

An Analysis of Ibn al-'Arabi's *al-Insan al-Kamil*, the Perfect Individual, with a Brief
Comparison to the Thought of Sir Muhammad Iqbal

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Abstract:

This thesis analyzes four philosophical questions surrounding Ibn al-'Arabi's concept of the *al-insan al-kamil*, the Perfect Individual. The Introduction provides a definition of Sufism, and it situates Ibn al-'Arabi's thought within the broader context of the philosophy of perfection. Chapter One discusses the transformative knowledge of the Perfect Individual. It analyzes the relationship between reason, revelation, and intuition, and the different roles they play within Islam, Islamic philosophy, and Sufism. Chapter Two discusses the ontological and metaphysical importance of the Perfect Individual, exploring the importance of perfection within existence by looking at the relationship the Perfect Individual has with God and the world, the eternal and non-eternal. In Chapter Three the physical manifestations of the Perfect Individual and their relationship to the Prophet Muhammad are analyzed. It explores the Perfect Individual's roles as Prophet, Saint, and Seal. The final chapter compares Ibn al-'Arabi's Perfect Individual to Sir Muhammad Iqbal's in order to analyze the different ways perfect action can be conceptualized. It analyzes the relationship between freedom and action.

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Introduction

The goal of this thesis is to articulate a detailed picture of Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s (560/1165 – 638/1240) concept of the Perfect Individual (*al-Insan al-Kamil*) by addressing the core philosophical questions surrounding who and what this figure is. Scholarship thus far has produced no detailed, philosophical, reading of this concept. In order to do so, some key concepts must be clarified: Firstly, what is Sufism? It is important to understand the implications of calling Ibn al- ‘Arabi a Sufi. Not only will this answer provide essential background for this study in particular, but it will also situate Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s thought within a specific “philosophical” school. Secondly, it is important to understand what perfection means, and how Ibn al- ‘Arabi specifically defines it. It is important to not only give a general definition of “perfection,” but also to present some of the varying details of this concept within different philosophical schools. Only after “perfection” is understood in this context can any discussion about individual perfection in Ibn al- ‘Arabi begin. The purpose of this introduction then is to: 1) Define Sufism in order to place Ibn al- ‘Arabi within a specific school of thought; 2) To provide an understanding of perfection, both in general philosophical terms and for Ibn al- ‘Arabi; 3) and to outline the key questions and themes that will be addressed in the body of the thesis.

Sufism

Sufism is commonly referred to as Islamic mysticism, yet this definition remains obscure and unsatisfactory, lacking the detailed, concrete characteristics vital for an adequate definition.¹ There are three points that need to be clarified for anyone who

¹ Clarifying this by defining mysticism, the experience and belief in unity or oneness with the divine, provides more background, but it still lacks any specific historical contextualization. It is knowledge of this historical background that allows one to form a complete picture of Sufism.

wishes to understand Sufism: 1) The historical development of the word itself, 2) to whom it has been and is applied, and 3) Sufism's relation to Islam.

Most scholars now agree that the origin of the word Sufism is derived from the word *suf*, 'wool,' which was adopted in reference to the coarse woolen clothes Muslim ascetics commonly wore; however, this explains nothing about what Sufism itself actually is. To gain a general understanding of the term, it is helpful to analyze various scholarly definitions. R.A. Nicholson says: "Sufism, the religious philosophy of Islam, is described in the oldest extant definition as 'the apprehension of the divine realities,' and Mohammedan mystics are fond of calling themselves *Ahl al-Haqq*, 'the followers of the Real.'" ² Nicholson describes it as a "religious philosophy" seeking the Real. The Sufi is concerned with finding the relationship between creation and God, and understanding the true nature of existence. William Chittick explains that:

Those who used the word [Sufism] in a positive sense connected it with a broad range of ideas and concepts having to do with achieving human perfection by following the model of the Prophet Muhammad. Those who used it in a negative sense associated it with various distortions of Islamic teachings. ³

And: "In a broad sense, Sufism can be described as the interiorization and intensification of Islamic faith and practice." ⁴ Chittick's passages infer that Sufism is the inner striving for perfection, as modeled by Muhammad, and this perfection is attained through an intense inner practice of Islam. However not all Muslims recognize this path as a legitimate form of worship. Labeled as heresy by some, Sufism, for this group, refers to a distortion of key tenets of the faith, specifically that of absolute monotheism. These definitions have one thing in common, namely, Sufism being described in relation to

² Reynold Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Arkana, 1989), 1.

³ William Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: One World Publications, 2000), 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

Islam. Both scholars seem to agree that without the practice of Islam, Sufism would not exist.

