experience and bring to the text in order for the purpose and meaning of that specific text to become apparent.

3. Despite the profusion of newly coined expressions, radically altered meanings (of familiar terms), and technical or symbolic vocabulary to be found throughout Ibn 'Arabī's writings—and the most accessible and extensive guide and summary of such distinctive usages is surely still S. al-Hakīm's monumental 'Sufi Dictionary' (*al-Mu'jam al-Sūfī*)—any serious student of Ibn 'Arabī quickly becomes aware that all of that new terminology is essentially poetic or 'dialectical' in nature. That is to say, it arises most often in his writing in the context of disputing previous interpretations (intellectual, practical or both) about the proper meaning (or appropriate *way to approach* the meanings) of Islamic scripture (Qur'an and hadith), where it functions as a spiritual catalyst for helping to resolve and eliminate the various intellectual and practical obstacles to discovering that actual meaning in the reality of one's own spiritual experience. Or else it arises, particularly in the early works written before Ibn 'Arabī's emigration from Andalusia and N. Africa, as a highly poetic, mysteriously allusive expression for Ibn 'Arabī's own personal experiences of realisation. The essential thing here—and the choice of formulation is intentionally provocative, but also quite literally accurate—is that Ibn 'Arabī (like Plato) has no 'teachings' or 'doctrines' of his own.   In other words, his constant emphasis and intention, in every work of his which I have yet encountered, is to force his readers to undertake their own indispensable effort of *tahqīq* (both 'verification' and 'realisation').   That is, they are intended to help his readers discover the essential existential connections between the 'forms' of revelation (or their endless social and historical transmutations) and their underlying realities as revealed in each individual's experience; and then to help them actualise the further demands of that *haqq*[784] which are inherent in its ongoing discovery.

4. A further implication of each of the above-mentioned points is that Ibn 'Arabī has no single or exclusive 'audience' for which his writings are intended. In particular, the interpreter of any of his typical works is faced in this regard with a strange double paradox. First, it is readily apparent that most of those 'people of God' (to use Ibn 'Arabī's own pregnant expression for his true companions and ideal readers) who would be uniquely qualified to understand these strange writings, in his time or any other, do *not* ordinarily devote most of their time to reading books and pursuing similar intellectual pursuits. Yet most of Ibn 'Arabī's *writings* presuppose nonetheless an rare and challenging intellectual mastery of religious and philosophic sciences and Arabic literary forms which must have been relatively uncommon even in his own day (not to mention our own). The second, further paradox is the extraordinary, lasting (indeed often lifelong) interest which those writings have nonetheless for centuries tended to awaken and sustain in so many devoted students and readers, as evidenced by the profusion of well-annotated manuscripts in the past, and of extensive translations, elaborate studies and Arabic editions more recently. An adequate resolution of this puzzle would require a book in itself, but two basic preliminary observations can already be noted here. First, even a cursory reader of Ibn 'Arabī's works will quickly notice that he was deeply suspicious of the increasingly institutionalised forms of what would later be called 'Sufism' that he encountered during his lifetime, for perennial reasons (not at all limited to the historical or individual particularities of that age) that may in fact constitute some of his most important

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[784] The underlying Arabic term, a favourite of Ibn 'Arabī, encompasses both the divine 'Reality' and all that is right and due or obligatory as an inseparable dimension of that same Reality: see the further discussion of these key terms in our Introduction to *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation.*

lessons.[785] Secondly, his voluminous treatment of all the forms of the Islamic 'religious sciences' is not simply intended to point his readers toward the spiritual meanings potentially expressed exclusively in that revelation and its diverse historical interpretations. By natural extension (as we can see vehemently reflected in the extensive spectrum of Ibn 'Arabī's later and present-day Muslim critics), his distinctive approach to Islamic scripture and its interpretation also constitutes a massive body of profoundly 'constructive criticism' of many existent (mis-) interpretations, and a concomitant inspiration to the—unstated but omnipresent—challenges of creative and positive revivification of the wider intentions and perennial goals of all revelation.

Now if we bring together each of the *positive* counterparts to the recurrent misconceptions we have briefly enumerated above, we can perhaps more easily conceive of the complexities involved in envisaging and capturing (from the historian's very limited perspective) the multiple dimensions of Ibn 'Arabī's 'influences' on anyone who has begun to understand what he actually demands of his readers. This is especially important, of course, in that vast majority of cases where history has subsequently hidden an individual's original contact with Ibn 'Arabī's writings.[786] Indeed here we have only look to the situation today of a student of Ibn 'Arabī in virtually any contemporary nation-state with a majority Muslim population (or whose livelihood and identity are primarily developed within a minority Muslim community): there we can readily see that in almost all such cases today it would normally be decidedly unconstructive (if not dangerously self-destructive) to highlight Ibn 'Arabī as the actual source of one's particular religious understanding and creative religious and social ideas.[787] For what should be equally

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[785] In our discussion of Ibn 'Arabī's contemporary 'influences' in the West below, we have suggested several recurrent reasons why most of the individuals publicly involved (whether 'Sufi' or not) have taken considerable pains *not* to draw undue attention either to Ibn 'Arabī or to the various cultural (including 'Islamic') contexts in which they may have first encountered the Shaykh's influence. To have emphasized either point would typically have meant both cutting themselves off from their wider potential audiences and—far more importantly—running the risk of short-circuiting the necessarily creative and ongoing demands of the process of realisation in favour of a spiritually ruinous 'idolatry' of particular earlier social and cultural forms. That last dilemma is never really escapable and—from Ibn 'Arabī's perspective—was surely just as poignant in the time and surroundings of each of the prophets as it is centuries later.

[786] A particularly striking example, both in the past and down almost to the present day, is R.W. Holbrooke's revealing article on the group of heads of the main Sufi orders in Istanbul who would regularly meet to study and discuss Ibn 'Arabī's works: see parts one and two of "Ibn 'Arabī and the Ottoman Dervish Traditions: The Melāmī Supra-Order" in the *Journey of the Muhyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī Society.*

[787] A somewhat ironical case is the way in which Ayatollah Khomeini's lifelong personal fascination with Ibn 'Arabī (growing out of his own scholarly specialisation in the study of Mulla Sadra's philosophy, and highlighted in his famous 'Letter to Gorbachev' shortly before his death) and his recently published super-commentary on the *Fusús* have had the widespread effect of rendering the study and even the

obvious reasons, it would be equally pointless or self-defeating for a teacher or interpreter (even in ostensibly 'tolerant' Western settings) primarily working with Christian, Jewish, Buddhist or avowedly 'secular' audiences and traditions to point out explicitly the central role of Ibn 'Arabī (or certain of his contemporary interpreters) in that teacher's own understanding and interpretation of the tradition in question[788]—even though we all know personally such friends and colleagues whose own shelves are well stocked with books (in translation) by Ibn 'Arabī or some of his contemporary interpreters discussed below.

In short, once we recognise that Ibn 'Arabī's essential purpose, in any of his works, is the realisation of actual spiritual intelligence which is necessarily 'translated' into a wider process of realisation and appropriate action, then we can readily see how each of the three equally indispensable parameters of communication—i.e., the particular communicator/translator/ creator; the particular operative symbols (visual, musical, scriptural, cinematic, etc.) in the cultural and inner life of their audience; and the actual circumstances and possibilities of each particular audience—are necessarily constantly changing and requiring new, necessarily creative forms of communication which can remain spiritually efficacious only by appropriately adapting to all the ongoing changes in any of those three parameters. If we assume, as I think we can, that the most intelligent and capable of Ibn 'Arabī's students and readers were (and are) those who are able to most consciously and capably respond to those further demands of effective communication, then it is likely the case that in any age the great majority of Ibn 'Arabī's 'influences' and most effective 'transmitters' will necessarily remain hidden from the view of historians.[789]   Thus the few contemporary examples we have enumerated below throw a fascinating light on that larger historical process precisely because we are in the privileged situation of being close enough to the actual creative actors and their audiences and circumstances to know something of Ibn 'Arabī's central role and 'influences' in their lives and creations.   In each case, it is therefore fairly easy to see how those

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publication of the undoubtedly rigorously Sunni works of Ibn 'Arabī more or less 'respectable' in Iran after they had spent centuries under considerable suspicion among wider Shiite clerical circles. Perhaps an equally dramatic illustration is provided by Prof. Paul Fenton's extraordinary discovery in a Jerusalem library of a Syrian manuscript (13th or 14th-century) of Ibn 'Arabī's very important *K. al-Tajalliyāt* written in Judeo-Arabic characters.   In light of what we are highlighting in this study, it is important to notice that such a remarkable manuscript could just as easily signify the *beginning* of a longer chain of 'influences' in an otherwise unexpected milieu (especially given the subsequent key developments of Jewish mysticism in nearby Safed) as much as the 'end' of the sorts of textual written evidence normally available to historical scholars.

[788] One should stress that such considerations are by no means limited to Ibn 'Arabī: the same considerations would be true as well for Christian (or Muslim) teachers teaching parts of the Bible or other scriptures in light of their study, for example, of a book like the *Zohar* (which offers endless parallels to Ibn 'Arabī's work).

[789] The 'chance' discoveries of V. Holbrooke and P. **Fenton (notes 12-13 above**) offer dramatic illustrations of such wider influences (actual or at least potential) which would otherwise have passed completely unknown to historians.

different parameters of communication have helped generate the particular forms of expression and creation in question.

Since the basic structure of these demands on anyone seeking to truly communicate Ibn 'Arabī's intentions to any range of audiences remains much the same across time and cultural boundaries, it may be helpful here to underline a handful of key practical observations which are equally relevant to the contemporary Western cases discussed below as they are to the larger processes of 'spread and assimilation' of the Shaykh's ideas in any earlier historical context. In particular, it is fundamentally important to keep constantly in mind what was the actual historical reality of the great centres of Islamic culture and intellectual, artistic and cultural creativity in that long period (13th-19th centuries) when Ibn 'Arabī's ideas became so influential in so many different domains. For these crucial cultural centres then—the Ottoman heartlands (outside what we now call the 'Arab world'), the Timurid and Safavid realms (including most of Central Asia and the Caucasus), the Mogul empire and many other Indian Muslim principalities, the trading entrepôts of Southeast Asia, and the centres of high Chinese culture—were all *locally* cosmopolitan, multi-cultural, multi-confessional and filled with vigorously competing forms of spiritual praxis in ways which can only be even mirrored today, if at all, on a much wider, global geographic scale. [790] Once the concrete historical realities of those specific times and places are known, it is much easier to recognize their frequently close contextual parallels to the recent 'Western' communicators and interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī discussed below.   Here are a few basic practical observations about these parameters of communication.

- To begin with, as in the anecdote with which we opened this essay, the possible range of influences in this domain are normally far less determined by the efforts of the communicator (teacher, shaykh, artist, etc.) in question than they are by the pre-existing spiritual needs and aptitudes of each particular *audience*. (This is a point we have attempted to clarify explicitly for the recent cases enumerated below).   Anyone teaching Ibn 'Arabī or trying to communicate his writings quickly recognizes that their natural, most immediate 'audience' is not at all academic philosophers or theologians—who typically can only see the conceptual interplay of abstract ideas and concepts visible within their own familiar intellectual schemas—but rather those who are existentially driven to seek the 'realities' or 'meanings' (Ibn 'Arabī' own terms) underlying the symbols through which spiritual meanings are conveyed: that is, poets, musicians, artists, writers; or in more 'vocational' contemporary terms, psychologists, teachers, healers, parents and other therapists.

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[790] Here it is essential to take into account not just the different 'religions' in the reified way they are often popularly conceived today, but especially the multitude of socially effective, actively competing 'schools', 'paths', 'sects' and the like within any of the milieus in question. Today it is difficult for all but historical specialists in the periods in question to begin even to imagine the degree of cultural and religious diversity which is extremely well-attested (both by travellers and internal witnesses) for so many parts of the present-day 'Islamic world' prior to the global transformations of the past century. On the striking analogies to those early historical settings in many parts of the contemporary world, see the concluding 'Postscript' to our recent volume *Orientations* (**n. 10 above**), pp. 101-116.

- Secondly, with such audiences—whose primary motivation is the inner search for what is 'Real'[791]— any teacher quickly discovers that Ibn 'Arabī's ideas and intentions are immediately comprehensible without reference to any particular (formal or official) religious and cultural upbringing at all. Indeed, vast amount of translators' and teachers' time must ordinarily be taken up with 'deconstructing' and eliminating potential contamination by the unrelated or misleading suggestions of his vast Islamic symbolic vocabulary, for both Muslim and non-Muslim readers alike—albeit in very different ways—in order for each student to begin to get at what Ibn 'Arabī actually means in terms comprehensible to a modern audience. (Any translator or teacher of Ibn 'Arabī can supply dozens of pertinent illustrations of this point.)

- Thirdly, as soon as one begins to explore the area of the serious spiritual apprehension of Ibn 'Arabī's intentions, his communicators—if they want to have any effect at all—are immediately forced to work with the symbols actually operative in the lives and souls of the particular audience and individuals they are addressing. With most contemporary audiences (usually including the non-traditional, secularly educated classes of officially 'Muslim' countries), those operative symbols are not immediately, primarily or exclusively drawn from any particular 'religious' tradition. (Not incidentally, one suspects that this has in fact been the case with most non-clerical, non-'educated' and illiterate populations in most pre-modern cultures as well.)[792] In other words, one cannot begin to communicate Ibn 'Arabī's ideas in any serious way without constantly investigating and then rediscovering what those operative and effective symbols actually are for the people with whom one is interacting. The fact that in most contemporary contexts those effective symbolic fields turn out to be the present-day equivalent of what we now often naively take to be the 'classical' Islamic humanities—i.e., spiritually effective, familiar and therefore 'popular' visual and story imagery (= cinema today), music, innovative social and ritual forms, etc.—brings us to our last key observation.

- Finally, the expanding waves of further influences which grow out of the genuine individual comprehension of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas and intentions (as opposed to the facile parroting of particular terms, practices, etc. which is also quite familiar to every teacher) can themselves only be expressed by further *creative* transformation and uses of the same shifting cultural and social possibilities (and 'givens') involved in each of the above-mentioned points. In particular, if those influences are genuinely effective, their original relation to Ibn 'Arabī (and his symbols) will actually become less and less apparent with

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[791] See further explanations at **n. 10 above.**

[792] Thus the same necessary conditions for communication, on a wider scale, also explain the central factors affecting the development of the local 'Islamic humanities', using vernacular languages and familiar 'local' symbolisms and cultural forms (in poetry, music, and vast fields of associated ritual), first in 'new Persian' and subsequently in the many other Islamic languages in the course of the long development and spread of Islam as a world religion. (See the further illustrations and explanations of these phenomena in **our forthcoming volume *Openings: From the Qur'an to the Islamic Humanities*.)**

each successive 'ripple' of transmission and further spiritually effective work of creation and transformation.

Thus whenever we examine the following contemporary cases more closely, each individual facet of this larger process of transmission of ideas may resemble an adventure novel or spiritual autobiography more than what we usually think of as history.[793] Certainly any detailed and remotely adequate 'history' of each individual and group mentioned briefly here would be the subject of a long book. (I speak here from the experience of guiding doctoral students in their detailed studies of only a few of the groups briefly cited below.) In this limited context, moreover, we can only mention only a few illustrative names and groups, remaining at the level of what is hopefully common public knowledge[794] and focusing on the corresponding wider *audiences* for each of these transmitters, with their specific needs and creative uses of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas. And of course, in reality the individuals, influences and audiences mentioned schematically and successively here have often overlapped and influenced each other, sometimes in major ways.

Guénon and His 'Successors'[795]:

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[793] I must acknowledge Prof. A. Popovic (the famous French authority on Sufism in the Balkans) for first making this point so explicitly to a group of curious Algerian interlocutors (at a conference on Ibn 'Arabī held in Oran in 1990) who were posing the perennial question, 'How did you ever become interested in Ibn 'Arabī [Islam, Sufism, etc.] in the first place?' One of the most illuminating moments in my scholarly career was listening to a group of academic 'experts' on Ibn 'Arabi (at another Ibn 'Arabī conference held in Noto, Sicily, in 1989) respond to the similar question of how each of them had actually first encountered and then become interested in the Ibn 'Arabī: one suspects that a collection of those frank responses, if suitably detailed, would make a popular book both more intriguing and more spiritually effective than most academic studies in this field.

[794] In many of the cases mentioned below, the detailed 'proof' of the influences of Ibn 'Arabī would involve revealing personal confidences and private knowledge acquired over several decades of personal contact with many individuals directly involved in the various groups and situations described here only in very general terms; many of the original participants in the Kyoto conference were of course at least equally knowledgeable of a much wider range of related illustrations. Even where written references have been cited below, in most cases those studies are useful only in initially situating and broadly describing groups and individuals alluded to here; written examples of phenomenologically accurate and in-depth spiritual descriptions in this domain are still almost non-existent, and should never be confused with superficial sociological categories and approaches.

[795] One uses the term 'successor' here only very reluctantly and as a concession to existing public usage, in the broadest sense of a particular subset of the many small groups and individuals very loosely acknowledging 'Guénonian' roots and antecedents. (And many of those, particularly in francophone countries, have not focused explicitly or centrally on the eventual role of Ibn 'Arabī in his thought). Moreover, in no case should this broad journalistic language be taken to imply any sort of wider 'dependence' on Guenon (to the exclusion of many different sources, Islamic and other) or general agreement with any of his particular pronouncements dating from very different periods of his life. The

According to students of this broad tradition, probably the first Western translation of Ibn 'Arabī's work (at least in modern times) dates from the beginning of the twentieth century, when a '*Treatise on (Divine) Unicity*' apocryphally attributed to the Shaykh was independently translated into French and English.[796] For more than fifty years, the primary translations of Ibn 'Arabī's writings readily available to wider audiences, including the first extended selections from his *Fusūs* and *Futūhāt*, were in French.[797] The historically best-known element in this process, particularly in the French-speaking world, is the

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actual diversity, disagreements and independence of thought and outlook one quickly discovers in studying the thought and life of each individual loosely associated with these 'schools' fully corresponds to all the radical diversity we discover in tracing Sufi paths, lineages and succession processes throughout history—especially whenever a relatively charismatic and creative figure dies.   For all these reasons, we have avoided giving literary references in this domain, since a separate book would probably be needed to situate adequately the vast range of relevant literature now available in French.

[796]One of the additional ironies of this situation is that this initial text of 'Ibn 'Arabī' translated into both English and French, the *Risālat al-Ahadīya* ('Essay on the Divine Unicity') was actually the work of a later Persian Sufi author (al-Balyānī) with very different ideas and teachings from those of Ibn 'Arabī himself. See the important historical background material on the Western discovery of Ibn 'Arabī that is included in Michel Chodkiewicz' Introduction to his translation of Balyānī's work (Awhad al-dīn al-Balyānī, *Epître sur l'Unicité Absolue*), and the further discussion of this text in our review article (and expanded web-based volume)**on 'Ibn Arabī and His Interpreters' (n. 2 above), along with the more detailed study 'Theophany or 'Pantheism'?: the Importance of Balyānī's *Risālat al-Ahadīya*,' in *Horizons Maghrébins* (Toulouse), special festschrift number for Michel Chodkiewicz, no. 30 (1995), pp. 43-50 and 51-54.** Some helpful historical context (albeit often rather superficial) is provided by related chapters in A. Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters* (Chicago, 1997). More useful detailed material on F. Schuon is provided in M. Lings' *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaykh Ahmad al-Alawi* (Berkeley, 1971), S.H. Nasr's introduction to his collection of *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon* (Amity, N.Y., 1986), and J. Cutsinger's *Advice to the Serious Seeker: Meditations on the Teaching of Frithjof Schuon* (Albany, 1997). Further background material, including reviews of more recent related publications, can be found at the website *www.religioperennis.org*. In French, see the more comprehensive recent study, *Frithjof schuon, 1907-1998 : Études et témoignages* (Paris, 1999).