These definitions have been deduced only from statements made by modern scholars. How did the early Sufis themselves describe their practice? Al-Sarraj (d. 378/988), when explaining the difference between a real Sufi and an imposter, says:

They [the early masters] had severed their connection with the materialistic world, had chastened themselves through long and austere prayers, practices, and discipline, and had arrived at the clearest knowledge of reality, which knowledge found its full and necessary expression in their honest, sincere, and truthful actions. Such early masters used to be models of men who having burnt their boats of worldly affairs lived in constant contact with the Almighty.⁵

Just as Nicholson claimed that Sufism is the search for the Real, so too is al-Sarraj claiming that the early masters of Sufism practiced asceticism in order to live in a sustained unity with the Divine, the Real. Just as Chittick categorized Sufism as striving for perfection, al-Sarraj claims that these early masters became active receptacles for the Real. Through personal discipline, the practice of *dhikr*⁶, and inner prayer, these individuals become models of perfection for humanity. One of the most important aspects of this perfection for al-Sarraj is the fact that these individuals live in continual contact with God. In relation to this M. Hamiduddin says of al-Qushayn:

One of the first things that Qushairi emphasizes regarding a Sufi is that he is absolutely convinced that of all the paths of life open to a man his path is the best. This is how Qushairi expresses it: "And the grounds on which their path was built were stronger than the grounds on which the paths of others were established, be they men of tradition and culture, or men of thought and intellect."⁷

⁵ Al-Sarraj quoted in, M. Hamiduddin, "Early Sufis: Doctrine," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. 1, ed. M.M. Sharif (Kempten, Germany: Allgauer Heimatverlag GmbH., 1963), 312.

⁶ This is the practice of "remembrance", usually the recitation of a specific Name of God, prophet or passage from the Qur'an, it is meant to draw the practitioner closer to God.

⁷ Hamiduddin, 316.

The Sufis, for al-Qushayn, believe that theirs is the best of all paths; it opens a realm of knowledge that the paths of reason, theology and/or tradition cannot open. Having these passages as a guide, Sufism can now be defined as: A school of thought, stemming out of Islam, that seeks to attain human perfection through intimate contact with God. Islam declares the oneness of God, *tawhid*, and the Sufis specifically stress the importance of understanding and experiencing this Oneness. This is achieved through ascetical disciplines, such as *dhikr*, and through intuitive knowledge/gnosis.

Earlier it was stated that many Muslims view Sufism as a heresy, therefore a brief discussion concerning the relationship between Sufism and Islam is necessary. Sufism aims at embodying Muhammad's experience of revelatory knowledge. On the night of ascension, Muhammad received a direct communication from God, and Islamic mystics desire to experience this intimacy. They desire not just to follow the edicts of Islam, but also to experience it. Chittick in his introduction to Sufism explains that:

In general, the Sufis have looked upon themselves as those Muslims who take seriously God's call to perceive His presence both in the world and in the self. They stress inwardness over outwardness, contemplation over action, spiritual development over legalism and cultivation of the soul over social interaction.⁸

While most Muslims are concerned with the outward aspects of the religion, saying the daily prayers, following the social and religious laws, etc., the Sufis strive to cultivate a personal connection with God. This is not a totally foreign element within Islam. There are three main aspects of Islam: 1) *islam*/submission, 2) *iman*/faith, and 3) *ihsan*/doing the beautiful. The first two are familiar terms to anyone conversant with Islam: *islam* implies submission to the laws and will of God. Commonly translated as surrender, it lends its name to the religion itself. Every Muslim is an individual who surrenders

⁸ Chittick, 19.

him/herself to the will of God. *Iman* is cultivated by following the dictates outlined in the Qur'an: i.e., saying prayers and studying the Holy Scripture and the books of tradition. *Ihsan*, then, as "doing what is beautiful," means being a virtuous person by performing, or striving to perform the other two. All three of these are important to devoted Muslims, and the Sufis put particular emphasis on the last. They do not desire to create a new religion, but to emphasize moral cultivation and personal connection to God.

The way to experience this unity is to destroy the individual self, experiencing the annihilation of the self in the Self of God. The most prominent analogy used for this is the desire of the lover for the beloved, the true lover giving up all thought for him/herself in his/her overwhelming desire for the beloved. Many individuals throughout the history of Sufism have sought to exemplify this in their religious life. Early on this produced "mad" mystics who would give up all worldly possessions to wander aimlessly, enraptured with love for the divine. There were many true mystics who followed this practice, but it was also a position that was widely abused. Many would pretend to be Sufis, because, instead of physical labor, they could adopt this "mad" state and collect alms to live on. This led to general distrust and loathing of anyone claiming the name Sufi. Anne-Marie Schimmel quotes fragments that relate to a saying that sprung up due to the true Sufi's frustration with this state: "Poets have satirized the self-styled Sufi (S666), and in the eleventh century it was repeatedly said: 'Today Sufism is a name without reality, but formerly it was a reality without a name... the pretence is known and the practice unknown' (H44)."⁹ The saying expressed the frustration that this group went through in becoming labeled. The group developed a collective belief in a set of ideals

⁹ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 20.

that did not have any clear name. Eventually, this group, being successfully planted within society, was labeled and given a popular definition, but one that did not necessarily fit what the group's actual intentions were. With this happening it became easy for others to mimic and bastardize the practices of the true followers. In so doing, the essence of the group was lost to the public eye. From this it is easy to understand why someone like Ibn al- 'Arabi would not necessarily label himself a Sufi; however, not labeling oneself is by no means a denial of the beliefs of Sufism. Today Ibn al- 'Arabi can, without doubt, be labeled a Sufi, because modern scholars and authentic practitioners alike have resolved this historical problem.

Perfection

Sufism has been defined as the attainment of human perfection through intimate contact with God, but what is meant by perfection is still unclear. Perfection in general can be defined as the state of faultlessness. What this state entails and how it can be achieved varies within different schools of thought. Three different "philosophies of perfection" will be briefly analyzed. This is not meant as a basis for a comparative philosophy of perfection, but merely to present some examples of how different philosophies have dealt with and developed the concept of perfection. Presenting Ibn al- 'Arabi's own definition of perfection along side these other examples will provide a philosophical basis to begin from.

The first example comes from Plato/Socrates, the "father/s of Western philosophy." They conceived perfection as the pure understanding of the Forms. The Forms are the abstract, ideal molds of all things and concepts that actually exist. For, example, the "beautiful" or the "just" are given this quality through the Form, in itself, of "beauty" or

“justice.” Perfection, then, is complete understanding of the entire Form. Socrates says, in relation to the perfection of the philosopher:

He will do this [perceive the Forms] most perfectly who approaches the object with thought alone, without associating any sight with his thoughts, or dragging in any sense perception with his reasoning, but who, using pure thought alone, tries to track down each reality pure and by itself, freeing himself as far as possible from eyes, ears, and in a word, from the whole body, because the body confuses the soul and does not allow it to acquire truth and wisdom whenever it is associated with it.¹⁰

This kind of perfect knowledge is the goal of the philosophical or religious life.

Philosophical speculation is the best of all occupations because this perfect knowledge is gained through pure abstract thought. The body distracts the soul from pure recollection; therefore, an individual must strive to repress the carnal desires and free his/her soul to pursue the “beautiful”, the “just”, etc. The state of perfection for the individual, in this manner, is the arrival back to the soul’s state of pure contemplation of the Forms.

A different articulation of perfection can be found in the *Bhagavadgita*, one of the key Hindu texts. Perfection in this context is tied to the performance or completion of an individual’s duty. Krishna says:

A man obtains perfection by being devoted to his own proper action. Hear then how one who is intent on his own action finds perfection.

By worshipping him, from whom all beings arise and by whom all this is pervaded, through his own proper action, a man attains perfection... He whose intelligence is unattached everywhere, whose self is conquered, who is free from desire, he obtains, through renunciation, the supreme perfection of actionlessness.

Learn from me, briefly, O Arjuna, how he who has attained perfection, also attains to Brahman, the highest state of wisdom.¹¹

Just as Socrates advocated pure philosophical speculation, freed from the desires of the body, so to the Hindu system, as represented here, advocates the renunciation of all

¹⁰ Plato, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, and Phaedo*, trans. and ed. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 102.

¹¹ *The Essential Vedanta: A New Sourcebook of Advaita Vedanta*, trans. and ed. Eliot Deutsch and Rohit Dalvi (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc., 2004), 78.

earthly/bodily desires and attachments. Proper action, in this case, would be adhering to the guidelines of an individual's specific role in the caste system. The individual ought also to strive to become completely detached from the world. This requires learning and actualizing the true nature of existence, that all is *Brahman*. The realization of this fact means acknowledging that everything in the world, all difference, is an illusion, *maya*. Perfection is freedom from the confines of *maya*. An individual, who has achieved perfection, has released him/herself from the chains of illusion, that is, he/she is able to see past the multiplicity in the world and all the desires and possessions it contains, to the One/*Brahman*. In this state he/she understands that "action" is in fact "non-action" or inaction. Since everything in the world is an illusion, all actions taken within it are illusions as well, therefore the enlightened individual knows that action taken by him/her in accordance with his/her duty is in reality "non-action" because it does not affect the Real.

The final example of perfection, before returning to Ibn al- 'Arabi, is from Gregory of Nyssa. This example can be directly contrasted with the passage from the *Bhagavadgita*. While the one equates perfection with emptying the self of the illusion of multiplicity, Gregory equates perfection to "filling" the self with Christ; to be truly called a Christian an individual must actualize all the attributes of Christ. He says:

This, therefore, is perfection in the Christian life in my judgment, namely, the participation of one's soul and speech and activities in all of the names by which Christ is signified, so that the perfect holiness, according to the eulogy of Paul, is taken upon oneself in "the whole body and soul and spirit," [1 Thess. 5:23] continuously safeguarded against being mixed with evil.¹²

¹² Gregory of Nyssa, *On Perfection in Saint Gregory Of Nyssa Ascetical Works*, trans. and ed. Virginia Woods Callahan (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press Of America, 1967), 121.

Perfection lies in the total transformation of the individual. He/she must live, act and, essentially be all that Christ was, meaning that, as Christ was God manifest in human form, completely free from evil, so too the Christian individual must sever all evil from his/her being. Thus while the Socratic ideal of perfection requires pure “abstract” thought, and the Hindu ideal requires sublimating difference into Oneness, the Christian ideal requires cultivating the characteristics of Christ and expelling all that is non-Christ-like from oneself.