[797] In addition, of course, to Asin-Palacios' pioneering Spanish studies of Ibn 'Arabī's life and the parallels between his eschatological writings (from the *Futúhāt*) and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. However, it is fair to say that in all of Asin's writings Ibn 'Arabī's own presence and distinctive perspectives are often very hard to detect or to separate from the views of his translator/interpreter. The key authors whose translations certainly did the most to begin to make Ibn 'Arabī's writings available to wider non-academic circles were T. Burckhardt and M. Valsān, both in independent books (most written originally in French) and through their many translations and other contributions to the journal *Ïtudes traditionnelles*, in itself the most accessible historical source for all the contributors to this movement. (Unfortunately, other early European academic studies of Ibn 'Arabī—especially Nyberg's editions and German translations—were of less representative works, and remained accessible at best to a handful of academic specialists).

very broad and diverse 'school' of religious writers, translators and teachers loosely associated—to move down through the past century—with René Guénon, the Algerian Shaykh al-'Alawī and the Shādhilī Sufi ñarīqa (in both Egypt and North Africa), and eventually the writings of F. Schuon, T. Burckhardt, M. Lings, and the many other contributors to the journals *Ïtudes traditionelles* and *Studies in Comparative Religion*. While all of these authors shared certain intellectual and, in many cases, further initiatic connections, their perspectives and chosen fields of activity were also quite diverse, and we do not yet have anything approaching a comprehensive history of their personal, intellectual and artistic activities.[798] Without entering into the details of that history, we can say that the direct 'influences' of Ibn 'Arabī, in almost all those cases, were inseparable from the wider role of the Shaykh's thought and teachings in recent North African and Arab Sufi traditions; that the majority of contemporary scholars actively translating Ibn 'Arabī's writings into English and French have continued to be directly or indirectly influenced by those same Sufi traditions; and that the most influential and prolific contemporary popularisers and public exponents of those ideas in English (especially Huston Smith and S. H. Nasr) have largely emerged from that same context.

However, when we turn to the wider influences of this 'school', beyond the translation and direct study of Ibn 'Arabī, what immediately stands out is the profound effect of the abundant writings of F. Schuon in applying the central ideas of Ibn 'Arabī to *articulating* (but in the long run also deeply and creatively shaping) an understanding of the spiritual dimensions of religious life appealing profoundly to several generations of philosophers and theologians seeking to develop a comprehensive, non-reductive 'philosophy of religions' enabling mutual understanding and active co-operation between the followers of different religious traditions and the increasing number of citizens who do not consciously identify exclusively with any particular or single historical tradition.[799] Because of the peculiar vagaries of academic opinion and respectability, this wide-ranging influence is rarely mentioned publicly (unlike that of the academically prestigious scholars discussed in the immediately following section), but is to be found virtually everywhere.[800] (Of course this contemporary process closely mirrors the equally

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[798] It is interesting that publications by the writers mentioned here (including a large body of English translations) are in general far more accessible than any reliable biographical and critical studies (see **notes 21-23 above**). The bio-bibliographical study by J. Borella, 'René Guénon and the Traditionalist School', pp. 330-58 in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, ed. A. Faivre and J. Needleman (New York, 1992), presupposes prior knowledge of the authors in question and is disappointingly thin, with an even more inadequate bibliography and very little indication of their debts to Ibn 'Arabī. Interested readers would do better to turn directly to the many available writings by these authors themselves.

[799] The prominence of the truly ecumenical interest in this dimension of Ibn 'Arabī's thought in the English-speaking democracies—like the parallel post-WW II growth in North American university departments of 'religious studies' unaffiliated with particular religious denominations—reflects not simply the political and social diversities of those cultures (which are arguably no greater than in many other countries), but also the peculiarly limited political and historical weight of any single established theology in these (at least until recently) predominantly Protestant cultures.

[800] I have yet to encounter an academic colleague interested in the spiritual dimensions of religious studies (specialising in any religious tradition) who, if one knew them closely enough to pose the

pervasive way that Ibn 'Arabī's ideas in this domain were largely developed in the past by those seeking to explain, justify and support the creativity and diversity of forms of spiritual life *within* the wider Islamic tradition.[801]) In the generations following Schuon, the authors and translators historically associated with this application of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas in English themselves have come from and write for readers from every major religious tradition, not just Sufism or traditional Islam. In fact, what has had the widest influence here—whether among academic specialists or a wider readership—is not any particular set of ideas that could be identified as a single philosophical or religious 'school,' so much as a broader shared focus on those spiritual dimensions of religious life *common* to all the revealed religions—an element largely neglected in the last century's reigning sociological and historicist theories of religion—and on the elaboration of an adequate metaphysical framework within which one can understand and appreciate all the observed diversities of religious life and experience. Thus all of those writers foreshadow important facets of that emergent 'science of spirituality' to which we return briefly at the end of this essay.

The Metaphysics of Imagination: Corbin, Izutsu and the Eranos School:

An intellectually related development in the application of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas—but with a wider, more diverse and less strictly academic audiences—has been the role of these students and interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī in the elaboration, in both learned and more popular forms, of a persuasive 'metaphysics of the imagination,' and in the subsequent adoption of their ideas by artists, writers, scholars of religious studies, and others (especially Jungian psychologists) looking to justify and deepen their own creative activities and spiritual worldviews.[802] For these purposes, the thought of Henry Corbin (along with other Eranos colleagues) and Professor Izutsu was especially relevant in that Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture of the US which had lacked a strong explanation and justification for such creative and therapeutic activities within its own cultural inheritance.[803] The need for such an explanation and justification was

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question or to examine their personal library, has not in fact read several of the works of Schuon or Burckhardt.

[801] See **notes 2, 6, 9 and 12-13** above and the important new contributions in this Kyoto conference issue concerning the spread of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas (often through creative poets like Jāmī and H. Fansúrī) into China and Southeast Asia, as well as Turkey. As the wider study of Ottoman culture and spiritual life—with its key dimensions shared not only by the many regions of the empire, but also by cognate learned and creative traditions of other faiths—gradually begins to re-emerge from the atomised nationalisms (of each small successor-state and ethnic group) of the last century, one can expect an ongoing series of further discoveries of Ibn 'Arabī's wider influences in all of those cultural areas.

[802] See the more detailed discussion of the particular historical background of these developments in our recent study 'Religion After Religion*s* ? : Henry Corbin and the Future of the Study of Religion', in *Philosophies et Sagesses des Religions du Livre*, ed. P. Lory and M. Amir-Moezzi (Turnhout, Belgium, 2005)

[803] See our earlier discussion of the fact that such historical 'influences'—both in the Islamic past and on the contemporary scene—are typically driven by precisely such clearly identifiable needs and relevant local demands. To take a very different cultural and historical setting, this same underlying phenomenon is especially visible in the otherwise remarkable (given the advanced and early

only aggravated by those pervasive, highly reductive Marxist and historicist intellectual currents that dominated Western intellectual discourse during at least the first half of the last century, and in many places until much more recently. Here one must note especially the remarkably widespread influence of English translations of Henry Corbin's works on Ibn ʿArabī and related Islamic writers, and of later books and lectures by Toshihiko Izutsu, in both cases through publications (by 'Spring' publishers and the Bollingen translation series at Princeton) closely associated with Eranos conferences and popular proponents of Jungian psychology. In another recent study, Stephen Wasserstrom has at least suggested some of the seminal and less visible ways Corbin's understanding of Ibn ʿArabī influenced M. Eliade and other foundational figures in the study of religion in the second half of the last century,[804] in ways that often paralleled or coincided with the ongoing (but less officially academic) influences of Schuon and his colleagues already mentioned above.

Much less studied, but no less influential in the longer run, have been the direct and indirect influences of Ibn ʿArabī's ideas (again largely through the translated books and Eranos lectures of Henry Corbin, and again often overlapping with the influence of authors mentioned in the preceding section) on more creative artists and writers. (And again all of these recent Western developments closely parallel the ways Ibn ʿArabī's ideas were earlier used in the Islamic world to justify and interpret the extraordinary creative achievements of the later Islamic humanities, as for example in the long tradition of learned commentaries on the incomparable mystical poetry of Rumi, Ibn al-Fāriã, Hafez and others.)   In Britain, along similar lines, one could cite the lastingly institutionalised achievements of Keith Critchlow (one of the pioneers in adapting Ibn ʿArabī's ideas to the understanding and practical preservation of many Islamic visual arts) in so effectively supporting and reviving 'traditional' artistic forms and practices, including especially those of Islam; of influential writers, poets and critics like Kathleen Raine (long-time editor of *Temenos*); and of other artists, writers and creators associated with the Beshara School and its

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development of Islamic scholarship there) relative *lack* of interest in Ibn ʿArabī in German-language regions of Europe—even though ironically many key figures already mentioned were themselves native German speakers. This apparent wider public neglect is hardly unsurprising in light of the plethora of German mystics, philosophers and artists (most obviously Goethe, with his powerful mirroring of Hafez's poetic expressions of Ibn ʿArabī's ideas), from the Middle Ages (Meister Eckhardt or Jakob Boehme) down to the 19th century, whose ideas and expressions have so powerfully articulated many central insights and concerns shared by Ibn ʿArabī's work. See also our review (*Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn ʿArabī Society* 33, 2003) of Alma Giese's recent pioneering German translations, *Urwolke und welt: Mystische texte des grössten meisters,* (Munich, 2002).

[804] Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, 1999).   Although this author's perspective, sources and organising thesis are avowedly partial, the book remains helpful in suggesting and tracing the many diverse 'channels of influence' and analysing the multiple 'audiences' which are the primary focus of this essay. Considerably more revealing, usefully detailed, and wide-ranging are the multiple perspectives and first-hand testimony of the broad spectrum of philosophical, theological and scholarly contributors (each personally illustrating the vast range of actual 'influences' alluded to in this essay) included in the recent Henry Corbin centenary commemoration volume, *Philosophies et Sagesses des Religions du Livre* **(n. 28 above)**.

offshoots.[805] A particularly dramatic illustration of this sort of hidden creative influence is Rafi Zabor's recent (1997) award-winning 'jazz novel', *The Bear Comes Home*, which was inspired by the reading of Ibn 'Arabī and was developed through decades of careful study of his (translated) writings.[806] Similar wide-ranging influences can be traced in the 'Black Mountain' school of American poets (Olson, Creely and others).[807] However, the cases of artists and creators actually citing or openly developing these transforming influences of Ibn 'Arabī and his interpreters are no doubt far fewer than those where the inspiration of their reading and study passes directly into appropriate creative action[808]—in a way not unlike the multitude of learned Muslim readers of the *Futūhāt* who for centuries have applied Ibn 'Arabī's ideas and insights for their disciples and students in their own sermons, teachings and interpretations, in forms that are often only discernible to those intimately familiar with the Shaykh's works.

The same largely hidden influences are particularly evident in the wider domain of what one might call 'applied spirituality'[809]—including the actual practice of therapists (of all sorts), psychologists, and spiritual teachers (both within and outside traditional religious denominations)—where Ibn 'Arabī's writings and teachings help provide a much-needed inspiration for the creative tasks of spiritual communication and pedagogy facing those seeking to develop the modern-day equivalents of the

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[805] See the Exeter University Ph.D. dissertation of Isobel Jeffrey-Street (2002), and now published as *Ibn Arabi and the Contemporary West* (Sheffield, 2012), devoted to the Beshara School and its multiple activities centred on the creative inspiration of Ibn 'Arabī over more than three decades.

[806] New York, 1997; winner of that year's prestigious Pen-Faulkner award.   Apart from the epigraph of two short—and unidentified—phrases from Ibn 'Arabī, there would be no way for most readers even to suspect the pervasive inspiring and organising influence of Ibn 'Arabī on this work, were it not for the author's own lengthy and fascinating explanation of Ibn 'Arabī's ongoing relation to the genesis and form of that work at the Ibn 'Arabi Society international Symposium held at the University of California, Berkeley, in November 1998.

[807] These references are thanks to the poets M. Bylebyl and P. L. Wilson, our colleagues at the Iranian Academy of Philosophy in the 1970's.

[808] The central Qur'anic term is of course *sālihāt*, the active expression of true faith through what is 'spiritually appropriate and fitting' at every instant.

[809] Fittingly enough, during the course of the Kyoto Conference at which this paper was originally delivered, my host for a brief visit near Tokyo—an old friend and former student—happened to be working as the Japanese simultaneous translator at a seminar for Japanese psychologists given by a noted creative figure in transpersonal psychology (and active Sufi teacher from a Jerrahi order in California) who was openly applying ideas of Ibn 'Arabī and related Sufis in the context of that practical spiritual discipline.   My Japanese student's discussion of the many problems of 'translating' those Sufi principles and teachings, in their already innovative 'Californian' form, to an audience of Japanese psychologists practising in Tokyo, vividly illustrated the many challenges and dimensions of communication briefly summarised above.

Islamic humanities, that complex of vitally inspired spiritual poetry, music, and new ritual and social institutions (including what we now call 'Sufism' and much more) which shaped highly diverse and scattered Islamic cultures and the larger Islamic civilisation in the centuries following Ibn 'Arabī's death.

Today those individuals in the West who read, seek out, and then apply in their own traditions and religious contexts the practical spiritual lessons contained in Ibn 'Arabī's writings come from every religious background, and use all the contemporary artistic, practical, devotional and creative equivalents of the classical Islamic humanities. Because those modern-day creators are motivated by their own spiritual, artistic and political needs, they are equally inspired to translate his ideas into the appropriate means for their own situation and field of action: normally that means working with audiences and seekers from Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or Buddhist, as well as Muslim backgrounds, using the artistic and social forms available in this contemporary culture. To take only one of the most obvious and widely influential examples, one could cite any number of recent feature films which are extraordinarily effective translations of Ibn 'Arabī central ideas and their common ground of 'esoteric' Sufi spiritual teachings into that extraordinarily effective medium for spiritual teaching: *Wings of Desire*, *Field of Dreams*, *After Life*[810], *The Colour of Paradise* (*rang-i Khodā*), *Jacob's Ladder, The Fisher King*, and so many others.

Other 'Sufi' Teachers and Influences:[811]

If we approach Ibn 'Arabī's influence in the West from the perspective of the study of religions, rather than the history of texts and translations, then the first thing we discover—as everywhere when we examine the spread of Sufism—is the key catalytic role of living guides and the small groups initially connected with them, both in encouraging the first translators of Ibn 'Arabī and in providing the initial

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[810] In the original Japanese, *wandarafu raifu* (visibly echoing the Frank Capra classic). See the more detailed elaboration of these wide-ranging and often highly detailed connections between Ibn 'Arabī's eschatological teaching and these recent cinematic classics in Chapter Five of our recent volume *The Reflective Heart: Discovering Spiritual Intelligence in Ibn 'Arabī's Meccan Illuminations* **(n. 3 above).**

[811] The best broad introduction to the basic spectrum of the more publicly visible Sufi movements in the U.S.—simply as a kind of preliminary 'catalogue' and 'direction-finder', rather than a full-length description or analysis of any of the particular groups discussed—is probably to be found in two pioneering articles by Marcia Hermansen, "Hybrid Identity Formations in Muslim America: The Case of American Sufi Movements" (*Muslim World* 90, 2000); and her earlier "In the Garden of American Sufi Movements: Hybrids and Perennials," in *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam*, ed. P. Clarke (London, 1997). (Significantly, given the centrality of the *malāmī* teaching and perspective throughout Ibn 'Arabī's work, Hermansen also notes the much wider diversity of Sufi-influenced movements, teachers and students who intentionally and carefully shun public visibility and 'institutionalisation'.) No remotely equivalent survey study exists as yet for the different countries of Western Europe (although many of the groups listed by Hermansen are also active in different countries there), and the extant diversity and multiplicity of movements and expressions, throughout the European Union as a whole, is certainly at least as great as in the N. American context.

audiences and readership for those pioneering translations and studies of his work. [812] As in the case of the first group of authors discussed above, those pioneering spiritual teachers, themselves coming from the most diverse regions of the Islamic world, have provided, along with their disciples and students, the essential seed-beds for a wider 'transplanting' of the Shaykh's influence into non-Islamic settings. And when one looks more closely at the lives of the translators, publishers, and popularisers of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas (anywhere in the West, not only in English speaking countries), one almost always discovers the essential catalytic role of Sufi teachers (or occasionally other Muslim scholars) in educating and motivating the translators and initial audiences for Ibn 'Arabī's thought. What is most fascinating about this 'secret history' is that—like the initial, creative phase of so many earlier religious movements—it has typically been a private, historically almost invisible process, requiring a detailed autobiographical knowledge of each individual actor and his or her personal history, a process in which the awareness of that necessarily individual dimension of spiritual communication and 'reception' tends to disappear from recorded history after each generation. One of the most striking aspects of this history is the way in which the transmission of Ibn 'Arabī's thought into the English-speaking world, in the second half of the past century, has largely continued to reflect the full range of his earlier influences in every region of the Islamic world, through the key role of teachers from former Ottoman realms (primarily Turkey), South Asia (India and Sri Lanka), and Iran who have passed on to their students, in equally influential ways, something of the distinctive cultural and spiritual roles the figure of the 'Shaykh al-Akbar' had taken on in those diverse regions. [813]

[812] I am not sufficiently familiar with the earliest representatives of this type of Sufi activity in the West, Gurdjieff and Hazrat Inayat Khan, to judge the extent of direct or explicit influences of Ibn 'Arabī in their work—although influence of Naqshbandi and *malāmī* teachings in Gurdjieff's writings is of course quite evident. Certainly there are key teachings and distinctive practical approaches of both figures (or of their successors and later interpreters) which do reflect themes of Shaykh's thought widespread in the Sufi traditions—of the Caucasus and Central Asia, and South Asia, respectively—from which they drew the spiritual teachings they then very creatively communicated to radically different Western audiences.

[813] The categorisation by ostensible 'tariqa' affiliation adopted in the pioneering articles cited in n. 37, while of obviously limited explanatory or descriptive utility, does have the additional virtue of highlighting this important socio-cultural aspect in the 'translation' of Sufi movements more generally (not just Ibn 'Arabī) into new Western contexts, since those vast regional and cultural differences of historical cultural origin are typically invisible or at least quite unfamiliar to popular *non*-Muslim audiences in their new countries of adoption.

Each of these individual stories would require a long book simply to recount the most basic facts.[814] But what is shared by those spiritual teachers and groups in which the influence of Ibn ʿArabī is most direct and explicit is a common, quite visible, factor which clearly marks them all off from the many other explicitly 'Sufi' tariqas which have simply attempted to 'export' unchanged local forms of Islamic practice to new Western settings: i.e., an explicit common intention to communicate the *spiritual universality* of Qur'anic teaching in ways appropriately adapted—which necessarily means creatively, even if protestations of 'orthodoxy' are sometimes required—to the distinctive circumstances of audiences of seekers in the contemporary world, relatively few of them 'Muslim' in terms of their own immediate cultural heritage.[815] In this respect, some of the most visible and active influences in supporting and communicating the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī have come—not entirely surprisingly—from Sufi traditions deeply rooted in the spiritually cosmopolitan, diverse and sophisticated world of the Ottoman empire. Thus the Beshara School, founded by the profoundly Ottoman figure of Bulent Rauf, has for several decades pioneered in the practical teaching of Ibn ʿArabī's writings to a wide international audience drawn from all walks of life. Equally significantly, its more academic offshoot, the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society, through its *Journal*, library and annual symposia that bring together scholars and translators from all over the world, has succeeded in creating a remarkable global network of editors, translators, and interpreters of the Shaykh's works which is increasingly effective and influential not only in English-speaking countries and among academic specialists, but also in a wide range of Muslim countries where intellectuals in the past century had often tended to reject the aspects of Islam associated with Ibn ʿArabī. Under the initial impetus of the charismatic Sheikh Muzaffer, diverse American branches of another originally Ottoman order (the Khalwati-Jerrahi tariqa) have also been extremely active in creating the vehicles needed for publishing, translating and disseminating Ibn ʿArabī's writings and ideas.[816]

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[814] One such more detailed study is the already-mentioned *Ibn Arabi and the Contemporary West*, which focuses only on the activities of the recently created 'Beshara School' and its courses and publications in the UK, over a period of little more than three decades. One quickly discovers that even the accurate generally 'external' description of a relatively limited spiritual group is in itself a daunting task, which can become almost limitless as soon as one embarks upon the sort of phenomenology of religious life and experience which is necessary for any serious understanding of any spiritual group (and its 'influences' and inspirations).   The recent sociological survey articles by M. **Hermansen (n. 37 above**) mention several other pioneering descriptive studies of this type, though none of those deal with groups that are so directly and profoundly linked to Ibn ʿArabī as in the case of the Beshara school.