These three examples provide a general framework for understanding some of the philosophical methods and spiritual practices whereby perfection is achieved, *i.e.* contemplation, sublimation, cultivation. Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s idea of perfection can be briefly contrasted with these other ideals to discover his general philosophical position. He says in *The Bezels of Wisdom*:

The image of perfection is complete only with knowledge of both the ephemeral and the eternal, the rank of knowledge being perfected only by both aspects. Similarly, the various other grades of existence are perfected, since being is divided into eternal and noneternal or ephemeral. Eternal Being is God’s being for Himself, while noneternal being is the being of God in the forms of the latent Cosmos. It is called ephemeral because parts of it are manifest to other, which being is manifest to itself in the forms of the Cosmos. Thus Being is perfect, the whole movement of the Cosmos being the movement of love for perfection, so understand.¹³

The beginning of the passage states that perfection requires knowledge of the eternal and the material/non-eternal. Similar to the Socratic and Hindu examples, this knowledge teaches the individual about true Reality, but unlike the earlier examples, this knowledge does not negate earthly existence. In fact, the individual must strive to understand both the eternal and the non-eternal, because both elements are required for the individual

¹³ Ibn al-‘Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. and ed. R.W.J. Austin (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 257-8.

attainment of perfection. “Being is perfect.” Both the eternal and non-eternal are aspects of Being/God. The eternal is God in Himself, and the non-eternal is the Cosmos, which includes humanity, who ought to strive for the perfection of the eternal. Also, similar to Gregory of Nyssa, is the idea that perfection entails transformation. The Cosmos/universe is moving, expanding and growing out of a love for perfection. It is moving toward perfection, seeking to transform itself into Being. From this it can be concluded that perfection for Ibn al- ‘Arabi is complete knowledge of the dual aspects of reality, and complete transformation/embodiment into eternal Being. With this in mind the key philosophical questions guiding this thesis can be outlined.

Key Questions and Themes

From the preceding section it is understood that perfection of the individual is attained through a specific method. Ibn al- ‘Ibn al-‘Arabi’s model was only briefly compared and contrasted to the other philosophical models; therefore the goal is to analyze the exact method involved in the transformation into Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s Perfect Individual. The key questions that will direct this undertaking are: “What does being this Perfect Individual entail?” “How does he/she act?” “What is his/her relation to other people?” To answer these questions the thesis will be divided into four chapters: 1) what type/s of knowledge are necessary to gain a complete understanding of the eternal and non-eternal, and how this transformative knowledge leads to perfection; 2) The Perfect Individual as a level of existence, and how the individual fits into the dichotomy of eternal and non-eternal; 3) The Perfect Individual as a reflection of the Divine in the cosmos, or what the transformation and embodiment of perfection entails; 4) the Perfect Individual as an active agent in the world, and how this individual, after reaching

perfection, interacts with the world. Some of the problems that will arise in the proceeding chapters and the proposed solutions are outlined below.

The modes of knowledge used in becoming the Perfect Individual

What method of knowledge leads to perfection? To answer this, the three types of knowledge employed by Sufism, revelation, reason, and intuition, must be explored. These three types of knowledge are also important for Muslim *kalam*/theology and Muslim *falsafa*/philosophy; therefore, it is important to understand how Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s, and subsequently Sufism’s, use of these is different from the other two factions. It is also important to understand how this knowledge helps to transform the individual into the Perfect Individual. Analyzing how the three factions differ in their use of these types of knowledge will show why Ibn al- ‘Arabi believes his method to be the most perfect. Thus, only the head of the hierarchy, Sufism, attains true perfection.

The Perfect Individual as related to Prophets, Apostles, Saints and Muhammad

How is status related to perfection? This question essentially asks how the Perfect Individual is different from the rest of humanity, and what his/her function is. The Perfect Individual *par excellence* for Ibn al- ‘Arabi is the Prophet Muhammad. He holds the position of the “Seal of the Prophets,” and, as such, marks the end of revealed religion. Holding this position means that he was granted the last divine revelation. Due to this position he has complete knowledge of God and of the world, and thus holds a position superior to the rest of humanity. This being the case, the most important questions to answer are whether or not there are true Perfect Individual’s other than Muhammad, and if there are what is their status in relation to him? To answer these questions the ranks of *wali*/saint, *rasul*/apostle, and *nabi*’/prophet must be analyzed in their relation to

Muhammad. This analysis will show that the ranking of the varying types of Perfect Individuals, does not affect their initial status of perfection.

The Perfect Individual as a mirror

What role does perfection play within the cosmos? Ibn al- 'Arabi says that each individual is a dusty mirror, but the Perfect Individual is a newly polished mirror that fully reflects God. Analyzing the various aspects of this analogy will reveal Ibn al- 'Arabi's ontological system. God is *wujud*/"Being", while all that is not God is non-being or nothing. The analogy implies that individuals who are closer to nothingness, mirrors that are dusty and less polished, are further away from God/Being than those who have, or are, polished mirrors. Also important to this investigation is the concept of identity. Identity deals with the individual's being in relation to God. A polished mirror shows a reflection identical to the object reflected. Are the object (God) and the reflection (Perfect Individual) one and the same? Analyzing the various aspects of the mirror analogy will reveal Ibn al- 'Arabi's ontological system, and will provide answers to the above questions.