[815] In this type of intentionally, wider, locally adapted contexts, this particularly open reference to the perspectives of Ibn ʿArabī is especially evident in the extensive writings and teachings—nowadays often circulated in various recorded formats—of the prolific Pir Vilayat Khan and of Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee (*www.goldensufi.org*), who have both openly recognised and very creatively developed the wider implications of many of Ibn ʿArabī's guiding ideas in contemporary global contexts.

[816] This is especially evident both in the editions and translations undertaken by Pir Publications (related to one New York branch of that Sufi order)—which include the recent publication of two volumes of extensive representative English translations from Ibn ʿArabī's *Futūḥāt* (*The Meccan Revelations*)—as well as the translations and commentaries of several works by Ibn ʿArabī translated by T. Bayrak and R.T.

Reflecting the wide-ranging influences of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas in South Asian Islam (most beautifully symbolised in Ibn 'Arabī's detailed inspiration for the architectonic form of the Taj Mahal)[817] other pioneering teachers originally from Muslim South Asia—Hazrat Inayat Khan (Chishti musician, teacher and founder of the Sufi order in the West), his son Pir Vilayat Khan, the Sri Lankan Sufi teacher Bhawa Mohyieddin, or Meher Baba—likewise continued to emphasise and practically apply the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī, as they had been transmitted and transmuted in the multi-religious Indian context, in their formation and direction of their American and European disciples, in ways that have subsequently been creatively adapted to the practical tasks of medicine and healing, psychology, and spiritual guidance, as well as more creative artistic endeavours.[818]

And finally, the central role of Ibn 'Arabī in so much of later Iranian thought (both Shiite and Sunni), poetry and the Islamic arts has been communicated in the West (and especially the English-speaking world) through even more diverse channels: the publications and seminars sponsored by the Ni'matullahi Sufi order and other originally Iranian spiritual groups; the above-mentioned works of Henry Corbin, S.H. Nasr, and Toshihiko Izutsu (all the direct fruit of their long-term residence, study and scholarly contacts in Iran); and more recently through the ongoing translations, interpretive studies and academic courses undertaken by a number of more recent scholars—Asians, Europeans and Americans—who had studied both with those older scholars and with more traditional representatives of Islamic spirituality in Iran. And again, in each of these cases the spectrum of immediate influences of Ibn 'Arabī's thought would cover a vast range of phenomena, ranging from the spectacularly public and

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Harris, from another regional branch of the same order. On the West coast, the psychologists R. Frager and J. Fadiman (from another branch of the same order) have published a number of more creative books relating ideas of Ibn 'Arabī and other related Sufis to the practice of psychology, counselling and other forms of therapy, as well as the popular anthology *Essential Sufism* (San Francisco, 1997).

[817] See the fascinating study by W. Begley, "The Myth of the Taj Mahal and a New Theory of Its Symbolic Meaning" (*The Art Bulletin* 61:1, March 1979). Begley's pioneering study is another extraordinary example of fundamental, undeniably direct influences by Ibn 'Arabī (in this case actual architect's books and notes directly based on the eschatological/cosmological chapter 371 of the *Futūhāt*) which would have been absolutely invisible were it not for a particular 'chance' discovery of that key historical link.

[818] In addition to the helpful description of the various offshoots of Hazrat Inayat Khan's legacy in the articles cited at **n. 37** above, see above all the fascinating documentation contained in the many contributions to *A Pearl in Wine: Essays on the Life, Music and Sufism of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, ed. Z. Inayat Khan (New Lebanon, 2001). This new book is important not only for its valuable detailed historical and background studies (which are virtually non-existent even for fairly recent Sufi figures in so many cases), but perhaps especially for its more autobiographical descriptions in the concluding section, which again provide the indispensable and necessarily highly individual 'spiritual phenomenology' which—taken together—is the actual human reality on which any reliable collective activity and description actually depends. The case studies detailed there illustrate how much the 'fantastic' and extraordinary tales and experiences (of dreams, illuminations, calls, spiritual coincidences, 'miracles' and the like) scattered throughout Ibn 'Arabī's *Futúhāt*, in particular, continue to be lived and experienced in contemporary contexts in strikingly similar forms and expressions.

visible (such as the best-selling Rumi translations of Robert Bly and Coleman Barks) to the no less important level of each such individual's spiritual growth and active contributions to their wider community. In each case, the profusion and creative diversity of those actual reactions powerfully defies the text-based historian's inherited vocabulary and conceptual baggage of influences, traditions, communities, teachers and the like. For example, some of the most visible and effective influences of Ibn 'Arabi in the U.S., by several of the channels of communication above, have been on individuals who have gone on to be particularly active in various Jewish 'renewal' movements.[819] But while those phenomena and the deeper reasons for that particular influence might seem quite obvious to religious studies specialists (at least those working in North America), they would no doubt require a considerably more extensive explanation for those coming from more distant cultural contexts .

In conclusion, therefore, it may be helpful to draw a few more explicit connections between this range of contemporary phenomena and potential case-studies we have just mentioned and the broader interpretive issues of 'communication' and 'influence' outlined at the beginning of this essay. The focus of the field of academic religious studies (and of Islamic studies within it) has recently been turning toward the more publicly interesting (and intellectually apparently less demanding) study of contemporary religious phenomena. But all too often such contemporary studies have betrayed the unfortunate unconscious importation of popular journalistic stereotypes and other misplaced assumptions which can quickly lead to profoundly far-reaching misunderstandings and misrepresentation of the religious and cultural phenomena in question. For that reason, a few further contextual explanations (and heuristic suggestions) may be in order.

First, in almost all of the cases we have mentioned above, the 'communicators' in question have *not* been trying to use Ibn 'Arabī and his ideas primarily in order to 'convert' people either to Islam or to any particular Sufi order or other social grouping. Whether we are referring to academics, artists, or activists and creators, any such suggestion (or assumption) would completely misrepresent the intentions of most of these communicators and their wider audiences alike. Secondly, if anyone wishes to explore in an accurate and reliable fashion the actual spectrum of influences of the writings, music, therapeutic methods, institutions and the like created by those many individuals mentioned above, they would have to begin (and constantly remain) on the plane of the *actual spiritual autobiographies* of the different individuals so influenced. (In other words, reductively 'sociological', quantitative approaches and assumptions are normally applied in these domains only by researchers who haven't seriously thought about the actual interpretive schemas they are assuming and applying.) Finally, for most of the effective communicators mentioned above, questions about what is or is not 'Muslim' (or 'Buddhist', etc., whatever such monolithic terms might mean) in these particular contexts—whether we are speaking of communicator, audience, or the cultural symbols through which communication is possible—are not (indeed practically cannot) be at the centre of their practical efforts at communication, which have to remain focused on their *real spiritual effects and influences* on their given audience, within its given cultural milieu, if their efforts are to have any lasting fruits. Indeed, as we suggest in conclusion, the wider parameters of spiritual communication in the modern world may be

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[819] One might add, of course, that there are many more obvious and more publicly visible examples, in that general context, of an even broader range of recent parallel Buddhist influences; but it is certainly not hard to see why there would be more reticence, in current political circumstances, about openly admitting Islamic influences in such situations.

shifting in ways that open up new possibilities of communication and creative influence that either transcend or practically replace earlier historical forms, categories and assumptions in this field.

Translating the 'Meccan Illuminations': Toward a 'New Science' of Spirituality?

So where does this brief sketch of a history leave us, particularly when we turn our attention outside the historically 'Islamic world'?[820] If we can project forward from past historical experience, there are a least two domains in which the appeal and development of Ibn 'Arabī's heritage beyond that earlier historical setting is likely to continue to grow in coming decades. In both those cases (as in the Islamic past), that wider potential interest in his work is likely to arise not directly from the study of Ibn 'Arabī's writings themselves, but rather from compelling new historical situations where—as in the anecdote with which we opened this article—the unavoidable need for 'something like' the Shaykh's guiding ideas and conceptions will become increasingly apparent to people from many different religious and cultural backgrounds. The first domain has to do with Ibn 'Arabī's profoundly rooted explanation of the inevitability and essential good which is embodied and expressed in the diversity of human understandings and expressions of our spiritual nature (including, but by no means limited to, the diversities of what different cultures arbitrarily happen to call 'religious' life and activity).   The ultimate fruit—and practical challenge—of Ibn 'Arabī's insight here is a true mutual understanding which goes far beyond what we ordinarily think of as tolerance, as a kind of grudging acceptance of the political necessity of the 'other'. That process of developing genuine mutual understanding itself is always a task, a 'work in progress' which is very hard for anyone to realise—and which is scarcely emphasized in the most public representatives of any of the monotheistic religions—but which lies at the practical and metaphysical centre of Ibn 'Arabī's worldview, and of the Islamic humanities more generally. It should be clear enough, without any detailed explanation, how ongoing world-historical developments will increasingly oblige people of every religious background to at least contemplate what Ibn 'Arabī has to teach in this regard.

The second domain in which Ibn 'Arabī's ideas are likely to have an increasing appeal is in some ways a wider practical extension of the point we have just made. The unprecedented global technological and economic transformations in the human situation through which we are living, and their still largely unpredictable cultural and political consequences, have so far had as their universal consequences (1) a severing of essential relations with the natural world and natural orders which were presupposed in the ritual and symbolism of every traditional religion; (2) a world-wide 'homogenisation' and reduction of the traditionally rich and diverse local forms of social and cultural life (including 'religion'); and (3) a strong corresponding political and ideological tendency to reduce the reality of human beings to a relatively narrow set of publicly visible social and 'ethical' needs—whether that politicising tendency is expressed in overt forms of totalitarianism or in more subtle forms of socio-economic conditioning. Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of human beings and their place in the universe (along with any number of other wisdom traditions, to be sure) would suggest that each of those three recent global tendencies cannot ultimately be sustained, and that theomorphic beings will inevitably resist, revolt and creatively move

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[820] The analysis of the growing renewal of interest in Ibn 'Arabī in all parts of the historically Islamic world, which we have partially undertaken elsewhere (see our articles in **note 2 above**), would take us in very different directions. However, those directions again illustrate the importance of close attention to the particular contexts and audiences in question in each case.

beyond those recent destructive historical developments in many different ways. To the extent that such creative reactions do develop, growing numbers of people (and not only Muslims) are likely to continue to find inspiration and justification for their intuitions—and for their personal creative inspirations—in what Ibn 'Arabī has to teach about the spiritual necessity and complementarity of the 'invisible' spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of human being.

If Ibn 'Arabī's inspirations in both these broad areas are to become more widely accessible, one indispensable practical condition for that is the useful translation (with the necessary explanations and contextual matter) of much of his magnum opus, the 'Meccan Illuminations' (*al-Futūhāt al-Makkīya*).[821] As already noted above, it is a curious fact that probably the dominant strands of his influence up to now, whether in the Islamic world or more recently in the West, have concerned his much shorter, though no less challenging, 'Bezels of Wisdom' (*Fusūs al-Hikam*)—along with the vast commentary literature, largely philosophico-theological in nature, which rapidly grew up around that work. The *Futūhāt*, as more and more students are beginning to understand, is something unique and very different: one might say that it offers a 'phenomenology of spiritual life' so comprehensive, detailed and subtle in its depiction of the actual laws and regularities of spiritual experience that nothing significant has escaped its purview. Certainly its contents provide a unique and uniquely powerful argument for Ibn 'Arabī's conception of the real universality and all-inclusiveness of the 'Muhammadan Reality'—a key symbolic expression which unfortunately is too often misunderstood (whether in English or Arabic) to mean something like the exact opposite of what Ibn 'Arabī intended. It is hard to convey the excitement and sense of constant discovery that always accompanies the exploration and unfolding of this immense work: without exaggeration, it is surely the equivalent in this domain of human spirituality of what the 'New World' must have seemed to its first explorers half a millennium ago. As with truly timeless creations (Shakespeare, Plato and their like), one always comes back to the *Futūhāt* at each occasion wondering why one had been spending time on anything else. Although it would be foolhardy to try to predict the wider impact of its gradual unveiling, certainly that discovery process will change the ideas of anyone who still believes that Ibn 'Arabī's intentions can be summarised or reduced to a sort of intellectual 'system', to any unambiguous 'doctrine' or rigid set of purely theological teachings or beliefs.

People often describe the prevailing approach of that historically recent 'science of religions,' which is increasingly based on ideas ultimately derived from Ibn 'Arabī, as a kind of '*phenomenology*': i.e, as an approach to uncovering the laws and regularities underlying 'religious' phenomena at the different levels or domains of reality—political, social, ritual, symbolic, etc. Having said that, anyone working in the field of religious studies is well aware that there are all sorts of unwritten taboos still in operation—most obviously, in its continued primary focus on earlier (and safely dead) historical systems and theological doctrines and 'beliefs', and in the embarrassed scholarly reluctance to approach a genuinely comprehensive phenomenology of spiritual experience in the way one finds much more clearly set out in either the immense range of popular spiritual literatures, or in the closely related literatures of fields like psychology, medicine and various forms of therapy.   In other words, the folk who populate this

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[821] See further discussion of this theme in our new Introduction to the two volumes of *The Meccan Revelations* which includes (vol. I) the extensive English translations from the *Futūhāt* (by W. Chittick and J. Morris) originally published by Sindbad (Paris, 1989), together with the extensive references to other recent translations and useful studies included in that Introduction.

particular scholarly universe are normally still far removed from that 'subjective objectivity' which was so typical of that unique '*qawm*' (the 'people of God') whose experiences and insights are the constant subject and reference-point of Ibn 'Arabī's '*Meccan Illuminations*'.

As I have recently discussed at greater length in other places,[822] it is clear to all concerned that there is a growing convergence today, where the phenomenology of spiritual life is concerned, between the historical data and approaches of the rapidly expanding new academic discipline of religious studies and a wide range of closely related scientific and therapeutic fields. As that convergence continues to unfold, more and more researchers will find themselves doing, in our own time, what Ibn 'Arabī so thoroughly and far-sightedly undertook in his *Futūhāt*. This 'new science' in the making may one day have more solid roots and foundations than that more formalistic and restricted 'comparative philosophy' once envisaged by Professor Izutsu, but in this field he will surely continue to be viewed as a key pioneer, another Columbus in his vision, his determination and his indefatigable contributions to this deeper understanding of our common human nature and destiny.

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[822] A number of studies on this theme (especially as it relates to the philosophy of Mulla Sadra and its continuation in the more recent works of Ostad Elahi) are brought together in our recent volume *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation* **(n. 10 above).**

"Second Readings": Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūḥāt* and the Renewal of Islamic Thought

Like almost all of my teachers and many contemporary Western students of Ibn 'Arabī, I was initially drawn to his works—and especially his *Fusūs al-Hikam* and its famous commentators—by their fruitful perspectives of universality, by their rich and proven potential for helping us to grasp and understand the deeper unities and dimensions of order ultimately underlying the diversities so manifest both within and between each of the world's great religious traditions. So when we received the invitation to speak here at Cordoba on some particularly significant ongoing topic in the study of the Shaykh's works, I was tempted at first to take up two major subjects that I (along with other scholars in religious studies) have been focusing on in recent years, and which are quite directly connected to inter-religious understanding and to the effective elaboration of a global human civilisation; both these topics are richly illustrated throughout the *Futūḥāt* and other later, still largely unstudied works of Ibn 'Arabī. The first of those subjects is his incomparably detailed, profoundly autobiographical phenomenology of spiritual experience, a central dimension of the *Futūḥāt* that is still almost unmentioned in Western-language studies of that masterwork, but which is surely the most elaborate Islamic contribution to the eventual multi-disciplinary elaboration of a comprehensive human science of spirituality.   The second such topic is the further elaboration of Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of the integrality of *walāya*—of the divine 'Proximity' in all its ongoing human spiritual manifestations—to all the phenomenological facets of spiritual life so richly developed in the *Futūḥāt*, an immense, necessarily cooperative and trans-generational task which must go far beyond Michel Chodkiewicz' masterly groundbreaking studies of Ibn 'Arabī's typologies of prophecy and sainthood. However, both of those key fields of religious and spiritual research are so immense, so complex, and at such preliminary stages of elaboration that they surely defy any adequate effort of outline or summary at this point.

Instead, I have chosen for this symposium a relatively narrower and far more topical subject, one whose pertinence and immediate practical significance should be evident to anyone even remotely following contemporary news and political events, although it is particularly unavoidable for Muslims living anywhere in the world today. To put it as simply as possible, Ibn 'Arabī's works—and more specifically, his immense *Meccan Illuminations*—offer what is perhaps a unique antidote to the manifold ravages of contemporary Islamist ideologies.

 As we are all reminded almost daily, most regions of the traditional 'Muslim world' have recently moved, often in the space of only one or two generations, from an agrarian material, cultural and social world whose almost unimaginably diverse and elaborate moral and spiritual forms were slowly elaborated over many centuries—into a largely homogeneous, but profoundly unfamiliar material, cultural and social situation that is most often experienced as imposed (rather than created) and apparently devoid of meaningful moral and spiritual forms. (The familiar situation of large-scale emigration—of *muhājirūn* of all sorts—has itself been only one particularly dramatic or visible illustration of that near-universal phenomenon of sudden cultural deracination and destruction.) The resulting void, almost everywhere, has quickly been filled by bizarre new ideological hybrids—ad hoc compounds of a handful of Marxist/fascist and pseudo-Islamic symbols often only tenuously related to their ostensible ideological precursors (*salafī*, Wahhābī, Hanbalī, etc.) in earlier generations—claiming to offer quick, easy, and universally applicable political and cultural solutions to that undeniably painful condition of widespread anomie and disorientation. For those who have personally lived through that historical transformation—which has successively touched different regions of the world, with unfortunately very similar results and reactions, over the past two centuries—their immediate reaction

has often been one of nostalgic loss and understandable efforts to somehow restore, preserve or revivify those centuries-old integral spiritual and cultural traditions within today's radically transformed conditions of life.

However, what anyone who has actually lived through the stages of that transformation, beginning with a firsthand experience of traditional agrarian life, finds almost impossible to imagine is the way that the prevailing Islamist ideologies—like the wider mass-media system of which they are only a part—act as a kind of magical cultural and spiritual 'eraser', a subtly omnipresent, genuine weapon of mass cultural destruction systematically effacing any effective memory of the complex responsibilities, creative richness, and slowly accumulated socio-cultural discoveries and ethical balances (in a word, the *adab*) of preceding religio-cultural traditions. Fortunately, of course, people do eventually have to experience for themselves the disastrous practical consequences of these familiar dualist ideologies (whatever their local symbolic colouring), either through the perpetual violence they naturally engender, or else through personally discovering the spiritual, intellectual and moral void that underlies their seductively appealing myths and popular slogans. Yet when someone does make that discovery today, they also find themselves in a historically unique and remarkably demanding situation: that challenging new situation—which so poignantly demands of thousands concrete individual efforts of spiritual research (*ijtihād*), creativity, and innovation once only limited to a handful of individuals in each generation— helps to explain the particular relevance of Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūhāt* for Muslims in our own time, as we shall explore in the remainder of this paper.