Iqbal's Perfect Individual

How does perfection act within the world? The Perfect Individual is an existential being, and therefore must interact with his/her environment. In what manner does this interaction take place? In order to answer these questions Ibn al- 'Arabi's concept of perfect action will be compared to that of Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938). Iqbal, a poet and philosopher from India, is deeply indebted to the thought of Ibn al- 'Arabi. A look at his concept of the Ideal Individual (as related to Ibn al- 'Arabi's Perfect Individual) will show the links between the two thinkers. However great the similarities

may be it cannot be ignored that Iqbal fiercely opposed what he called the “other-worldly” Sufism of Ibn al-'Arabi and his school of thought. To determine whether or not Iqbal's accusations leveled at Ibn al- 'Arabi are correct a thorough analysis must be undertaken. The accusations are two-fold: the first is Iqbal's claim that this system of thought leads to complete inaction; and the second, a subsidiary claim, is that Ibn al-'Arabi's system supports the view of predestination and is devoid of any modicum of free will, again leading to inaction. What is of concern here is whether or not this is an accurate critique of Ibn al- 'Arabi. Is Iqbal's criticism just a misinterpretation, or does it point to an inherent flaw in Ibn al- 'Arabi's system? The analysis will provide answers to these questions and a concise outline of what action is for Ibn al- 'Arabi's Perfect Individual.

These questions point to some of the problems inherent in Ibn al- 'Arabi's theory of the Perfect Individual. Any philosophical analysis of Ibn al- 'Arabi has limitations due to his experiences as a mystic. The fact that his philosophy is largely an attempt to articulate his personal and mystical revelations received from God creates barriers for any philosophical analysis. The proceeding chapters will attempt to faithfully interpret and critique Ibn al- 'Arabi given the limitations of the intellect and reason.

Chapter 1: Revelation, Reason and Intuition

The most important question to ask in regard to the Perfect Individual is: how does an individual gain this state? Perfection, in this context, necessarily involves knowledge. The definitions of perfection from the Introduction were concerned with knowledge; therefore, this section seeks to understand what type or types of knowledge are important for Ibn al- 'Arabi, and how they contribute to the perfection of the individual. Implicit in this is the further concern of how the Perfect Individual is related to some of the different modes of thought within Islam. To address these issues two elements must be explored: the relationship between *kalam*/theology, *falsafa*/philosophy and Sufism; and how the individual utilizes the various types of knowledge used by each faction to become the Perfect Individual. The three factions, for the purposes of this chapter, will be viewed as each emphasizing a specific type of knowledge: *wahy*/revelation to *kalam*, *'aql*/reason to *falsafah*, and *ilham*/intuition to Sufism. However, this does not mean that the other two types of knowledge do not hold an important role within each of the three factions. The emphasis given in this chapter is not meant to suggest that this separation of knowledge is an actual dividing point among these three schools of thought, but to emphasize how Ibn al-'Arabi understands them in a distinct manner.

Definitions for each type of knowledge will be given, and the following discussion will show that no faction can use one type of knowledge to the exclusion of the other two. Each faction relies on all three modes of knowledge. Understanding this will help to clarify the manner in which the individual should acknowledge the types of knowledge, and how he/she should use them to attain perfection.

Definitions of *Kalam*/revelation, *Falsafa*/reason, and Sufism/intuition

To begin the discussion, the terms and concepts being used must be defined. A qualification will be given for each faction, followed by a brief definition of each mode of knowledge. *Kalam* nominally refers to Muslim theology in general, but here it will specifically be represented by al-Ghazali, referring to his work *On the Boundaries of Theological Discourse in Islam*. *Falsafa*, the Arabic rendering of the Greek *philosophia*, envelops a diversity of Muslim, Christian and Jewish thinkers who flourished in the regions associated with the Near East. Although the term does not represent all philosophical thought within Islam, it does represent those thinkers who were concerned with understanding and interpreting the Greek philosophy they came into contact with. These are the philosophers this chapter will deal with, and they are primarily represented by Ibn Rushd and Ibn Tufayl. Sufism will refer to the thought of Ibn al-‘Arabi.

Wahy, Revelation, can be defined as the knowledge or wisdom that was given by God to the prophets, culminating in the final revelation given to Muhammad, *i.e.*, the Qur’an. This definition is far from adequate, for it requires a deeper understanding of all elements involved. Revelation implies that something which was hidden or unknown became clear or known. The prophets were chosen by God to transmit a message to humanity, a message that was previously not understood correctly, thus the Torah and the Bible. The sum of all revelatory knowledge, as expressed in the Qur’an, can be summed up as follows: a) there is one God; b) this God created the world and everything in it; c) there is a gulf between God and humanity; and d) there is a way to breach this gulf. The last is the core of this revelation. This knowledge is supra-human, which means that no amount of human effort can enable one to deduce on his/her own the truths that God gave

to Muhammad and the prophets. It is knowledge given to an individual, by God, not through any effort on the individual's own part.