In short, given the radical historical transformations underlying the momentarily pervasive appeal of today's reductionist ideologies, the only lastingly effective alternative to such ideology is in most cases no longer the return to any sort of surviving intact tradition—all the more so when the political supporters of any Islamist ideology, as we can everywhere see in practice, immediately recognise and seek to destroy any alternative *genuinely* spiritual authorities and effective spiritual forms, rightly perceived as their most profoundly dangerous enemies. Instead, whatever the particular cultural domain in question, anyone seeking a more solid foundation in a reality beyond ideology (and the insubstantial social consensus that momentarily lends it credence) is *individually forced to rediscover and to re-create the essential spiritual connection between the inherited forms and symbols of Islamic revelation and the actual living spiritual realities to which they now refer in their own particular individual circumstances.* And this active process of individual spiritual rediscovery is precisely what Ibn 'Arabī forces his readers to do on virtually every page of his aptly named *Futūhāt*—since for every reader, each of those uniquely individual spiritual 'openings' can only come from one source….

The practical result of the Shaykh's unique language in the *Futūhāt*—and an experience which I am sure is often shared by many students of that work—is that one constantly has the sense that Ibn 'Arabī wrote this book not for people of some earlier century and culture, but precisely for the very particular situation and dilemmas of people of our own time. If nothing else, this paper may at least help us to understand why that might be so.

Scripture, Language, and Intention:

As an academic trained in philosophy and theology, my own natural expectation when approaching an unfamiliar thinker or spiritual writer—and one even more unconsciously assumed by most of my students—is to begin with a more or less detailed outline of that particular author's system of thought, of his or her guiding ideas and their intrinsic interconnections. Although heroic efforts have been made, as we all know, to provide such pedagogically useful summary introductions to Ibn 'Arabī's *Fusūs al-*

Hikam, there are a whole range of reasons why that familiar systematic approach simply will not work with the *Futūhāt*—reasons which certainly help to explain why there is no corresponding historical tradition of extensive commentary on that work as a whole. Here, in keeping with the topic of this paper, we will focus on a few distinctive structural and rhetorical features of the *Futūhāt* which make it such an effective antidote to the underlying appeals and assumptions of any form of religious ideology.

The first, and perhaps the most important, of those defining features—and one radically different from many of Ibn 'Arabī's other prolific writings—is that the *Futūhāt* is above all an encyclopedic work of Islamic *learning*, presupposing on virtually every page a serious knowledge of both the Qur'an and standard hadith collections; of the historically developed interpretive 'religious sciences' (*kalām*, *fiqh*, *usūl*, etc.) and ancillary linguistic and historical fields of learning; and of all the rational philosophic and scientific disciplines (logic, cosmology, physiology, etc.) of that age. As such, the *Futūhāt* is quite radically unlike most of what we normally consider 'Sufi' literature and poetry (including much of the rest of Ibn 'Arabī's own literary production). Yet at the same time, most of that book would certainly be incomprehensible to anyone not intimately familiar with the teachings, practices, and experiential stages of the spiritual path extant in Ibn 'Arabī's own time.

Now the clearly intentional result of the Shaykh's dizzyingly complex, constantly shifting interplay of different, but ultimately and necessarily complementary perspectives, methods, assumptions, and motivations is essentially twofold. First, any reader—whatever their particular background and starting point—who is inwardly blinded (with regard to any of the many intellectual and spiritual faculties Ibn 'Arabī constantly calls upon) by this or that particular limited set of 'beliefs' (i.e., by their own personal ideology, both conscious and unconscious) will only be able to grasp what they *already* 'knew' (i.e., believed that they knew) before approaching this work, and will soon set this book aside. Aptly prepared readers, on the other hand, will again and again discover—with increasing frequency, depth and comprehensiveness of vision—those indispensable spiritual insights and 'openings' which are the book's source and raison d'etre: i.e., a lifelong unfolding process of illumination of the spiritual meanings conveyed and intended by the Qur'an and the actual Prophetic teachings.[823]

But in addition to the obviously transformed and greatly intensified motivation arising from such discoveries, the personal experience of those 'openings' themselves, at each particular point, simultaneously reveals and grounds a crucial *critical discernment* of the limitations, grounds, and potential usefulness of each of the multitude of historically elaborated 'sciences' (*'ulūm*, both religious and philosophico-scientific) claiming to substitute for the actual illuminating process and inimitable reality of inspired 'opening'. Thus the serious and properly apt reader is gradually led to discover the absolutely indispensable difference between truly knowing and 'following' (in Ibn 'Arabī's very special and extraordinarily demanding spiritual sense) the *realities* of the prophets and their trans-historically unfolding teaching—directly here and now, not based on the endless pitfalls of external historical transmission—and simply 'imitating' (*taqlīd*) this or that partial account or distorted interpretation of

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[823] See the detailed discussion and illustration of this subject in ***Ibn 'Arabī's Rhetoric of Realisation: Keys to Reading and 'Translating' the Meccan Illuminations***; **Part I in *Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī Society*, vol. XXXIII (2003), pp. 54-99; Part II, vol. XXXIV (2003), pp. 103-145.** More extensively translated illustrations will be found in the relevant chapters of our forthcoming volume, *The Reflective Heart: Discovering Spiritual Intelligence in Ibn 'Arabī's "Meccan Illuminations."*

that actual reality. And with that discernment comes the twofold ability both to use and transform those socially instrumental inherited intellectual and social traditions (so that they better reflect and communicate the actual divine prophetic intentions), but also to create *new forms of more effective communication, teaching*, *and guidance* just as was once done by the historical creators and elaborators of those earlier traditions.

The best illustration of how this process has worked in the past is to be found in the example of those dozens of earlier historical students of Ibn 'Arabī who created or defended those manifold forms of the Islamic humanities—as philosophers, poets, theologians, Sufis, spiritual teachers, and so on—which underpinned the dramatic spread of Islamicate cultural and spiritual forms across so much of Asia and Europe in the centuries immediately following Ibn 'Arabī's death. It is surely no accident if virtually every significant contemporary scholar writing on Ibn 'Arabī—across a vast range of languages and cultures today—has simultaneously devoted much of their career to studying and communicating the crucial contributions of many of those other, later creative Muslim figures.[824]

Each of the fundamental points just made here should be kept in mind as we turn now to a bare enumeration of some of the key issues and principles in the *Futūhāt* which offer a dramatic alternative to contemporary Islamist ideologies. What is actually important and so uniquely valuable in the study of this work is not these particular abstract principles in their verbal or conceptual form ('freedom', for example)—but rather the actual mysterious initiatic *process* of rhetoric, contextualisation and allusion (*ishārāt*) through which the Shaykh gradually leads his properly prepared students to a real apprehension of each of those realities. And for that, there is no substitute for his own words.

BALANCING PHILOSOPHICAL TENSIONS:

When we look at Ibn 'Arabī's distinctive way of teaching in his *Futūhāt* from the highly practical perspective of its contrasts with contemporary Islamist ideologies, one of the most striking features of his approach there—which again is constantly reflected in the unique forms of language and structure we have just highlighted—is the ways those characteristic rhetorical devices force his readers to maintain a careful balance (at once spiritually, intellectually, and practically) between intrinsic, unavoidably contrasting—and potentially warring or radically conflicting—tendencies within each human being and likewise within the ambient wider social order. (In this respect, as in so many others, Ibn 'Arabī's writings are an extraordinary mirror, in Islamic civilisation, of the central guiding concerns and structures of Plato's dialogues, and of the *I Ching*.) In each case, the only grounded, harmonious resolution of those unavoidable recurrent human tensions is to be found in that realized character trait of *active spiritual discernment* (*taqwā*, in its root Qur'anic sense) which is evidently the ultimate aim of this remarkable text.

While the catalogue of those philosophical and theological tensions could be extended indefinitely, it is sufficient to mention three particular points in which Ibn 'Arabī's approach provides a radical contrast to

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[824] For a detailed survey and critical overview of many of those recent historical studies and contributions, see the collected internet volume ***Ibn 'Arabi and His Interpreters: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Perspectives,*** including fifteen longer articles and studies and twenty related book reviews (all published earlier in various journals and collective volumes), available (for free downloading) on the website of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society.

contemporary ideologies. The first, which can be amply illustrated from within every religious tradition, is the obvious ongoing tension between assertions of the inalienable right and responsibility of individual human spiritual freedom (a point to be explored in more detail below) and the diverse practical needs for a stable, structured social order, necessarily grounded in a host of unexamined beliefs and traditions. The second area, dramatically heightened throughout the Qur'an itself, is the ongoing tension between the familiar human aims and responsibilities required by the life of 'this lower world' (*al-dunyā*) and those relating directly to the spiritual dimension of our being and experience (*al-ākhira*). And the third essential tension flows from the fundamental, observable, apparently irreducible diversity of spiritual and all other natural aptitudes and capacities across any existing set of human beings.

Now on each of these three points, there is no question that Ibn 'Arabī's most central teachings and most passionately defended insights in his *Futūhāt* often do provide a radical contrast to popular religious ideologies of both our own era and his own. Indeed even without referring to any of his writings at all, the commonplace caricatural stereotypes of his own culture (only heightened in the familiar cartoon-speak of contemporary ideologies) would surely depict him—along with many other Sufis—as one of the most uncompromising representatives of the most radically spiritual and dangerously unrealistic 'extremes' in regard to each of those three key areas of tension. Yet at the same time, one could also cite any number of passages—whether from the *Futūhāt* or from other more public and topical epistles—and biographical incidents from his own life which could equally be taken as apparent documentary 'proof' of his apparently thorough acceptance of many contemporary religious traditions, assumptions, and practices which themselves would seem to be called into question by principles and arguments that are unambiguously articulated at other places in the *Futūhāt*. Thus interpreters wishing to be drawn into such ongoing polemics and controversies can always selectively manufacture as many 'Ibn 'Arabī's in their own image as they like—as has already been so prolifically illustrated in the centuries of well-studied disputes surrounding his *Fusūs al-Hikam*, down to our own day.[825]

In reality, critics and superficial interpreters seeking to stereotype Ibn 'Arabī in this one-sided fashion—whether they do so with an admiring or negative aim in mind—always systematically ignore his fundamental guidance, repeated explicitly throughout the long Introduction to his *Futūhāt*, concerning the different intended levels and types of his readers, and his corresponding 'scattering'—just as throughout the Qur'an—of those challenging spiritual and metaphysical insights accessible only to the most apt and suitably prepared of his readers.[826] And above all, they clearly miss out, at the same time, on the even more demanding educational opportunities for acquiring genuine ethical, spiritual and political wisdom which flow from the ongoing practical necessity of recognizing and appropriately

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[825] See numerous references to those polemics in the collected studies (especially on Ibn Khaldun) and reviews cited in the preceding note.

[826] **See *How to Study the Futūhāt: Ibn 'Arabī's Own Advice*, in the *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī: 750th Anniversary Commemoration Volume*, ed. S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan, Shaftesbury/ Rockport, Element Books, 1993, pp. 73-89;** and the more recent article cited in note 1 above concerning this key opening section of the *Futūhāt* and its fundamental implications for the study and proper interpretation of that work.

integrating and guiding each of those forms of potential in every individual we encounter in the spiritual crucible of everyday life—a central prophetic attribute illustrated in immense detail throughout the standard collections of hadith.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT:

In this section, we begin by contrasting the basic operative assumptions of contemporary politico-religious ideologies with the corresponding fundamental principles articulated in key passages of Ibn 'Arabī's *Meccan Illuminations*. (The actual translation and analysis of those extensive passages scattered throughout the *Futūhāt* is the subject of a much larger book on the Shaykh's political and religious thought now in preparation.) For the purposes of this short and relatively popular presentation, we will focus here directly on the highly simplified restatement of Ibn 'Arabī's own key positions, on the assumption that almost anyone today (and certainly anyone living or working in connection with predominantly Muslim countries) is sufficiently aware of the characteristic positions and approaches of current Islamist ideologies—which are in any case not really substantially different from those of their earlier Marxist and fascist incarnations—to recognize the ways in which they are in fact diametrically opposed to Ibn 'Arabī's guiding perspectives on each of the following essential points.[827]

Presented here in terms of their logical and philosophical sequence,[828] Ibn 'Arabī's presentation of the essential *practical* conditions and natural stages of human spiritual growth—of the universal Qur'anic *dīn al-Haqq*—can be reduced to the following four essential points:

- The fundamental human right of individual *freedom, responsibility, and rational choice* (*irāda*) as the primordial prerequisite for effective spiritual learning and growth. When that is actually carried out in practice, this leads to:

- The possibility of ongoing *direct spiritual inspiration* and the manifold forms of *creativity* which are its natural outward expression in every relevant sphere of life. Multiplied by many different individual cases and situations, this naturally leads to:

- A naturally *expanding diversity* of both 'beliefs' (in the largest possible sense) and of effective actions and social and cultural expressions of that creative inspiration. The resulting recognition of that intrinsic human spiritual diversity and creativity has two further inevitable practical consequences:

- A systematic *tolerance and openness* to the infinite diversity of divine creation manifest in these evolving human forms (or in ethical terms, an ever-expanding humble awareness of our own irreducible individual ignorance and relative 'not-knowing' in the

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[827] A much more detailed academic presentation of these same principles, including illustrations (and some key translated passages) from many different sections and related topics in the *Futūhāt*, can be found in our earlier article on *Ibn 'Arabī's "Esotericism": The Problem of Spiritual Authority,* in *Studia Islamica,* LXXI (1990), pp. 37-64.

[828] Although in practice each of these points is developed in a complexly 'scattered' fashion, as already noted, throughout the *Futūhāt*. (See some representative illustrations in the article cited **in n. 5,** as well as in the forthcoming *The Reflective Heart,* **n.l above.)**

face of that infinite diversity); and in a more constructive direction, a growing awareness of the necessity and possibilities of *active, creative co-operation* in realizing, practicing and communicating the fruits of that freedom, inspiration and creativity.

However, since each of these four fundamental principles is likely to seem completely 'obvious' and unquestioned to anyone—whatever their outward religious tradition and historical situation—consciously involved in the actual processes of spiritual work, it is important to stress once again that Ibn 'Arabī's guiding intention, whenever he touches on these basic practical spiritual principles, has nothing to do with simply encouraging with some kind of particular theological statement or conscious 'belief' in these principles as such, but rather with the successful encouragement of their practical realisation and actual implementation. And that actual realisation naturally and inevitably takes many outwardly quite different forms, as we can readily see—and as Ibn 'Arabī himself often implicitly and sometimes even explicitly acknowledges—in the context of the endlessly complex and evolving historical expressions of Sufism, or of familiar cognate movements in other religious traditions. As we can readily see in the complexity of real-life circumstances (e.g., already simply in the immediate circle of relations with our particular family, friends and colleagues), the effective awakening and actualisation of these principles must constantly be changing and appropriately adapted to the particular characters, possibilities, and limitations of each particular person and situation. And like so much of the rest of Sufi literature, in every Islamic language, many of Ibn 'Arabī's most popular writings, from poetry to short epistles on practical spiritual guidance, clearly reflect those shifting practical contexts and concerns at the levels of very different audiences.

But that wider background and spectrum of possibilities of teaching and guidance only serves to highlight the most dramatic and singular quality of the Shaykh's magnum opus. That is the way, as we have already noted, that the *Futūhāt* is so systematically devoted to only three very particular elements in that wider process of human spiritual growth: the actual language and teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet; the full spectrum of interpretive schools and 'sciences' that were gradually developed or applied over many centuries in the process of elaboration and application of those revelations; and finally—and surely the most distinctive feature of this particular work—the constant evocation of those key spiritual experiences, insights and guidance of the *awliyā'* (including the prophets, saints, and their true spiritual 'heirs', including above all Ibn 'Arabī himself) which can, if only potentially, provide the indispensable keys to the deeper understanding and active appropriation of the inherited outward forms of revelation.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE 'RETURN': A SECOND READING

Now what is unique about that peculiar 'spiritual alchemy' flowing from Ibn 'Arabī's distinctive mixing of these three constituent elements of the *Futūhāt*—although this transforming process can really only be appreciated by actually reading and studying that text itself—is that the gradual integration of the approach and insights of the *awliyā'*, in the process of each reader's spiritual work, constantly involves all sorts of revealing criticism, debunking, and 'deconstruction' of the inherited schools of interpretation. Only in this particular context that ongoing critical element emerges primarily through *the realized contrast between those alternative systems of belief and practice and the actual apprehension of spiritual meanings and ends*—and *not* through abstract intellectual criteria (whether logical, historical, ethical, socio-political and so on) which no doubt reveal many of the same failings, but without providing any truly effective and grounded alternative. In the latter case, the all too familiar result is an

ongoing process of polemics[829] and repeated cyclical 'revolutions' that lead only to further reiteration of the same inadequate alternatives. Whereas from the perspective of actual spiritual realization, the accomplished reader of the *Futūhāt* becomes able to do two further important things which do go beyond just a simple 'critique' of inherited beliefs and forms of interpretation. Those two practical, and inherently political, skills are (a) the ability to *use* the forms of the traditional religious sciences (and of underlying popular beliefs and assumptions more generally) as more effective instruments for spiritual guidance and direction[830]; and (b) the no less indispensable ability to recognize the relevant natural *limitations*—whether those be individual or collective—restricting various forms of spiritual development, and the corresponding wide range of irreducible natural endowments and worldly realities that are also embodied and reflected in the ostensibly 'religious' beliefs and institutions of any age. When it is read this way, the *Futūhāt* is not simply a masterpiece of spiritual insight and guidance, but a remarkably instructive and profound handbook of practical political and ethical wisdom. That additional dimension is perhaps most obvious in the famous long concluding chapter 560 of that work, a vast compendium of ethical and spiritual advice, drawn indiscriminately from all the diverse earlier traditions integrated in classical Islamic culture, which is meant to be read in radically different ways by 'those who have arrived' (at the end of the Path, and of these 'openings') and by those who are only setting out.

Seen from that culminating perspective of realization and right guidance, the *Meccan Illuminations*—like so many masterpieces—look very different indeed, and continue to teach ongoing and equally indispensable lessons, when one begins to read them through 'for a second time', in light of their conclusion. One of the repeated leitmotifs of this work, for example, is the ongoing contrast, already quite familiar from any number of other Sufi teachers and writers, between the revealed divine inspiration (*shar'*) of the prophets and *awliyā'*—which both reveals and points to the 'unseen' realities of our spiritual existence and destiny—and the contrasting dramatic limitations of natural wisdom and the unaided worldly intellect (*'aql*), everywhere naturally concerned only with the necessary ends of our worldly existence (*masālih*). That recurrent contrast is so dramatic that first-time readers are understandably tempted to take such frequent passages as an unrestricted, 'otherworldly' or 'mystical' criticism of any concern with the things of this world. Or those readers might likewise be tempted to draw a radical contrast between certain historical human communities ostensibly guided by divine revelation (*shar'*) and other particular human associations somehow based solely on natural wisdom and worldly ends. (I.e., by 'religious' and 'secular' communities, to use the language of contemporary ideologies and media stereotypes.) And interestingly enough, both of these common first impressions are normally shared by readers who love Ibn 'Arabī, and by those who detest him.

Those initial impressions, however, tend to give way to a new set of far more nuanced and balanced insights once a reader has begun to appreciate fully, on the basis of personal experience and practice, further realities that could be added to (or included within) the fourth natural 'stage' of spiritual development already mentioned. Those would include (a) the inherent limitations on each given (at least non-prophetic!) individual's possible degree of accomplished inspiration and immediate spiritual

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[829] *Jidāl* and *mujādala*: one of the most frequently repeated leitmotifs in the *Futūhāt* is Ibn 'Arabī's pointed reminder of what the Qur'an actually says about such actions and approaches.

[830] As could be illustrated, for example, in the later works of al-Ghazali, such as the *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*.

insight; (b) the fundamental role of diversity and 'complementarity' of inspired insight and creative accomplishments in any wider appreciation of the divine plan and in any community, large or small; and (c) a heightened appreciation of the ongoing practical political necessities of consensus, compromise, and vast areas of providentially unconscious, conventional 'beliefs' and unexamined assumptions in enabling and maintaining any stable larger political and social order. From the perspective of these culminating realizations, interestingly enough, most of the hadith, along with other traditional sources concerning the life of the Prophet and Companions (or of early Islamic history), can be read and understood in other lights which only complement their more familiar uses within each of the religious sciences and spiritual traditions of Islam. That is yet another dimension of 'second reading' suggested by the eventual reflective assimilation and deeper appreciation of these 'openings'.

In conclusion, I hope that these final considerations will at the very least suggest one particularly compelling answer to the often-repeated and quite understandable question which students often ask: "Why are there no extended commentaries on Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūhāt* ?" Perhaps that is because, as we can see in the lives and works of so many of its earlier Muslim students and readers, the only appropriate response to *these* openings lies in effective creative action and reflection—in what Ibn 'Arabī himself, following as always the Prophetic example and exhortation, calls 'good-and-beautiful innovation', *bid'a hasana*.

If the dramatic encounter in 12th-century Cordoba of Ibn Rushd and the young Ibn 'Arabi was indeed emblematic, as Henry Corbin has so memorably suggested, of the very different subsequent trajectories of philosophy in the Islamic 'East' and the Latin Christian 'West', such a judgment—like the sharply contrasting accounts and value-judgments of Renan and other 19th-century 'rationalists'—may also reflect criteria of originality and later significance which were imposed from *outside* the actual historical traditions in question. For what the historian of self-consciously philosophical schools, texts and traditions can actually observe, throughout much of the next four centuries, from the Latin West to the intellectual centres of the post-Mongol Eastern Islamic lands, is in fact the ongoing institutional preponderance, in ever more scholasticised versions, of Avicenna's systematic, heavily theologised metaphysics and logic, including his central political claim of the true philosopher-theologians as the rightful interpreters of the Prophetic legacy.[831]   And in post-Safavid Iran, of course, that medieval 'marriage of convenience' of Avicennan scholastic philosophy and political theology has dramatically and quite publicly persisted, in religious education and many related domains, down to the present century.[832]   In other words, when we compare the ongoing historical influences of the key philosophical figures of 12th-century Cordoba and Safavid Isfahan, what is actually visible to the intellectual and cultural historian is *not* at all the mythical divergence of 'rationalist' and 'mystical' (or 'obscurantist', etc.) cultural directions popularised by Renan and other 19th-century European positivists.[833]   Instead, what no one can deny is the lasting, remarkable successful institutionalised persistence in both civilisations of one key feature *equally* present in both Averroes and Avicenna—that is, of al-Farabi's formative vision of the central guiding political role of the philosopher-theologians, whether they be Christian or Muslim (or even, more recently, Marxist).

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[831] See our detailed historical discussion of Ibn Sina's 'Farabian' intentions and procedures underlying his extraordinary historical achievement in "The Philosopher-Prophet in Avicenna's Political Philosophy," chapter 4 of *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*.

[832] This very survival suggests another as yet largely unexplored historical mystery: Why this central persistence of Avicennan philosophy/theology throughout the Shiite schools of Iran and Iraq, alongside the gradual disappearance of Avicenna and related philosophical studies from religious education in other Islamic centres of high culture where such studies were once an important subject, as in Mogul India and throughout the Ottoman world? Was it the result of distinctive sociological, economic or political shifts in the roles of Sunni *madrasas* and their graduates? Or due to internal or external (colonial) radical political shocks, including the competing projects and claims of Ibn Taymiyya-inspired 'reformers'? This vast historical problem is at least as challenging as the much-mooted decline of the traditions of 'Islamic science', but still virtually unstudied.

[833] It is well known that their ostensibly 'historical' views of 'Averroism'—whether in France, Spain or the fragmented polities of German-speaking lands in the 19th century—reflected dramatic earlier and contemporary political struggles of various anti-clerical groups with the ecclesiastical authorities and political groups locally allied with them, political issues which of course were often central in Catholic countries on through the last (20th) century.

In this paper, therefore, we would like to set aside those familiar 19ᵗʰ-century myths and turn our attention instead to those recurrent 'subversive' challenges, in the specific domain of *spiritual* experience and reality, that have periodically tended to undermine the overarching claims to religious and political authority shared by the theological successors of both Avicenna and Averroes. Our starting point is a real and revealing dialectic intermittently observable throughout later Islamic thought: i.e., the ongoing tensions between the conflicting demands of spiritual realisation (*tahqīq*), on the one hand; and on the other, the various tendencies and conditions encouraging the ongoing 'scholasticisation' of all religious and philosophical thought. There are three stages to this overview. First, a brief allusion to the actual processes by which each of the modern physical and human sciences have very slowly separated themselves from the institutional and intellectual hegemony of established scholastic forms of philosophy and theology. Secondly, a reminder of the recurrent tensions between realisation and systematisation in the problematic philosophic 'revolutions' initiated by Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra— and of the ongoing challenge posed by Ibn 'Arabī and the host of earlier Muslim *muhaqqiqūn* whose efforts are essentially included within his *Meccan Illuminations* (*al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*). Thirdly, a suggestion of the current prospects for the project of a genuine 'science of spirituality'—already foreshadowed in Mulla Sadra's 'transcendent wisdom'—within the much more favourable contemporary context of the converging contributions of a wide range of sciences and earlier spiritual traditions in today's emerging global civilisation. Finally, as a helpful antidote to that still pervasive mythology of '"western" rationality' and '"eastern" spirituality' with which we began, we would like to conclude by highlighting the extraordinary pioneering role, in Islamic intellectual history, of the undeniably *'eastern'* scientist al-Biruni (d.1048 CE) in actually exploring and setting out, already a millennium ago, so many of the foundational principles of the emerging sciences of spirituality and religious life.

THE DIVORCE OF THE NATURAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES FROM SCHOLASTIC PHILOSOPHY-THEOLOGY:

Modern historians of the natural and human sciences alike have highlighted the ways the eventual seminal (re-?)turning to the empirical study of both nature and society in the European Renaissance owed so much to diverse *extra*-philosophical interests and concerns, including a wide gamut of specific theological, philosophic and theosophical schools whose various alternative perspectives, questions and criticisms together helped encourage inquiring minds to begin to question and challenge the official— heavily Avicennan, as much as 'Aristotelian'—philosophico-theological teachings institutionalised in the established ecclesiastical universities.[834] With varying degrees of accuracy and sophistication, the hagiography (and martyrology) of this gradual process of the liberation of scientific inquiry is familiar to anyone with a liberal education, even in the popular images of a figure like Galileo.

However, when we look back at the development of each natural or human science, the role of this indispensable initial aspect of critical thinking, of questioning the existing 'conventional wisdom'—which for some centuries, from Cordoba to Isfahan, long remained a systematic, theologised Aristotelianism heavily dependent on earlier Islamic philosophers and commentators—was nonetheless only one

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[834] See, for example, the well known seminal studies by Frances Yates. The normal view of Aristotle's works shared by modern classical scholars and philosophers interested in him, of course, has very little at all to do with the systematic philosopher (or philosopher-theologian) so familiar to all students of medieval philosophy and science, both in Islam and the Latin West.

dimension of a much larger picture. If we take a broad enough historical view, it is evident that in every field, certain exceptionally critical, inquisitive and insightful individuals—who later appear as neglected 'pioneers'—do arise from time to time. (An extreme case, of course, is the multi-faceted genius of al-Biruni, discussed below). However, the continuation, expansion and institutionalisation of their pioneering individual efforts obviously requires an eventual wider *collective* transformation of mentalities and an ongoing *co-operation* in investigative approaches. And both those additionally indispensable wider socio-cultural transformations are so rare, historically-speaking, that their eventual development deserves much closer attention in each specific field of study.

In the development of any domain of science, of course, what marks out the initial departure from the local 'scholasticism' is necessarily a renewed deeper attention to the actual relevant phenomena.[835] Then researchers in that field are able to move on to a search for the relevant '*descriptive*' unities. Eventually they may proceed to seek out and articulate deeper kinds of principles, explanatory hypotheses—which can then be subjected to testing and empirical verification (or falsification).   In practice, decisive breakthroughs can come at any of the four stages of this process: through the discovery of new relevant phenomena or of instruments enabling a deeper level of perception; through revelatory new concepts and perspectives; through the formulation of new 'laws' or more accurate forms of testing; and so on. And in the end, we normally witness a growing consciousness of this underlying process as a whole, as an ascending cycle of investigation, realisation and verification— inseparable aspects all aptly summed up in the marvellously apt Arabic expression *tahqīq*.

 Without entering into the detailed history of any particular science, it is helpful to recall a few familiar illustrations of this slow evolution of *tahqīq*: for example, the well-known procedures of Aristotle's biology; the careful immense 'phenomenology' of Linnaeus; the initially 'inductive' discovery of the principles and practical possibilities of genetics; and very recently, the gradual unveiling of the actual mechanisms of molecular biology in all its dimensions. Or in such human sciences as economics, sociology, psychology or political science, the similar contrast between the approaches of Aristotle and any number of other classical thinkers and historians (including analogous figures in Islamic and other civilisations); the expanded, yet still highly tentative perspectives of isolated seminal figures like Vico and Montesquieu (so deeply indebted to their contemporary vast expansion of the known historical and geographical 'world'); or the great pioneering theoreticians of the 18th and 19th centuries.   For what even those minimal examples reveal is certain distinctive characteristics that invariably appear whenever we are 'looking *backward'* at earlier stages and representatives in the evolution of a given

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[835] 'Scholasticism', in the broader sense we intend here, seems to be a natural process in every civilisation, whose multiple roots and comforts are fairly self-evident to anyone who has had a formal 'school' education—where the actual goal is simply the rote reproduction of particular outward forms of learning, rather than the encouragement of actual understanding and further investigation—in any culture or religious context. On the other hand, the ongoing collective disciplines and individual creative and intellectual demands of each modern 'science' (whether natural or human/social) are extremely difficult to build up and even harder to maintain. In this sense, historians of science are well aware that the dangers of incipient 'scholasticisation' are constantly present in each contemporary scientific discipline as well.

science.[836] First, the very partial and incomplete, apparently 'primitive' (from later perspectives) initial accounts of the actual relevant phenomena. Second, the tentative, apparently confused mixture of accurate insight and egregious errors (or apparent 'blindness') with regard to the stages of both description and the subsequent formulation of explanatory hypotheses. And finally, the (to later eyes) often bizarre persistence of elaborate efforts to re-integrate the valid new discoveries and insights— inevitably in a problematic, dialectical fashion—within the prevailing earlier schemas of thought (whether philosophy, theology, myth, earlier sciences, etc.).

Now it is this final phenomenon—i.e., the highly problematic, dialectical tension between the actual processes of *tahqīq* and their wider intellectual formulation, dissemination and eventual institutionalisation—that becomes so important when we turn our attention to the erratic development of the nascent science of spirituality both in Islamic and other comparable civilisational contexts (including our own).[837] Fortunately, since the potential 'laboratory' for spiritual research includes every human being's life, there is no problem with the individual survival and episodically more collaborative advancement of the more 'practical' dimensions of the process of *tahqīq* in this vast domain of human experience. The gradual development of the wider traditions of Islamic spirituality, already at the stage memorialised in Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūhāt*, is an extraordinary illustration of this wider repeated process, but it is closely mirrored by parallel developments in other world religious traditions.

However, a whole set of challenging new problems arises whenever individuals have sought to articulate in comprehensible intellectual terms not just practically useful, detailed 'laboratory instructions' for the essential types of spiritual work and 'research', but also the wider, newly (re-)discovered universal spiritual 'laws' and observable regularities generated by their own successful efforts of *tahqīq*— systematic intellectual conclusions which could ideally form the institutional basis for more harmoniously co-operative and lasting collective transformations of the human condition. As Plato had already beautifully dramatised in the *Phaedrus*, *Timaeus* and other dialogues (often alluding to the achievements of an already-ancient Egypt), this particular scientific and institutional endeavour inevitably encounters two major obstacles: either the intellectual, conceptual effort can quickly become separated from the indispensable ongoing processes of actual spiritual *tahqīq*; or else the actual underlying genuine 'science' (*'ilm*, in the sense of actual experiential knowing) articulated in the

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[836] In the final chapter of our recent book *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation,* we have already pointed out the remarkable ways the current state of the modern disciplines of the study of religion and of spirituality clearly mirror similar stages in the earlier development of other human and social sciences.

[837] Even undergraduate students in the study of religion (or interested 'lay' readers) simply cannot avoid today the constant necessity of a thoroughly comparative perspective on these issues and developments, given the profusion of hundreds of well-contextualised translations of key works in both practical and 'theoretical' spirituality from every major religious tradition readily available on the shelves of any well-stocked bookstore.   Thus the intellectual and practical situation today of even a beginning religion student who reads, for example, Ibn 'Arabi in the wider company of, say, the *Zohar*, Patanjali, Shankara, Meister Eckhart, Milarepa, or the *Tao Te Ching* is likely to be radically different—from the very start—from the normally expectable perspectives of a more traditional Muslim reader in past centuries. (The development of this contrast would require something like a book in itself.)

language of a given culture can all too easily become distorted, or even disappear completely, as it is submerged in the wider body of accepted opinions and mythologies/theologies (the local 'scholasticism') of the culture in question. In either case, all the essential features of *tahqīq*, of true *philo-sophia*, are quickly lost and irremediably distorted, so that the intended prospect of an ongoing, co-operative development of genuine science disappears in the all too familiar mirages of ideology, sophistry and 'miso-sophy', in all their forms.

SADRA AND IBN 'ARABI: THE ONGOING TENSION BETWEEN REALISATION (*TAHQĪQ*) AND SCHOLASTICISATION

  Nowhere in Islamic thought are those tensions we have just discussed more richly and visibly illustrated—partly because of his proximity to our own time—than in the philosophic achievement of Mulla Sadra (d. 1050/1641) and the story of its subsequent scholastic reception, both in India and in the Shiite schools of Iran and Iraq—a history which is no doubt largely familiar to many of the participants in this Conference. However, it is important to recognise that this problem has a long history in earlier Islamic thought—both specifically with regard to the science of spirituality, and in relation to the development of other universal sciences as well. Such early seminal figures as (the physician) Razi, al-Farabi, al-Biruni (see below), and the equally influential *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Safā', for example, all provide remarkable illustrations of the self-conscious, carefully crafted intellectual articulation—and lastingly influential institutionalisation—of the universal principles and procedures of *tahqīq* in their respective domains of research.[838] However, in the domain of *spiritual* research—no doubt reflecting its particularly visible and inseparable connection to popularly accepted religious practices and beliefs, and to the increasingly influential clerical 'authorities' in that area—the well-known fates of such relatively outspoken *muhaqqiqūn* as 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī (d. 1131 CE) and Suhrawardī (d. 1191 CE) eventually became emblematic of the increasing cultural and political limits, throughout the expanding Islamic world, on any openly *universal* discussion and expression of the deeper laws and regularities of spiritual

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[838] Of course the relatively early dates (in Islamic terms) of such key figures also highlights the particularly favourable historical circumstances of their earlier period, with its open official patronage of the rational sciences and medicine, and courtly conditions of relatively free intellectual exchange even among representatives of different religious traditions—as is again the case globally today. This theme is more thoroughly developed in the Introduction and conclusion to our *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation* **(n. 6 above).**

life.[839] Suhrawardī's philosophical works are especially revealing in this regard, since they so openly and paradoxically combine a remarkably frank (and sometimes self-consciously 'revolutionary') assertion of the basic principles and practical preconditions of spiritual observation and research—which he adapted from the technical terminology of his contemporary astronomy—with a thoroughgoing elaboration of his radical new insights within the entire received framework of earlier Avicennan scholastic thought. Whatever Suhrawardī's own original intentions, the ultimate historical outcome of his initially radical 'reform', of course, was not the encouragement of further innovative *tahqīq*, but rather the ironically rapid reduction of his contributions to a few scattered *topoi* and recurrent debating-points within the ongoing scholastic development of the larger Avicennan tradition.

It can be argued—although here the full historical picture is far more complicated—that something outwardly similar took place within the long tradition of largely philosophical commentaries on Ibn 'Arabī's *Fusūs al-Hikam* which led up to Mulla Sadra's own creative philosophic reworking of Ibn 'Arabī's thought.[840] However, in that *Fusūs*-commentary tradition (and even with Kashani, probably the most openly Avicennan of the famous commentators), the eventual outcome, while heavily marked by the adoption of Avicennan language and categories (and by the underlying assumption of a coherent philosophical 'system), was certainly not any ultimate 'reduction' to the prevailing Avicennan philosophical framework. Instead, this line of commentators, beginning already with Sadruddin Qunawi (notably in his famous correspondence with N. Tusi), consciously elaborated a formally similar, but *alternative* system of philosophy differing thoroughly from Ibn Sina's own presuppositions, problematics and characteristic conclusions on many fundamental points. And even more significantly, much of Sadra's personal philosophical reflection on Ibn 'Arabī (as preserved in his monumental *Asfār*) is clearly

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[839] I.e., in terms openly intended to make it unmistakeably clear that the divine spiritual laws are 'already' universal, and not dependent on the language, symbolism, education, etc. of only one particular historical tradition. See the longer discussion of the relative rarity of explicitly universalist forms of discourse in *written* Islamic traditions—and of the deeper reasons for that phenomenon—in the last three chapters of our *Situating Islamic 'Mysticism': Between Written Traditions and Popular Spirituality*, pp. 293-334 in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics and Typologies*, ed. R. Herrera. In light of current highly misleading religious stereotypes, it should be stressed that there is a paradoxical, often dramatic (or ironic?) tension between those efforts to highlight and explore the deeper universality of spiritual *tahqīq* and its consequences—all of which in fact are quite explicit and central themes in the actual Qur'anic teaching—and the particular subsequent historical (social, political, traditional) factors which led most later Muslim *authors* in this field to remain more prudently (in their writings, at least) within much narrower particularistic frameworks of later 'Islamic' social customs, 'religious sciences', etc.

[840] See our discussion of the main outlines of this historical process in our **article *Ibn Arabī and His Interpreters*, in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 106 (1986), pp. 539-551 and pp. 733-756, and vol. 107 (1987), pp. 101-119. That initial study has been continued and updated in more than thirty subsequent published articles and reviews which we have brought together in a single volume, *Ibn 'Arabi and His Interpreters: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Perspectives*, now directly available in free downloadable *.pdf* (Adobe Acrobat) format on the Internet at *www.ibnarabisociety.org/IbnArabi*.**

based directly on the far more complex and problematic task of deciphering his '*Meccan Illuminations'* (*al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*).   And one of the most distinctive characteristics of the *Futūhāt* is the way that its unique language and rhetorical procedures have so far systematically resisted any effort of reductive 'commentary' or scholasticisation for many centuries.

The heart of Ibn 'Arabī's absolutely distinctive rhetoric in the *Futūhāt*—so distinctive that no one since has ever seriously tried to imitate its full gamut of 'instruments' and effects!—lies in the intrinsic connection between, on the one hand, (a) the *multiplicity of perspectives* he intentionally evokes by his personalised use of a profusion of technical languages drawn from a host of fields and disciplines;[841] and on the other hand, (b) the necessarily and intensely *individual process* of each reader's heightened, *careful attention to the unfolding particulars of their own spiritual life and experience*. The process and the intended effect of combining these two equally indispensable elements quickly draws his serious readers into all the stages (both intellectual and actively existential) of *tahqīq* or spiritual 'realisation'. The *muhaqqiq*, Ibn 'Arabī's ideal intended reader, is that person who is constantly involved in the uniquely human (and 'human-ising') process of literally 'discovering' (*wujūd*) or 'witnessing' (*shuhūd*) the ultimately Real. Which is to say, each person who is actively engaged in perceiving and 'deciphering' the intended meanings of all the infinite, constantly unfolding 'Signs' that constitute every field of our actual individual human experience. This spiralling ascent (*mi'rāj*) of realised spiritual perfection results from the ongoing revelatory interaction between three equally essential elements of *tahqīq*: (a) our actions, experience, inspirations, and insights; (b) their *observed* consequences; and (c) the further inseparable spiritual processes of reflection and deliberation (*tafakkur*, *tadabbur*, *dhikr*, etc.).