'Aql, reason, as distinct from revelation, is the mind's ability to explore the world and to form abstract concepts and categorize the empirical data it collects. Reason employs logic and critical analysis. The truths gained through these means are universal, not subject to time or place. The philosophers, especially Ibn Tufayl as will be explored later, saw rational reflection as a means, outside of revelation, to reach Truth. In fact, it will become clear that these philosophers were concerned with the ability of the human mind to gain Truth.

Ilham, intuition is one of the cornerstones of mysticism. Mysticism is generally understood as the belief in and experience of the unity between ultimate Reality, the One, and the finite many, the individual selves. Margaret Smith explains that:

All Mysticism affirms that Reality, in its highest form, cannot be understood by intelligence, but only by something above it, that inner sense which is called intuition, by which a man can receive direct knowledge and revelations of God, and perceive things hidden from reason.¹⁴

Intuition, like revelation, is knowledge that cannot be communicated or discovered via reason; it is an experiential form of knowledge. Just as revelation is special knowledge handed down to a chosen individual by God, intuition is direct experience and knowledge given to an individual by God. While revelation proper was given to only a select few individuals, intuition is open for anyone to experience. The individual "feels" the intimate connection between his/herself and the Divine One, a "feeling" that cannot be adequately communicated to those who have not experienced such for themselves. With this basic

¹⁴ Margaret Smith, *An Introduction to the History of Mysticism* (New York: Gordon Press, 1976; reprint, London, 1930), 4.

understanding, the use of these forms of knowledge by the different factions can be explored in greater detail.

Revelation

Kalam relies on revelation to the extent that any particular theology relies on its religion's "divine" message. Revelation, as defined above, claims to be a divine message given to an individual apart from any intellectual or physical striving. However, the exact means through which this is done was unclear. Oliver Leaman claims that revelation is understood through the faculty of the heart (*qalb*):

There are two kinds of knowledge: *'ilm*, which describes the *'alam al-shahada*, the world with which we are familiar and which is described by natural science, and *ma'rifa*, which describes the *'alam al-ghayb*, the hidden world, and which is more than propositional knowledge. The way to attain this knowledge is through revelation, and the relevant faculty is the heart.¹⁵

The physical world is understood through science and reason, but the knowledge of revelation deals with something science and reason cannot access. The content that revelation reveals "is more than propositional knowledge," which means that it cannot be logically derived from any proofs formulated from demonstration or experience. The being of God and the order that God imposed on the universe are all things outside the realm of finite human understanding. By merely observing the effect (creation) one cannot discover the cause (God); for example, when looking at a painting the observer cannot discover the physical characteristics of the painter. The observer may deduce that some agent created the painting, but he/she cannot, with any amount of certainty, piece together the characteristics or purpose of the painter. The only way the observer can learn any of these things is if they are given a picture of the painter along side the painting, or the painter leaves behind a statement of intent for the painting. Now imagine that this

¹⁵ Oliver Leaman, *A Brief Introduction To Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 58.

statement of intent was only verbally given to one person. The observation of the painting on its own is the intellect trying to discover God by rationalizing empirical data, while the use of the picture and statement of purpose is analogous to the heart being given revelation to understand the purpose of existence. Revelation is not a knowledge that can persuade people through rational argument, but through a deeper “knowing,” for faith is based on the assurances of the heart/soul.

Revelation is important for *kalam* because its knowledge contains the ultimate measure of truth. Rivaling schools of theology arise, but as al-Ghazali points out, all schools still accept the message of the Qur’an in its entirety. The animosity between the schools is based on a misunderstanding of what true unbelief is. He says:

“Unbelief (*kufir*)” is to deem anything the Prophet brought to be a lie. And “faith (*iman*)” is to deem everything he brought to be true... Hence, every Unbeliever deems one or more of the prophets to be a liar. And every one who deems one or more of the prophets to be a liar is an Unbeliever. This is the criterion that should be applied evenly across the board.¹⁶

Every theological school that accepts the entirety of the Qur’an and all of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad is a Believer.¹⁷ Any school that fits into this category cannot be labeled with “unbelief” simply because of a disagreement about interpretation. From this, it can be gathered that revelation is a source of truth that, although subject to interpretation, gives a core set of values and propositions that are true. Therefore, this truth lies beyond any arguments of the intellect.

¹⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Faysal al-Tafriqa bayna al-Islam wa al-zandaqa* quoted in Sherman Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali’s Faysal al-Tafriqa bayna al-Islam wa al-zandaqa* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 92- 93.

¹⁷ Al-Ghazali went on to outline the proper method for interpretation, with the aim of ending all discord among rival schools. He was also concerned with eradicating wrong interpretations that would lead the masses astray, but this will not be analyzed here. What is important is the fact that he identifies revelation as the certain foundation for all theological truth.