Mulla Sadra's profound re-configuring of the focus and practical grounds of philosophic 'realisation' (*tahqīq*) in his *Asfār* and other mature works would of course have been inconceivable without that vast—and almost entirely 'extra-philosophical'—collective enterprise of spiritual phenomenology undertaken by so many earlier creative generations of Muslim *muhaqqiqūn*, which is so massively summarised in the writings of Ibn 'Arabi. Essentially, he takes Ibn 'Arabī's unremitting and monumental effort of *tahqīq* one key step further, attempting to articulate more explicitly the full philosophical *universality* of Ibn 'Arabī's guiding insights. In so doing, he was clearly undertaking an immensely far-reaching *political* (hence above all educational) challenge to all the diverse Muslim claimants of arbitrary, self-proclaimedly irrational forms of spiritual and religio-political 'authority' (or true scriptural interpretation). At the same time, within a more narrowly scientific perspective, his new 'transcendental wisdom' is not intended as a final, self-sufficient 'system' of wisdom or truth, but as the fully articulated philosophical framework setting forth the wider ontological and epistemological *situation*, the framework of being, within which the ongoing wider spiritual process of human realisation (*tahqīq*, *takammul*) actually takes place. However, all these perspectives appear clearly and unambiguously *only* if one approaches Sadra from the background of a serious acquaintance with the

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[841] On any given single page of Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūhāt*, for example, we are likely to find him employing the distinctive technical languages of classical Arabic poetry, Arabic lexicography and etymology, the Qur'an, hadith, a wide spectrum of earlier Sufi authors, and several of the multitude of both the 'religious' and 'rational' Arabic 'sciences' (*'ulūm*) of his day—almost always, in each case, with specific nuances and shifts of meaning (familiar enough to long-time students of the Shaykh) distinctively reflecting his own very particular uses of that language in the specific context in question.

works of Ibn 'Arabī and the much wider traditions of actual spiritual practice and realisation (what Iranians today call *'irfān-i 'amalī*) which those writings constantly presuppose.

Unfortunately, of course, this is not at all the case if—as has more normally continued to be the case with the 'reception' of Sadra's diverse writings in the theological madrasas of later Mogul India (where he was seen mainly as another commentator on Avicenna), and especially in the post-Safavid Twelver Shiite world—students instead tend to approach his works, only at a late stage of their theological education, against the background of the complex scholastic tradition rooted in the works of Avicenna and Tusi. In such cases the standard approach to Sadra's works—even among the most astute and gifted commentators—more closely resembles the initial readings of Shankara and similar Hindu commentators, or the metaphysical expositions of the equivalent Buddhist schools, when they were first discovered by 19th-century scholars and philologists versed in German philosophical traditions: the essential dimensions and presuppositions of *tahqīq* are more often than not simply passed over without further explanation, or with a few casual phrases of lip-service (about 'purification', 'religious practice', 'piety', etc.). In other words, the broader historical outcome was the rapid re-scholasticisation of Mulla Sadra, whose far-sighted and radical intentions were quickly reduced to the construction of alternative metaphysical 'systems' or minor variants on the dominant Avicennan models of philosophical theology—and then only in the Twelver Shiite religious colleges, essentially cut off from the vast majority of Sunni Muslims.

 These two pioneering Muslim philosophers and 'spiritual scientists', Mulla Sadra and Suhrawardi, shared a common commitment to revealing (and thereby more widely institutionalising) the universality of both of the inseparable dimensions of *tahqīq*: the processes of independent spiritual research, and the further--necessarily creative, transforming and open-ended--practical human realisation or actualisation of its demands.   What actually happened to reduce their innovative and unavoidably challenging visions to a sterile, endlessly repeated scholastic 'tradition' is surely at least as much of a historical mystery as the near-disappearance of Islamic philosophy in the Maghreb after the great figures of the 13th century, or the relative decline of so much independent scientific research even before the shock of the Mongol and Crusader invasions.

BEYOND SCHOLASTICISM?: THE 'NEW SCIENCE' OF SPIRITUALITY IN A GLOBAL CIVILISATION

  But is their story really over? In an age in which a single global civilisation is so clearly emerging in every domain of human life, do the writings of figures like Ibn 'Arabī and Mulla Sadra not still invite us to a conception of philosophy not simply as an academic exercise in metaphysical or theological abstractions, but as the ongoing, collective, inherently multi-disciplinary practical challenge to explore and integrate the actual phenomenology of the fundamental spiritual dimensions of human existence in all their breadth and specificity?

In many fundamental respects, it would appear that the situation throughout the world today is particularly propitious for a renewed, more effective and more wide-ranging pursuit of the scientific vision of those earlier Muslim 'spiritual scientists'. To start with, if we take the apparent historical reasons for the unintended scholasticisation that so quickly engulfed the pioneering efforts of Mulla Sadra (and of Suhrawardi before him), it would appear that neither of those contingent factors are likely to cut short contemporary efforts to elaborate a genuine science of spirituality. On a global scale, none of the earlier historical religio-political traditions is today (at a global level, that is) in any position to effectively block or cut short the multi-faceted efforts of spiritual *tahqīq* in which individuals, groups and scientists and scholars are everywhere engaged. And the dangers of 'premature scholasticisation', or of

the separation of the intellectual elaboration of this emerging science from its almost infinite practical spiritual foundations, are greatly reduced when that emerging science itself is the product of so many quite different academic and institutional enterprises. Anyone working in contemporary academia is of course well aware of the serious ongoing influence of powerful unwritten 'taboos' within each relevant pre-existing discipline—the 'history of religions,' psychology, biology, medicine and so on--against working with the unpredictable, suspect stuff of actual living spiritual reality. But the phenomenological fields of inquiry in question are so vast—and the potential results so humanly fascinating and fundamental—that only a few committed researchers are often sufficient to advance the collective effort of *tahqīq*.[842] And because the actual spiritual reality in question is one—despite the radically different official methodologies of each constituent discipline—those problems and perspectives of understanding which are neglected by one discipline will almost inevitably be taken up by the converging interests of each of the others.

More important than the absence of those previously restrictive pressures, though, is the positive impetus of so many widespread and compelling practical factors and attractions. No doubt the first and most universal of these, no doubt, is the almost unavoidable mixing and encounter—at all levels of human life, from daily individual encounters to the increasingly wide popular access to all relevant forms of historical information—between what were once relatively 'separate' forms of religious life and tradition.[843] Just as was already the case for those far-sighted Muslim thinkers with which we began (in their influential efforts to awaken their readers and disciples to a reality underlying and transcending the interminable 'war of the seventy-two sects'), the eventual practical upshot of this unavoidable feature of contemporary life, for any sufficiently curious and intelligent *muhaqqiq*, is again inevitably to highlight the universality of those ethico-spiritual realities, practices and perspectives underlying the visible profusion of historical forms and manifestations. And to bring to the forefront of our attention, by natural extension, the manifold pressing ethical, political and educational tasks which are so essential in order to reveal and realise those unifying spiritual dimensions of our existence.

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[842] For example, one of the most remarkable illustrations of that pioneering, carefully empirical approach has been the lifelong research efforts of Ian Stevenson in exploring different dimensions of the phenomenon of successive human lives. See, among others, his *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (Charlottesville, 1974). Again, and perhaps equally importantly from a wider sociological and cultural perspective, the shelves of serious bookstores today offer dozens of volumes devoted to contemporary efforts of spiritual research (as well as the comparable range of historical studies mentioned in n. 7 above) in a wide gamut of phenomenological domains.

[843] Of course this type of situation is not entirely 'new' historically. On the one hand, it was always to some extent accessible to and even demanded of certain elites of travellers, philosophers or interested intellectuals. On the other hand, it was precisely during those past historical periods when dramatic political and cultural changes (normally due to sudden extensive conquests) suddenly brought together many disparate cultures and civilisations on the wider mass level in a single *oikumene*, that we often find a similar unusual openness to the possibilities (and, in those circumstances, even 'necessities'!) of serious, widespread spiritual research: e.g., most notably in the post-Alexander 'Hellenistic' world (stretching to India and China), the early Abbasid empire, the early post-Mongol realms, the early Ottoman and Mogul empires, and China at certain periods.

If we turn to more narrowly academic factors, the similarly nascent contemporary scientific fields of global ecology and environmental studies, the science of spirituality (and other adjacent realms of the study of religion) appear at present as the *practical* converging point of a number of hitherto disparate sciences and related 'arts' or areas of practice. On a world-wide scale, its initial developments at this time are comparable in many respects to the condition of the nascent social sciences, chemistry or biological sciences only a few centuries ago—all of which likewise began with the careful (if to us now seemingly 'primitive') attempts at gathering and systematically classifying the relevant natural phenomena, while very hesitantly seeking appropriate hypothetical models and explanations.

The first, most visible aspect of this new development is that the religious and historical sciences (and their contemporary offshoots among the social sciences) are making possible an ever wider and more encompassing *empirical phenomenology* of spiritual practice and experience and of their corresponding traditional theoretical or symbolic explanations. Even beginners in this field now have easily accessible an extraordinary, rapidly growing repertoire—and eventually, for those who inquire (the *muhaqqiqūn*), a potential deeper synthesis—of millennia of 'spiritual research' extending to an increasingly global range of cultures, practices and creeds.   The longer-term public interest and wider impact of that vast enterprise of historical research, of course, lies in its fruitful intersection with related contemporary forms of spiritual practice, therapies and scientific research which are only in their earliest stages.

Thus in the related domains of psychology—in the very broadest sense of that term—we are faced with such new fields of research and practice as the increasingly extensive study of 'near-death experiences' and the much broader spectrum of 'para-normal' phenomena; the cross-culturally convergent discoveries emerging from hypnotic regression therapy (and a host of similar phenomena arising in the practice of many other widespread 'body-centred' therapies); cross-cultural studies of the spiritual and imaginal life of children, of organically inexplicable forms of 'mental illness,' out-of-body experiences and other altered states of consciousness, and so on. What is striking in each of these cases is two mutually reinforcing processes of convergence: the way in which initially isolated and *ad hoc*, empirically based forms of practice, therapy and experience almost immediately demand a wider intellectual and spiritual framework of understanding. And at the same time, the way academically scientific and self-consciously objective approaches to any of the particular 'phenomena' in these fields quickly come to encounter the much more problematic, deeply complex reality of their wholistic spiritual context and their different traditional historical forms of expression..

Even in the more sceptical domains of official medicine and the biological sciences, under the competing pressures of growing popular interest in many forms of 'alternative medicine' drawn from various civilisations and earlier spiritual traditions, we are witnessing the first fascinating 'empirical' studies— that is, in terms of the accepted methodologies of modern science—of the actual long-term effects of prayer, music, meditation, fasting and a host of other age-old spiritual disciplines and practices universally associated with traditional forms of spiritual healing, therapy and spiritual realisation. While at the same time, millions of people—not simply a handful of cloistered 'specialists' and 'mystics'—are increasingly engaged in those same activities as part of their own self-conscious efforts of empirical 'spiritual research': i.e., with close attention to the interplay between their own activities and their observable spiritual consequences, not simply as unquestioned and undifferentiated aspects of their locally traditional religious ways of life.

An Edifying Postscript: The Example of al-Biruni

We have already written in many places of the central role of Ibn 'Arabī in so many dimensions of this ongoing contemporary development, which increasingly mirrors his earlier far-reaching irenic and creative influences throughout the Islamic world, especially in the newly Islamic eastern and Ottoman regions, in the centuries following his death.[844] However, we would like to close by highlighting the remarkable efforts of another intellectual giant in this field, whose contributions to the scientific study of religion and spirituality (unlike his work in other sciences) are still unfairly neglected. Long before the more celebrated philosopher Ibn Khaldun, and with considerably more historical breadth, empathy, clarity and objectivity, al-Biruni's passionately independent and endlessly curious intelligence turned to carefully objective study of the phenomena, regularities and underlying 'laws' of religious and spiritual life—each of the key elements of *tahqīq*—in works whose methodological prologues and procedures could in many ways still be taken today as models for the contemporary study of religion.[845]

Already in the *K. al-Athār al-Bāqiyya*, his youthful[846] historical study of the holy days, calendars, rites and learned institutions of all the religious traditions known to his Muslim contemporaries, al-Biruni was careful to supplement his often problematic textual historical sources with as much direct (or indirect) personal evidence as he could glean from actual practitioners (more or less informed and authoritative) of the traditions in question. The result, despite the limitations of his sources at that time, was an extraordinary picture of the diversity and variations within each of the major religions—a work visibly different from any of its supposed antecedents in earlier Islamic heresiography, bibliography, history, or philosophy—which is even today an important source for several Central Asian religious traditions (Manichean, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, etc.). As though returning to the original breadth and spirit of Aristotle's own wide-ranging researches (though it is impossible to know whether or not they may have helped inspire this work), al-Biruni is careful above all to seek out those reliable, accurately described 'phenomena' which are always the indispensable base for any serious phenomenology.

In contrast, al-Biruni's mature *K. al-Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind* (the 'India'), together with his translation of Patanjali's *Yogasutras* and other now-lost constituent volumes of translations and commentaries of key Sanskrit sources, form the fruits of several decades (and the massive supporting resources of his Ghaznavid patrons) indefatigably devoted to the first Muslim study of the religious traditions of

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[844] See a brief summary of these developments **in *"Except His Face...": The Political and Aesthetic Dimensions of Ibn 'Arabi's Legacy*, pp. 1-13 in the *Journal of the Muhyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī Society*, vol. XXIII (1998), and *Ibn 'Arabī in the "Far West": Visible and Invisible Influences*, pp. 87-122 in the *JMIAS*, XXIX (2001), pp. 87-122. These** and a number of other specialised studies of particular figures and texts involved in these developments are collected in the volume, ***Ibn 'Arabi and His Interpreters: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Perspectives*, now directly available in free downloadable *.pdf* (Adobe Acrobat) format on the Internet at *www.ibnarabisociety.org/IbnArabi*.**

[845] We are especially grateful to our current doctoral student, Mr. Mahmoud El-Kastawi, for bringing to our attention the methodological importance of these works of al-Biruni for the wider study of religion, and not simply as a historical source.

[846] The work is one of Biruni's earliest surviving writings, begun in his early twenties, in the (Zaydi Shiite) court of the Sultan Qābūs, long before he benefited from the patronage and "research support" of Mahmud of Ghazna and his sons.

northwest India.   Biruni's careful, often anthropologically grounded, attention to each of the different dimensions of religious life—from the learned elites to the popular castes, and from the arcane details of mythology and science to the rituals and regulations of everyday social life—still constitutes a sort of manual for the comparative study of religions. Yet that careful critical methodology (boldly enshrined in his title!) is only half the picture. What has so far been largely neglected is another equally indispensable dimension of any effective study of religion, al-Biruni's extraordinary ability to translate the phenomena of another, at first strikingly 'alien' tradition into accurate terms comprehensible for his educated Muslim readers, through the careful matching of dimensions of Hindu tradition with appropriate cognate phenomena in the wider and highly diverse Islamic tradition of his day. His most challenging masterpiece in this fundamental interpretive task of cross-cultural 'translation', of course, is his Arabic translation-commentary of Patanjali's *Yogasutras*, with its constant implicit work of correlation with the spiritual vocabulary and references of the Qur'an and the growing technical language of the nascent 'Sufi' movements of his day.

The much-needed book on al-Biruni as one of the true 'fathers' of the scientific study of religious life and practice has yet to be written. If we have mentioned him in the context of this ambitious Conference, it is simply as a word to the wise. Biruni's homeland and places of research, as we all know, were far indeed from the homeland of Averroes and the other famous Aristotelian philosophers of Andalusia. Yet few other figures in Islamic civilisation have ever presented, in their accomplishments as well as in theory, such a remarkable far-ranging, thoroughly universal model of insatiably curious, objective, and critically active investigative intelligence in action—in sum, of all the universal dimensions of *tahqīq*.

The Contemporary Appeal of Ibn 'Arabi's Thought

 The focus of my remarks for this conference, hopefully conveyed by the title of this essay, is not so much on surveying recent scholarship on Ibn 'Arabi as such, but instead on exploring a few key elements in the recent, rapidly expanding wider *public* appeal and underlying motivations for the growing interest in his ideas among very different audiences—only a few of them now particularly academic or scholarly—around the world. When I last reflected on this subject, for several conferences devoted to Ibn 'Arabi's legacy that were held in Murcia, Marrakesh, Kayseri and Kyoto a decade or more ago, most of the present-day audiences and influences that I discussed were paradoxically to be found among Western students of religion, philosophers, poets, psychologists and Sufi teachers.[847] Yet while all those already extensive new currents of interest in Ibn 'Arabi have continued to unfold in the new millennium, the most dramatic recent development has been a suddenly renewed interest in the contemporary socio-political relevance of this "Greatest Master" (*al-shaykh al-akbar*) all across the Muslim world. So that is where I would like to begin, before moving on to other sets of interests, shared by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, in the Shaykh and his teachings.

I. IBN 'ARABI'S RENEWED "POLITICAL" APPEAL IN THE MUSLIM WORLD:

Perhaps the following anecdote will help to suggest what I mean—keeping in mind that this particular recent illustration from Turkey is less visibly echoed in the many government-supported and locally organized conferences devoted explicitly to aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's thought that have been held in other Muslim majority nations (including notably Syria, Egypt, and Morocco) in recent years. In December of 2007, while attending the annual celebration of Rumi's death and spiritual marriage (*'urs*) in Konya and participating there in one of the many international symposia devoted to that great mystic's poetry and wider legacy during that UNESCO "year of Rumi" celebrating the 700th anniversary of his birth, we were invited to a concluding, nationally televised Mevlevi *semā'* ceremony which was preceded by four long speeches by Turkey's President, Prime Minister, parliamentary speaker, and the main opposition party leader. Given the particular occasion of this celebration, it was clearly not surprising that much of each speech was devoted to recalling the glorious Mevlevi heritage of Rumi and his successors, and also (with a nod to Turkey's many Alevi voters) the parallel role of Rumi's famous popular Sufi contemporary, Hajji Bektash Veli. What was totally surprising in that celebration, however, was that each politician's speech actually concluded with extended references to the central historical place of Ibn 'Arabi—hardly someone popularly associated with Turkey, Rumi or Konya—and to the ongoing *contemporary* socio-political significance of his thought.[848] Now whoever may have written those speeches—and given the

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[847] **These contributions to those earlier conferences are summarized in the following articles:** *Ibn 'Arabī in the "Far West": Visible and Invisible Influences***, pp. 87-122 in the** *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* **[***JMIAS}***, XXIX (2001); "***Except His Face...***": The Political and Aesthetic Dimensions of Ibn 'Arabi's Legacy***, pp. 19-31 in** *JMIAS* **XXIII (1998); and** *The Continuing Relevance of Qaysari's Thought: Divine Imagination and the Foundation of Natural Spirituality,* **pp. 161-171 in** *Papers of the International Symposium on Islamic Thought in the XIIIth and XIVth Centuries and Daud al-Qaysari,* **ed. T. Koç, Kayseri (Turkey), 1998.**

[848] The speeches did not refer directly to Ibn 'Arabi's travels in Turkey nor to his historically decisive connections with Sadruddin Qunawi and his mother.

wide political spectrum they represented, they were certainly not all by the same hand—the insistence and recurrence of each of those highly public praises of Ibn 'Arabi clearly evoked a much more widely based return to a positive evaluation of the historical influences and modern-day relevance of the distinctive theological perspectives of that Muslim thinker whose characteristic approaches, as refracted through all the burgeoning Islamic humanities of that age. in fact dominated the rapid geographical expansion, cultural creativity, integrative capacity, and civilizational centrality of Islamic religion and culture all across Asia (and the Balkans) in the five centuries immediately following the Mongol invasions.