Where does this truth of revelation stand for *falsafa*? These Islamic thinkers were concerned with how pagan philosophers, coming long before the final and ultimate revelation of Islam, were able to deduce certain truths that are inherent within Islam, truths which first became known to the Arab and Persian people through the Qur'anic revelation. For these Muslims, philosophy, at its roots, relies on the truth of revelation as a foundation for its exploration and enquiry. The goal of the *falasifa* was to formulate how knowledge of God and the world could be gained through reason. They read the various Greek treatises that were available and adopted their tools of rational argumentation and logic. Aristotelian and Platonic thought provided them with proofs of God's existence, and arguments for the existence of a soul and the creation of the world. The conclusion that the Muslim philosophers came to was that all rational truth comes from the same source. Seyyed Hossein Nasr expounds on this idea:

For the *falasifah*... the truth was one; therefore they were certain that the truth, wherever and whenever it might be discovered, would conform to the inner teachings of Islam, simply because the instrument of knowledge for both *falsafah* or *hikmah* and religion was the same, namely the Universal Intellect or Logos, which plays such an important role in the theory of knowledge of the Islamic philosophers.¹⁸

The revelation of the Qur'an, according to this passage, was still the guideline of truth for the philosophers. The Universal Intellect or Logos, that is God, as the Creator of the universe, is the source of both revelation and rational thought. Thus, the argument of the Muslim philosophers can be summed up as follows:

- 1) If the Qur'an is the totality of Truth, then all truths come from the source of this Truth.
- 2) If all truths come from the source of this Truth, then the truths found in ancient philosophy are also truths found in the Qur'an. ∴

¹⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Meaning And Role Of 'Philosophy' In Islam," *Studia Islamica* 37 (1973): 75.

- 3) If the Qur'an is the totality of Truth, then the truths found in ancient philosophy are also truths found in the Qur'an.
- 4) The Qur'an is the totality of Truth. ∴
- 5) The truths found in ancient philosophy are also truths found in the Qur'an.

The argument's soundness relies on the statements in premises one and four. Working backwards, the devout Muslim would accept premise four as (intuitively) true, that is, it would be the most basic tenet of faith. The Qur'an is the completed word of God given to humanity. Since it comes from God who is the ultimate measure of truth, and God would not deceive humanity, it is the most perfect source of truth for the world. If premise four is true, then the consequent of premise one could be positively affirmed as valid due to *modus ponens*, however this still does not prove premise one as true. The argument's soundness relies on the assumption that God and Truth are equivalent. If Nasr's passage is taken into consideration, then God is equivalent to the Universal Intellect, the provider of all rational Truth in the world. If this is accepted as true, the argument is sound.

Revelation, having been shown as the measure of truth for *kalam* and *falsafa*, can now be considered in relation to Sufism. Sufism as a branch of Islam necessarily accepts the truth of Qur'anic revelation, but in what manner? The heart is the instrument through which revelation is communicated and understood, and is distinct from the intellect. Sufism, being the interiorization of the revelation of Islam, also relies on the heart. Even in the Qur'an the opening of the heart was not asked solely of Muhammad, but is asked of every believer in the true Faith. The Qur'an, in the first Sura, says: "And [those] who believe in the Revelation sent to you, and sent before your time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the Hereafter... As to those who reject Faith... Allah has set a seal on their hearts... In their hearts is a disease."¹⁹ The "heart" was not just the instrument God

¹⁹ Qur'an 2: 4-10

used to speak and reveal Truth to Muhammad, but is the instrument that God uses to communicate “revelatory” knowledge to every individual. Those who have opened their hearts to this knowledge, and relationship, become the chosen of God, but those who have a “disease” in their hearts cannot relate to God. Whether or not one becomes a believer of Islam is due to the specific condition of one’s heart. Sufism takes individuals who have an open heart, a heart that has accepted the truth of revelation, and seeks to further transform it. This is the transformation into the Perfect Individual, the mirroring of the attributes of God. The poet Farid Attar explains:

If you would glimpse the beauty we revere
Look in your heart- its image will appear.
Make of your heart a looking-glass and see
Reflected there the Friend’s nobility;
Your sovereign’s glory will illuminate
The palace where he reigns in proper state.
Search for this king within your heart; His soul
Reveals itself in atoms of the Whole.²⁰

The transformation can only begin by looking into the heart, which requires a purifying based on the truths found within revelation.

Reason

The reasoning of *falsafah* is grounded by the truth of revelation. Some philosophers create an intellectual hierarchy between philosophy/reason and religion/revelation. Good philosophical reasoning, and its necessary tools, must be cultivated. An intellectual is not born, but is created; this means that it takes particular types of education and enquiry to develop the rational tools necessary to deduce truths about God and the world. Thérèse-Anne Druart describes the hierarchy that this creates: “*Falsafa* ... is absolutely and universally true, but accessible only to a small intellectual elite. The masses need

²⁰ Farid Un-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. and ed. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 54.

something they can relate to, that is religion, which must be adapted to particular cultures.”²¹ Reason’s attainment of universal truth is an avenue open to only a few. The majority of people are not a part of this elite group of intellectuals, yet they still have a means of accessing Truth, the means to this is religion. The revelatory knowledge of Islam then, is the knowledge of true philosophical enquiry “watered down” into a form the average intellect can grasp. This implies that revelation is a necessary form of knowledge, since only a small percentage of humanity can gain access to philosophical Truth.²² It is clear that this is a hierarchy where philosophy is placed ahead of religion. Philosophy is for the most capable minds in society, those that can reach Truth unaided by any guide other than their own reasoning, while religion presents the Truth of the Qur’anic revelation for the weaker minded, i.e., individuals who need a guide. The philosophers who arrive at this Truth relying only on reason and their own intellectual capabilities are developmentally “better” and “more capable” than the rest.