Now while the antithetical perspectives of Ibn Taymiyya and the ideological slogans of his well-financed Wahhabi heirs continue to dominate public cultural and political discourse throughout many Muslim nations today, there can be no doubt that this remarkably visible and widely-based evocation of the historical example and potential contemporary inspiration of Ibn 'Arabi reflects a growing awareness, in at least some Muslim nation-states, of the compelling need for a credible, inherently persuasive religious alternative (in every sphere of life, from the private to the most public) to the empty ideological slogans of those recent dualist Islamist political ideologies that have so faithfully mirrored their earlier apocalyptic Marxist and Christian (whether fascist or liberationist) models. Just as with the fate of those earlier, historically disastrous ideological experiments of the past century, the ongoing rapid democratization of education and digital communication, and the concomitant extension of effective politico-economic participation to ever wider and more diverse social groups, have eventually begun to erode the totalitarian claims and messianic expectations of these more recent pseudo-religious dualistic ideologies. In this recent Turkish case, a higher level of educational attainment and more active wide-based social participation—as we can also see so visibly occurring in Iran—eventually help to make it clear that the unavoidable, genuinely informed demands of existentially grounded, individually credible interpretation of the Qur'an and other elements of Islamic tradition necessarily lead not to some monolithic, factitious mass unity of action and belief, but rather to an evolving, co-existing complex of ever more diverse and creatively adapted interpretations, in intellectual and public spheres just as within the spiritual life of each individual. And the this foundational, spiritually illuminated understanding and acceptance of the necessary, positive role of diversity and creativity of interpretations within one's own religious tradition inevitably opens the door to a more tolerant and even co-operative attitude toward other neighboring religious, social and ethnic communities and traditions.

In other words, the prominent political speakers at this recent celebration in Konya—like thoughtful many cultural and political figures elsewhere in the Muslim world who have been following less visibly in their footsteps—were unlikely to have been speaking primarily from their own direct acquaintance and study of Ibn 'Arabi's writings as such. Instead, they were evoking the appealing image or potential inspiration of that key symbolic theological figure whose thought and writing were most intimately and widely associated, almost everywhere in the pre-colonial Muslim world (not simply among Ottoman elites), with the diverse, cosmopolitan, creative, profoundly multi-cultural and relatively tolerant and inclusive polities of that era of the great Muslim empires. Today, this peculiar celebratory—and at least in Turkey, somewhat nostalgic—public evocation of that image of "Ibn 'Arabi" is all the more striking because his pervasive theological, cultural and eventual political influence during that apogee of Islamic civilization cannot be realistically identified with any particular simplistic set of beliefs or doctrines, nor with any particular religious sect or school. Instead, that lasting influence seems to have flowed from Ibn 'Arabi's peculiarly comprehensive and inclusive spiritual and intellectual *method* of spiritual practice,

interpretation and understanding—an approach which was quickly manifested throughout the Eastern Islamic world in poetic, social, literary, musical, architectural and other forms of creativity—and from its eventual influence in shaping those localized Islamic humanities far beyond what we would think of as narrowly religious or spiritual domains. Yet that distinctive method of inquiry and transforming personal "realization" (of *tahqīq*, or "becoming real"), as Ibn 'Arabi usually called it, in fact requires an extraordinary combination of practical, devotional, intellectual and spiritual commitments and lifelong engagement and reflection.[849]

What that transformative process of "spiritual realization" actually involves can best be appreciated by a careful, ongoing frequentation of the Shaykh's own teaching and instruction, which is most readily and comprehensively accessible through his immense magnum opus, the "Meccan Illuminations" (*al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*), a work which is only recently and very slowly becoming more accessible, through an increasing range of partial translations, to much wider, non-specialist audiences.[850] For our purposes here, however, it is sufficient simply to mention and highlight certain key presuppositions of that hermeneutical method which so sharply and unmistakably distinguish it from the parameters of any familiar political (or politico-religious) ideologies. In short, Ibn 'Arabi's approach requires the carefully devoted personal practice of at least four equally indispensable elements: (1) careful lifelong *attention* to the inner and outer consequences of one's ongoing spiritual discipline and practice (*dhikr*); (2) sincere, comprehensive, reflective engagement with all the actual immediately present operative elements of the divine revelation, which include scripture, our highly personalized and intimate interactions with the prophets and *awliyā'*, and the full range of divine "Signs" manifest in all other creatures and nature (*tafakkur*); (3) intellectual commitment to discerning and communicating the coherence and universality of the fruits of these first two elements (*sidq*); and (4) effective exercise and appropriate communication of that wider intellectual, ethical and spiritual *authority* which inherently flows from actualized realization. Finally, as one eventually discovers in the course of apprenticeship with Ibn 'Arabi (or with his many influential earlier interpreters through the ages), careful attention to the interplay of our individual destiny and our personal responses to its unfolding demands, in the light of the *practice* of all four of these foundational commitments, gradually reveals the actual locus and meaning of the scriptural eschatological promises, threats, and descriptions in the unfolding of each soul's unique process of spiritual learning and evolution.[851]

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[849] See the detailed discussion of **these fundamental points in two long recent essays: *Ibn 'Arabī's Rhetoric of Realisation: Keys to Reading and 'Translating' the Meccan Illuminations*, pp. 54-99 in *JMIAS* XXXIII (2003) and pp. 103-145 in vol. XXXIV (2003); and *Freedoms and Responsibilities: Ibn 'Arabī and the Political Dimensions of Spiritual Realisation*, pp. 1-21 in *JMIAS* XXXVIII (2006) and pp. 85-110 in vol. XXXIX (2007).**

[850] For the contrasting role of the long historical "Akbari" tradition of extended commentaries on the Shaykh's *Fusūs al-Hikam* ("*Bezels of Wisdom*"), see our earlier overview **in *Ibn 'Arabī and His Interpreters,* in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* vol. 106 (1986), pp. 539-551 and pp. 733-756, and vol. 107 (1987), pp. 101-119.**

[851] See the forthcoming volume of extensive translations of key chapters from the *Futūhāt* and the accompanying lectures given at the Sorbonne (EHESR) i**n 2003: *Ibn 'Arabī's 'Divine Comedy': Eschatology and Spiritual Realisation in the 'Meccan Illuminations*.**'   Key aspects of that research are

Now simply listing these complex practical preconditions for Ibn 'Arabi's distinctive approach of "realization" (*tahqīq*) might at first glance seem to have taken us very far indeed from the familiar concerns and intentions we normally associate with politicians anywhere, or even with history's much rarer genuine statesmen. Why should those speakers at Konya, with their very different local political agendas, have concluded their speeches with this curious positive stress on the central historical and potential contemporary role of Ibn 'Arabi, rather than the world-famous and universally appreciated mystical poet they had come there to celebrate? At least part of an answer quickly emerges, I would suggest, if we simply contrast those challenging presuppositions of his methodological approach just mentioned with the incomparably simpler dualistic assumptions—and all too familiar eventual consequences—of totalistic mass ideologies (whether of right, left, or center; and whether socialist or ostensibly "religious"). The practical reliance of such modern populist ideologies on enforced ignorance, fear, resentment, insecurity, and violence can sometimes be momentarily effective in inducing a widespread outward attitude of apparent slavish obedience—but at the cost of virtually all genuinely human virtues, including many that are also quite pragmatically essential, in the longer term, for any deeper social cohesion, active political engagement, and economic innovation, development and competitivity. In contrast, the particular set of rights and responsibilities effectively presupposed by each of Ibn 'Arabi's just-mentioned inter-dependent elements of realization, as one quickly discovers in their practical application, are intrinsically human, universal, and ultimately shared and assumed by each enduring religious tradition. As such, the actual individual practice of realization—which might at first appear as some impossibly esoteric and elitist spiritual ideal—paradoxically encourages and perhaps even practically underpins the indispensable human virtues of self-discipline, responsibility, creativity, intrinsic motivation, voluntary sacrifice, spontaneous and intelligent service, and actively positive, constructive co-existence.[852] Given the depth of that contrast, Ibn 'Arabi's civilizational options—demanding and daunting as they surely are—may well deserve more reflection and even wider attention, as this broad spectrum of Turkey's political leaders so eloquently and memorably suggested.

II. Emerging Global Dimensions of Ibn 'Arabi's Appeal:

When we move from the narrower realm of new Muslim-majority nation-states to the wider global stage, on which every religious and ethnic group is itself necessarily a distinct minority, it quickly becomes apparent that the contemporary appeal of Ibn 'Arabi's perspectives, both of thought and method, in fact constitutes a kind of natural extension of its particular functions within the great empires and scattered Muslim trading cultures of the post-Mongol, pre-colonial period. Throughout those centuries, the distinctive theological and spiritual perspectives of Ibn 'Arabi helped to support, justify and encourage two pre-eminent historical achievements of Islamic civilization during those centuries. The first of these was the ongoing cultural and social creativity of lastingly effective and appealing forms of the Islamic humanities suitably adapted to the many languages, customs, and unique circumstances of extraordinarily diverse local populations—a process that was of course inseparable

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briefly summarized in the concluding chapter of *The Reflective Heart: Discovering Spiritual Intelligence in Ibn 'Arabī's "Meccan Illuminations."*

[852] See our recent study "From Allusion to Insight and Right Action: Political Dimensions of Ibn 'Arabi's Hermeneutics of Spiritual Realisation," pp. 41-83 in *Symbolisme et Hermeneutique dans la pensée de Ibn 'Arabi (Actes du Colloque)*, ed. Bakri Aladdin (Damascus, 2007)

from the gradual spread of Muslim identity throughout the various regions concerned. The second accomplishment, whose distinctive virtues are perhaps more apparent today in historical hindsight, was the creation of ethical, political and social orders capable of successfully integrating populations from a host of radically different ethnic, religious, social and cultural backgrounds. Today, we have only to think of the range of contemporary issues and conflicts normally associated—at least in public, journalistic contexts—with the term "religion" (whatever the particular tradition in question) to appreciate how radically different were the perspectives and outcomes traditionally associated with the cosmopolitan and ecumenical influences of Ibn 'Arabi and the Akbari school.

In the contemporary world, what is strikingly new about this wider universal appeal of the thought of Ibn 'Arabi, within the past decade or two, is the ways that both the positive and the negative impacts of economic, technological and cultural globalization have led to an immensely wider public awareness—above all in those younger generations whose worlds have been most radically transformed by digital technology and near-universal literacy—of a spectrum of unavoidable issues and challenges whose effective resolution can only take place within an *inherently global* (not merely "inter-national") perspective. In each of these cases, the acute awareness of these wider global issues—both as "problems" and as potential opportunities—was once restricted to a relative handful of intellectual specialists: philosophers, theologians, political and economic thinkers, philanthropists, and scientists. But today the heightened "democratized" and pointedly existential awareness of these inherently collective ethico-political issues is often raised not simply by the obvious spread of mass literacy and the impact of digital media, but often far more concretely and existentially by the more immediate painful consequences and dilemmas of the global developments in question.[853] In each of the three cases briefly mentioned here, it is quite obvious that the fundamental human dilemmas in question profoundly precede any possible "appeal" to potentially helpful thoughts and insights of Ibn 'Arabi, or to similar figures in other pre-modern traditions.

The first and most recently emerging area of the possible appeal of Ibn 'Arabi's thought, against the recent backdrop and impacts of globalization, lies in the closely inter-related challenges posed by the preservation of the natural environment and the establishment of justice in *all* its inter-related dimensions (economic, social, and political balance and harmony). Anyone working with and educating young people anywhere in the world today cannot avoid noticing how poignantly aware new generations often are both of the unavoidable global ethical and political challenges posed by the rapidity of transforming ecological, technical, and economic change—and of the extraordinary lack of convincing, potentially effective responses within both the dominant official representations of traditional religious traditions (particularly where those are reduced to local dualist political ideologies, as in so many new nation-states) and the once-appealing post-Enlightenment political theologies of scientism and Marxism. However, simply listing certain unavoidable features of any conceivable effective response to these global issues immediately points us toward the distinctively wholistic and universal perspectives of Ibn 'Arabi. These include an awareness and vision of the practical inseparability of ethical *and intellectual* virtues; of the necessity for intensive and far-sighted, ongoing *cooperation* between all human groups (not simply enforced or grudging "tolerance"); of positive *spiritual and psychological support* for the necessary, but difficult virtues of self-discipline and self-

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[853] See the summary remarks in the Conclusion of our *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation*.

sacrifice; of *effective sustaining service* to those manifold marginalized groups unable to participate profitably in the global knowledge economy; and of the ongoing need for a fundamental c*reative reworking and communication* of universal ethical norms and imperatives (originally expressed and promulgated in agrarian or even tribal social settings) in appropriate terms more carefully adapted to the radically new structures (involving both new limits and new possibilities) of modern economic life. In each of these areas, it is not that difficult to imagine the contemporary relevance and potential creative appeal of a philosophy whose central leitmotif and practical goal is fully realized *service* and perfect servant-hood (*'ibāda* and *'ubūdiyya*).

The second area of wider contemporary appeal of Ibn ʻArabi's thought—and more particularly of his *Futūhāt*, as its contents are gradually translated and made available to much larger interested audiences—has to do with a potentially transforming perception, which one frequently encounters among educated, thoughtful young people of every imaginable background all over the world today, that is inchoately expressed in their commonly repeated assertion that (to use the simplest possible expression of a profoundly complex intuition) that "I am spiritual, but not religious." This significant open admission of the shared human spiritual *fitra* (in Islamic terms) and of the true universality of the one divine Reality/Religion (*dīn al-Haqq*) in all its manifestations immediately points anyone who would care to explore the meaning and deeper challenges—both intellectual and practical— of this familiar confession of faith toward the most fundamental aspects of Ibn ʻArabi's thought. For if the universality of his intellectually formulated metaphysical and theological positions, most influentially articulated in his enigmatic and allusive "Bezels of Wisdom" (*Fusūs al-Hikam*) and its many generations of commentators, quickly became central to Islamic intellectual and cultural life in succeeding centuries, most of the communicators and creators of that influential Akbari tradition devoted less open attention to its indispensable practical spiritual underpinnings that are so clearly and extensively articulated throughout his much longer and more practically challenging book of "Meccan Illuminations" (*al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*).

For Ibn ʻArabi's *Futūhāt*, as we have often suggested, constitutes one of the most extensive and elaborately detailed "phenomenologies of the Spirit"—of the transforming individual interactions of the Divine and the many dimensions of the human soul—that have been formulated in any religious or philosophical tradition. That is to say, the Shaykh's constant focus throughout that work is on revealing and carefully describing all the illuminating and transformative dimensions and expressions of the divine "Nearness" and Guidance (the twofold sense of *walāya*: of God as "*al-Walī*," intimate Lover and Guiding Friend and Protector) that were opened up to Ibn ʻArabi, both in his own impressive experience and through the wider tradition and revelation that he records and illuminates from that perspective throughout all his writings. The divine *walāya*, as it is described and evoked throughout those massive volumes, goes far beyond the usual associations with the (already almost endless) description of the different roles and manifestations of the angels, prophets and holy beings in every dimension of human life, eventually merging with astonishingly powerful, yet persuasively familiar evocations of the most intimate expressions, perceptions and workings of the Spirit. Most importantly, throughout the *Futūhāt* Ibn ʻArabi takes great pains not simply to evoke and convey these realities using traditional scriptural, theological and poetic forms—all of them initially problematic or vaguely abstract cultural "givens"—but also to provide more concrete, individualized illustrations from his own experience or the accounts of his spiritual companions (a very broad term indeed, where the Shaykh is concerned!) which are

particularly effective forms of communication for modern audiences unfamiliar with his original cultural and practical spiritual contexts. [854]

While Ibn 'Arabi's distinctive rhetorical combination of these different forms of allusion and phenomenological description helps to encourage deeper spiritual understanding and to avoid the familiar excesses or illusions that so often accompany the awakening of deeply transforming, but "immature" spiritual experiences, his approach is particularly useful and effective in today's inherently multi-cultural patchwork of religious and cultural symbols and philosophies drawn from many different traditions and cultural contexts. For one of the peculiar consequences of actually realized spiritual experience (i.e., of *walāya* in actual practice) is the heightened capacity to recognize that same newly-discovered spiritual reality in many of its other, previously unfamiliar forms, whether in different scriptural and symbolic contexts or in the living experiences of other people. This unique pedagogical procedure, most fully elaborated throughout the *Futūhāt*, is the very concrete foundation of the ongoing irenic and ecumenical appeal of Ibn 'Arabi's distinctive spiritual *method* of phenomenological "realization" (*tahqiq*) or natural "spiritual realism," which works by grounding spiritual discovery, practice and eventual communication in *observable spiritual-ethical laws* and in the shared *results* of practical spiritual inter-action—rather than in arbitrarily interpreted formal symbolisms, doctrines or beliefs.[855] In Ibn 'Arabi's works, both popular and learned, the real grounds of universal ethical and spiritual laws gradually emerge from their actual individual application and practice and discovery, in ways that concretely and visibly apply across all historical, social, cultural boundaries. Of course one should hasten to add that the same is certainly true of many other classical, lastingly influential spiritual works—particularly artistic masterpieces, whose effective liturgical universality most theologians too often carefully ignore—in each of the world's major traditions. We shall return briefly to that last, relatively more familiar aspect of Ibn 'Arabi's thought and historical influence at the end of this essay.

Finally, to return briefly to our opening topic, we should keep in mind that the active and effective perception of the divine Presence, of *walāya* in all its necessarily intimate dimensions in the soul, is a necessary precondition for fully and accurately mirroring and manifesting that Presence, for eventually becoming—or at least approaching—the state of true and complete servanthood (*'ubūda* and *'ibāda*), which is the distinctive property and mission of each of the divine Friends (*awliyā' Allāh*), whose endlessly varied spiritual qualities, functions and responsibilities are so carefully described as the central subject of all of the *Meccan Illuminations*.

The third, more intellectually specialized and already much more explicitly developed area of Ibn 'Arabi's contemporary appeal—and in this case, of his actually traceable influence—lies in the ongoing global projects of a "science of spirituality" and a "comparative theology of religions" (not a new religion!),

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[854] See the extensive translated illustrations of each of these key **rhetorical features (whose function is analyzed in more detail in *Ibn 'Arabī's Rhetoric of Realisation: Keys to Reading and "Translating" the "Meccan Illuminations,"** n. 4 above) to be found throughout *The Reflective Heart* and **our forthcoming volume of similar thematic studies, *Elevations: Insight and Transformation in Ibn 'Arabi's "Meccan Illuminations".***

[855] See the detailed discussion of this hermeneutical process in the recent study, ***Freedoms and Responsibilities: Ibn 'Arabī and the Political Dimensions of Spiritual Realisation* (n. 4 above).**

immense collective efforts that call upon the insights and discoveries of scientists and scholars who are exploring and attempting to bring to light the common human grounds—at once experiential and intellectual—of those spiritual, aesthetic, ethical and metaphysical elements shared by the world's religions (or by humanity more generally).[856] Given the centrality of such universalist claims in the Qur'anic account of humanity, revelation, *walāya*, and divine creation and revelation, and the undisputed pre-eminence of Ibn 'Arabi as the most elaborate and dedicated exponent of those universal perspectives within the Islamic tradition, it is not surprising that so many contemporary researchers in this domain continue to be both inspired and informed by the gradually emerging fruits of the Shaykh's own "Illuminations", as his great work is slowly translated and conveyed in forms accessible to much wider scholarly audiences.

III. The Specificity of Ibn 'Arabi as A Practical spiritual Guide:

The third major area of Ibn 'Arabi's ongoing contemporary appeal, and one that is relatively easier to document and illustrate, is the specific role of his works both as direct tools of spiritual guidance and especially as indirect ones, through their creative practical adaptation by shaykhs and other spiritual teachers and preachers.[857] One telling concrete indication of the ongoing usage of his works for this purpose—especially many of his short practical treatises, which have been among his first works translated into both French and English[858]—is the survival of hundreds of manuscript exemplars of those works, clearly copied for usage within different Sufi tariqas, throughout all parts of the Muslim world, as we find recorded in the classic bio-bibliographical work of O. Yahya and in the more recent, invaluable manuscript collection and digitalization projects of the Ibn 'Arabi Society. In addition, as Michel Chodkiewicz has indicated in several important studies, it appears that the most commonly occurring public use of Ibn 'Arabi's *Futūhāt*, for many centuries, was in the frequent (and usually

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[856] To a great extent, these immense collective projects already mirror many key features of the centuries-long development of the "Akbari" tradition of commentaries on the *Fusūs al-Hikam*--and the concomitant application of those insights in both helping to create and later interpreting (to religiously learned intellectual audiences) the explosion of locally adapted forms of the Islamic humanities throughout the post-Mongol expansion of Islamic civilization. It should be stressed that the understandable attempt to discern common human grounds in these domains may well bring out at the same time certain essential differences, whose eventual consequences and status remain to be interpreted. Nether of these projects are inherently reductionist or exclusivist, any more than Haydar Amuli's lifelong efforts to bring out the relevance of Ibn 'Arabi's thought for initially suspicious Shiite scholarly audiences were conceived in a polemic spirit.

[857] See the discussion of some telling contemporary illustrations of this kind of profound pedagogical influence (often nearly invisible from the perspective of explicit literary references)—whose earlier historical dimensions in the Arab world have been extensively developed in pioneering research by M. Chodkiewicz, D. Gril, and R. McGregor—in *Ibn 'Arabī in the "Far West": Visible and Invisible Influences,* **pp. 87-122 in *JMIAS*, vol. XXIX (2001).**

[858] For the early reception of Ibn 'Arabi's thought in Europe, see *Ibn 'Arabī and His Interpreters* **(n. 5 above)** and the foundational studies by Michel Chodkiewicz.

unstated) re-presentation or reframing of its ideas and perspective. Often this was in the form of recognizable spiritual and theological insights expressed in scriptural commentaries and explanations, but one finds such influences as well in more complex theological and philosophical contexts, as for example in the highly influential later philosophical works of such otherwise diverse thinkers as Mulla Sadra and Shah Waliullah of Delhi.[859]

While Ibn 'Arabi's ideas, teachings and actual writings continue to be used today in this very traditional setting of spiritual guidance and teaching, especially within Sufi groups and their offshoots,[860] it is also clear that their readership and eventual practical use in teaching settings have recently extended rapidly to wider (non-Muslim) spiritual contexts as well. This development should not be at all surprising, in light of the particularly noteworthy features that clearly distinguish most of the Shaykh's spiritual writings—both the short individual treatises, and the more extended treatments found throughout the *Futūhāt*—from much of the vast (but often highly repetitive) Sufi literature of spiritual guidance. This is because under pre-modern conditions, in each of the Abrahamic traditions, specialized spiritual teaching and guidance tended to be given orally by practiced and specialized teachers, in carefully adapted institutional settings that allowed for the teacher's immediate oral explanation, intervention, adaptation and guidance in ways personally adapted to each individual student's progress and conditions. In those traditional initiatic and supervisory settings, there was understandably little need for written guide-books (with all their inherent limitations already so persuasively outlined in Plato's *Phaedrus*), so that much of the relevant literature that survives is so broadly repetitive, archetypal and esoteric (i.e., typically using scriptural language, symbolism, and inside allusions from earlier spiritual traditions) that it readily appears—when viewed from outside the actual living process of spiritual guidance and direction—as a kind of moral sermonizing, popular apologetic (e.g., Ghazali's famous *Ihyā'*), or superficial sets of formal prescriptions and externalized group regulations (i.e., *adab* in the least spiritual sense).

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[859] See, for example, M. Hermansen's *Shah Wali Allah of Delhi 's Hujjat Allah al-Baligha (The Conclusive Argument from God)*, (Leiden, 1996); the introduction and index to our *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*; and especially P. Peerwani's new translation of the corresponding chapters of Sadra's *Asfār, Spiritual Psychology: The Fourth Intellectual Journey in Transcendent Philosophy-Volumes VIII & IX of The Asfar*, (London, 2008). These studies and translations are also significant for highlighting the characteristic ways such creative and lastingly influential interpreters often carefully concealed or underplayed the profound influences of (and often extensive direct borrowings from) the *Futūhāt* and other works of Ibn 'Arabi.

[860] Recent years have seen a continuation of this long tradition in the continuing stream of translations, in both French and English, of shorter practical spiritual works or of brief and popularly accessible selections from longer volumes in both French and English. See, for example, the expanding catalogue of such short prayers and practical treatises by Anqa publications (*http://www.ibn-arabi.com*), including, for example, S. Hirtenstein's recent translation of the classic *The Four Pillars of Spiritual Transformation: The Adornment of the Spiritually Transformed (Hilyat al-abdal)*, (Oxford, 2008), which includes a short corresponding chapter from the *Futūhāt*.

 Now what normally sets apart Ibn 'Arabi's practical spiritual writings (whether shorter treatises or the more extended treatments found throughout his *Futūhāt*) from these familiar Sufi genres is his consistent focus—more or less elaborately developed, depending on the case—on going beyond often quite familiar formal or outward prescriptions to illuminating the interplay of universal metaphysical principles and concrete spiritual practices and prescriptions.[861] His typical combination of scriptural/archetypal allusions and justifications with deep intellectual contextualization and a clear indication of the ultimate spiritual *goals* underlying and orienting the particular practices or experiences in question helps to highlight the deeper context of aims, supporting and restrictive conditions, and operative functions of spiritual and religious practices that were more commonly presented without such a careful phenomenological explanation of their essential aims and limiting conditions[862]—all that indispensable qualification being left to the living teacher and master. Historically, the growing contemporary appeal of this distinctive practical dimension of Ibn 'Arabi's writings clearly mirrors his earlier widespread role as a quietly authoritative "shaykh for shaykhs".[863]

Today, however, when people in many parts of the world are increasingly pursuing spiritual and contemplative practices in conjunction with active life "in the world," and in ways openly (or surreptitiously) blending practical insights and methods from various spiritual traditions, rather than in more isolated and specialized "spiritual" institutional settings restricted to a single tradition, this further explanatory and contextual dimension of Ibn 'Arabi's practical spiritual writings clearly has a much wider and specific appeal. For it immediately opens providential doors for the effective transmission, sharing, and creative appropriation of related or complementary methods and practical insights both *to* and *from* other ambient spiritual traditions.

In light of that process of practical spiritual creativity and experimentation so visibly unfolding all around

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[861] This distinctive focus and intention of the *Futūhāt* is dramatically and thoroughly illustrated in the long concluding chapter 560 of the work ("*A Testament of Philosophical and Revealed Advice Useful to the Beginning Seeker and One Who Has Arrived [at the Spiritual Goal]*"), often published separately as a substantial book in itself. That conclusion might at first appear as a voluminous and almost random collection covering the full spectrum of familiar moral and religious principles known to Ibn 'Arabi's culture, were it not that all the preceding chapters of the *Futūhāt* provide essential illumination as to the deeper meanings and metaphysical contexts of the teachings in question.

[862] This distinctive guiding aim and approach of the *Futūhāt* is particularly clear when we compare the relatively external, even social treatment of the spiritual stations in Qushayri's classic *Risāla* with Ibn 'Arabi's corresponding discussions of those same themes throughout the second major division (*fasl al-mu'āmalāt*, chapters 74-189) of the "Meccan Illuminations". See M. Chodkiewicz, "Mirāj al-kalima: from the Risāla Qushayriyya to the Futūhāt al-Makkiyya" (*Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 45, 2009).

[863] See particularly Victoria Rowe Holbrook's revealing two-part study of this phenomenon in modern Turkey, "Ibn 'Arabi and Ottoman Dervish Traditions: The Melāmī Supra-Order," as well as M. Chodkiewicz's classic studies of the earlier "Akbari" initiatic path.

us today,[864] it is again worth noting that many recent historical studies indicate that this sort of creative, exploratory blending and adaptation of practical spiritual methods and approaches from Islamic and other traditions—with a central clarifying role for the metaphysical insights of Ibn 'Arabi—was a recurrent feature of cultural and religious life throughout the cosmopolitan centers of post-Mongol Islamic civilization, at least from the Balkans through South Asia and on to China and Southeast Asia.[865]

IV. IBN 'ARABI AND THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF THE ARTS

Earlier scholars and orientalists, beginning with the earliest stages of the European encounter with Islamic civilization, frequently noted the way that the dominant themes of the Akbari "School of Ibn 'Arabi"—usually centering on the commentary tradition surrounding his *Fusūs al-Hikam*, and exemplified in such familiar (albeit highly problematic) formulae as the "Unicity of Being" (*wahdat al-wujūd*)—seemed to pervade later discussions of many of the classics of the Islamic humanities and Sufism (such as the long commentaries on the poetic masterpieces of Rumi and Hafiz), as well as many other theological and philosophical figures from this later pre-colonial period. Indeed, given the omnipresence of his ideas in Islamic learning throughout that period, it is often difficult to separate Ibn 'Arabi's possible role in inspiring creative artistic works—such as most notably the fundamental role that key eschatological chapters of the *Futūhāt* have been shown to play in the design and planning of the Taj Mahal[866]—from the more demonstrable use of his writings and ideas in theologically justifying and philosophically explaining the spiritual and religious authenticity and centrality of these newly forged Islamic humanities in post-Mongol religious life and expression, throughout the vernacular languages and new cultural contexts of the rapidly expanding Muslim world, especially in Asia and Europe.

As we have pointed out in earlier articles examining Ibn 'Arabi's wide-ranging influences on European and American artists, poets and creative thinkers in the past century, both those earlier aspects of the Shaykh's historical influence and appeal have continued to expand more recently in the West even outside traditionally Islamic contexts, particularly through the writing and teaching of a handful of key

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[864] While these familiar wider social and cultural processes of experimentation and cultural adaptation were until recently associated (at least in terms of media attention and wider public visibility) with the impact and reception of non-Christian spiritual traditions in historically Christian cultures in the West, it is quite clear that in recent decades the same processes are increasingly engaging educated and cosmopolitan groups globally, and from one end of the Muslim world to the other. See the illuminating case studies collected in *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*, ed. M. van Bruinessen and J. D. Howell (London, 2007), particularly those focusing on contemporary Indonesia and Morocco.

[865] Even a simple bibliography of the range of relevant studies and research here would now amount to a (much-needed) book. Here it should suffice to mention a handful of the most dramatic and accessible recent translations and related contextual studies illustrating this phenomenon: Manjhan, *Madhumālatī: An Indian Sufi Romance*, tr. S. Weightman and A. Behl, with S.M. Pandey (Oxford, 2000); Sachiko Murata (and W. Chittick), *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* (Albany, 2000); and W. Chittick, S. Murata, and Tu Weiming, *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi: Islamic Thought in Confucian Terms* (Cambridge, 2009).

[866] See Wayne Begley, "The Myth of the Taj Mahal and a New Theory of Its Symbolic Meaning."

popular interpreters and translators—e.g., Henry Corbin and the Eranos circle, Toshihiko Izutsu, Titus Burckhardt, F. Schuon, S.H. Nasr, and many others—whose prolific writings have served to familiarize much wider circles of artists, writers, poets, psychologists (particularly Jungians), educators, and philosophers with key ideas and insights from his writings.[867] Here we can simply note the close parallels, for example, with the similarly problematic "influences" of Swedenborg on such diverse later creative figures like Blake, Baudelaire (and other Symbolist poets and painters), or J. F. Oberlin; or of Goethe on so many later artists, writers and religious figures. These widespread mediated echoes and appeals of Ibn 'Arabi's thought and ideas to contemporary artists and creative thinkers, in very different domains, are palpable and profound, and yet often apparent only to those who happen to know what are often the quite private, outwardly hidden and indirect processes of transmission operating in each case.[868]

A VERY PRACTICAL CONCLUSION:

In the contemporary global context, the course of this essay has moved from what we readily acknowledge as the still only potential, as yet quite inchoate public appeals of the ideas and thought of Ibn 'Arabi—especially in the domain of contemporary Islamic politico-religious thought—toward the already more visible and demonstrable types of interests and recent influences which we have outlined in earlier studies. Yet one very practical and insistent thread connects each of these domains: the absolutely critical future role of properly contextualized and carefully reliable *translations* of that vast proportion of Ibn 'Arabi's surviving works which has yet to be made available to modern audiences.[869] Even more specifically, in each of those areas where the growing global potential appeal of the Shaykh's

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[867] See es**pecially *Ibn 'Arabī in the "Far West": Visible and Invisible Influences*, pp. 87-122 in *JMIAS*, vol. XXIX (2001).** The most important point elaborated in that article is that we are only able to appreciate and properly gauge the full dramatic extent of Ibn 'Arabi's often profound influences on these wider *contemporary* intellectual, artistic and creative circles because we have direct personal knowledge of the multiple channels and forms of communication involved. If subsequent generations were to judge only by surviving *explicit written* indications of such influences, they would detect at most a tiny percentage of the real extent of these living influences.

[868] This is particularly evident in the case of the many contemporary Sufi teachers and shaykhs borrowing from Ibn 'Arabi's works in their almost exclusively oral, and therefore historically unrecorded forms of teaching and spiritual guidance. However, the same point is equally applicable to many well-known musicians, writers, film-makers, and poets whose relationships to particular Sufi tariqas and related literatures are normally not subjects of public knowledge and discussion.

[869] General readers may be unaware that most of Ibn 'Arabi's works, including virtually all of his *Futūhāt*, are written in a rhetorically complex and demanding language that—for a number of reasons—is no longer really understandable today even by those literate in modern Arabic, for reasons that have been elaborated in several of our earlier studies focusing on the challenges of translation and proper contextualization and presentation. See the most detailed discussion of these issues in ***Ibn 'Arabī's Rhetoric of Realisation: Keys to Reading and "Translating" the "Meccan Illuminations,"* pp. 54-99 in *JMIAS*, vol. XXXIII (2003) and pp. 103-145 in vol. XXXIV.**

ideas has yet to be transformed into more concrete, realized influences (i.e., especially the opening two sections of this essay), that essential passage from a widely felt public need to a practically effective, actualized influence undoubtedly remains dependent in the first place on the gradual translation (and adequate presentation) of much more extensive and representative sections of his immense masterwork, the "Meccan Illuminations" (*al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*) into the pertinent modern languages.

This is not because there are a great many unfamiliar new abstract theological or philosophical ideas and concepts—of the type we associate, for example, with the earlier Akbari school centered on the interpretation of his *Fusūs al-Hikam*—that are still unknown to specialist scholars and students of the Shaykh. Rather, it is because the essentially phenomenological focus and underlying method of realization (*tahqīq*) adopted throughout Ibn 'Arabi's *Futūhāt*—whether that work is encountered in the original Arabic or in any accurate and effective translation—simply cannot be summarized or reduced to a more immediately accessible and purely intellectual form. (If that were the case, incidentally, such introductory summaries or popular commentaries on the *Futūhāt* would surely have been written down and widely circulated centuries ago, given the tremendous prestige of this vast work and its author alike. They were not.) Instead, the study and eventual understanding of each chapter and section of the *Futūhāt* itself necessarily remains an intrinsically demanding, but always transforming, spiritual and intellectual process of realization whose peculiar demands—and fascinating eventual rewards—must take Ibn 'Arabi's readers in another, necessarily more intimate and challenging direction.

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        Volume I:
        1. *Kitāb Al-Fanā fī Al-Mushāhada*
        2. *Kitāb Al-Jalāl wa-l-Jamāl*
        3. *Kitāb Al-Alif wa huwa Kitāb Al-Ahadiyya*
        4. *Kitāb Al-Jalāla wa huwa Kalimat Allāh*
        5. *Kitāb Al-Shaʾn*
        6. *Kitāb (Maqām) Al-Qurba*
        7. *Kitāb Al-Iʿlām bi-Ishārāt Ahl Al-Ilhām*
        8. *Kitāb Al-Mīm wa-l-Wāw wa-l-Nūn*
        9. *Risālat Al-Qasam Al-Ilāhī*
        10. *Kitāb Al-Yāʾ*
        11. *Kitāb Al-Azal*
        12. *Risālat Al-Anwār*
        13. *Kitāb Al-Isrā ilā Al-Maqām Al-Asrā*
        14. *Risāla fī Suʾal Ismāʿīl bin Sawdakīn*
        15. *Risālat Al-Shaykh ilā Al-Imām Al-Rāzī*
        16. *Risālat La Yuʾawwal ʿAlayhi*
        17. *Kitāb Al-Shāhid*

        Volume II:
        18. *Kitāb Al-Tarājim*
        19. *Kitāb Manzil Al-Qutb wa Maqāmuhu wa Hālahu*
        20. *Risālat Al-Intisār*

21. *Kitāb Al-Kutub*
22. *Kitāb Al-Masā'il*
23. *Kitāb Al-Tajalliyāt*
24. *Kitāb Al-Isfār 'an Natā'ij Al-Asfār*
25. *Kitāb Al-Wasāyā*
26. *Kitāb Hilyat Al-Abdāl*
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some are apocryphal.
    Volume I
1. *Tahdhīb Al-Akhlāq*
2. *Al-Mawa'iza Al-Hasana*
3. *Risālat Rūh Al-Quds*
4. *Al-'Ujāla*
5. *(Risālat) Al-Anwār*
6. *'Aqīda fī Al-Tawhīd aw 'Aqīdat Ahl Al-Islām*
7. *Shajarat Al-Kawn*
8. *Al-Nūr Al-Asnā bi-Munajāt Allāh bi Asmā'ihi Al-Husnā*
9. *Tanbīhāt 'Alā 'Uluww Al-Haqīqat Al-Muhammadiyya*
10. *Al-Khalwat Al-Mutlaqa*
11. *Kitāb Al-Bā'*
12. *Kitāb Kunh mā lā Budd li-l-Murīd Minhu*
13. *Istilāhāt Al-Sufiyya*
14. *Al-Hikma Al-Hātimiyya*
15. *Risālat Al-Shaykh ilā Al-Imām Al-Rāzī*
16. *Tawajjuhāt Al-Hurūf* [*Al-Salawāt Al-Mutalsama, Al-Salawāt Al-Akbariyya, Al-Salawāt Faydiyya, Al-Dawr Al-A'la, Al-Salāt Al-Nāriyya*]

    Volume II
17. *Al-Tanazzulāt Al-Layliyya fī Al-Ahkām Al-Ilāhiyya*
18. *Al-Tanazzulāt Al-Mawsiliyya fī Asrār Al-Taharāt Wa-l-Salawāt Wa-l-Ayyām Al-Asliyya*
19. *Radd Al-Mutashābih ilā Al-Muhkam min Al-Ayāt Al-Ahādīth*

    Volume III
20. *'Anqā' Mughrib fī Khatm Al-Awliyā wa Shams Al-Maghrib*
21. *Al-'Abādila*
22. *Mawāqi' Al-Nujūm wa Matāli' Ahillat Al-Asrār wa-l-'Ulūm*
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some are apocryphal.
    Volume I
1. *Fihras Mu'allafāt Ibn 'Arabī*

2. *Kitāb Al-'Azama*
3. *Kitāb Marātib 'Ulūm Al-Wahb*
4. *Kitāb Al-Hurūf Al-Thalātha*
5. *Kitāb Al-Lum'a*
6. *Kitāb Manzil Al-Manāzil Al-Fahwāniyya*
7. *Risāla fī Asrār Al-Dhāt Al-Ilāhiyya*
8. *Kitāb Al-Qutb wa-l-Imāmayn wa-l-Mudlijīn*
9. *Kitāb Maqām Al-Qurba*
10. *Kitāb Al-Madkhal ilā Al-Maqsad Al-Asmā fī Al-Ishārāt*
11. *Kitāb Nuskhat Al-Haqq*
12. *Kitāb Shaqq Al-Jayb bi-'Ilm Al-Ghayb*

Volume II
13. *Kitāb Al-Qutb wa-l-Nuqabā'*
14. *Risālat Al-Durrat Al-Baydā'*
15. *Risālat Al-Anwār fī mā Yumnahu Sāhibu Al-Khalwa min Al-Asrār*
16. *Tāj Al-Rasā'il wa Minhāj Al-Wasā'il*
17. *Kitāb Al-Tadbīrāt Al-Ilāhiyya fī Islāh Al-Mamlakat Al-Insāniyya*

Volume III
18. *Al-Kawkab Al-Durrī fī Manāqib dhīl-Nūn Al-Masrī*

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19. *Kitāb Al-Yaqīn*
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