This belief, that intellectual enquiry can lead to the truths of religion, is best illustrated by Ibn Tufayl’s *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Hayy grows up on an island completely cut off from humanity. He relies on reason alone to learn about the world, himself, and God. When discovered by a Muslim/Sufi hermit, he is brought to a fictional, Muslim, civilization to teach them the inner truths he has learned without ever reading any religious text. The people do not listen to him, and disillusioned by civilization he returns to his island and solitary reflection.

²¹ Thérèse-Anne Druart, “Philosophy in Islam,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. S. McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 104.

²² Revelation is necessary, because only a few can be true philosophers. The Truth of Islam was meant for all of humanity, not just a select handful of philosophers.

The argument in Ibn Tufayl's book relating to reason can be summed up as follows: If revelation was the only means to truth, then only people aware of the Qur'an could arrive at truths about the world, the self, and God. Hayy is an example of someone who arrived at these truths without knowledge of the Qur'an. Therefore, revelation is not the only means to Truth. Leaman affirms this: "Some thinkers... suggest that an individual who is sufficiently well developed intellectually and personally can do without a guide—indeed, can guide himself. The famous example is the story by ibn Tufayl of Hayy ibn Yaqzan."²³ This well developed individual has the capacity to discover Truth separate from all revelation. An Imam or Shaykh acts as a religious guide for most Muslims, without whom they could not obtain knowledge about God; however, there are a select few who do not need such a guide, for their own rational faculties are enough of a guide. In Ibn Tufayl's story, Hayy is one of these latter types of people. As Hayy grows up, he begins to cultivate his reasoning capabilities. This is accomplished by adopting a type of solitary empiricism. At first, this entails merely trying to stay warm and have a full belly, but as his experiences expand, he begins to reflect on death, self-identity, and creation. Eventually Hayy is led to postulate a God and begins a quest to reach Him. Through intense yearning and reflection, after many long years, Hayy finally reaches God in a state of spiritual ecstasy.²⁴ Thus, he reaches the truths of Islam without ever having read the Qur'an. It could be argued that Hayy did not actually reach the truths on his own, because eventually he was introduced to society and the Qur'an, which told him that the knowledge he had gained on his own was true. This is not a refutation, for Hayy never questioned the truthfulness of his knowledge. He knew that it was true through the use of

²³ Leaman, 58.

²⁴ That this is a mystical experience, and the true verifier of knowledge for Hayy will be discussed in the section on Sufism and intuition.

his own reason, and, it might be argued, through intuition. The Qur'an served only as verification, and finding other people living this religion only affirmed the Truth he had gleaned.

The intellectual power of reason in relation to Sufism can be discussed by looking at Ibn al- 'Arabi's autobiographical account of his meeting with the philosopher Ibn Rushd. Although some scholars have disputed the authenticity of this encounter, this does not detract from its illustrative importance. The supposed meeting between Ibn al- 'Arabi and Ibn Rushd happened while Ibn al- 'Arabi was still a boy. He was sent to the great philosopher's house on a feigned errand, and the encounter had a profound impact on both individuals. Claude Addas translates Ibn al- 'Arabi's account of the event:

As I [Ibn al- 'Arabi] entered, the philosopher [Ibn Rushd] rose from his seat and came to meet me, showing me every possible token of friendship and consideration and finally embracing me. Then he said to me: "Yes". I in turn replied to him: "Yes." Then his joy increased as he saw that I had understood him. But next, when I myself became aware of what it was that had caused his joy, I added: "No". Immediately Averroes [Ibn Rushd] tensed up, his features changed colour and he seemed to doubt his own thoughts. He asked me this question: "What kind of solution have you found through illumination and divine inspiration? Is it just the same as what we receive from speculative thought?" I replied to him: "Yes and no. Between the yes and the no spirits take flight from their matter and necks break away from their bodies". Averroes turned pale; I saw him start to tremble. He murmured the ritual phrase, "there is no strength save in God", because he had understood my allusion.²⁵

In this passage Ibn al- 'Arabi sets up a clear distinction between himself as a "knower" or gnostic, a true Sufi, and Ibn Rushd as a philosopher. The meeting begins with Ibn Rushd seeking affirmation that the great store of knowledge and wisdom the young Ibn al- 'Arabi possesses is identical to his own as a seasoned philosopher. The first "yes" given by Ibn al- 'Arabi signifies the similarity of the knowledge. It can be outlined in the

²⁵ Ibn al- 'Arabi in Claude Addas, *Quest For The Red Sulphur: The Life Of Ibn 'Ibn al- 'Arabi*. Trans. and ed. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 37.

following manner: Truth for revelation/Islam and reason/falsafah comes from the same source; the unveiling of Sufism is the personalization of the revelation of Islam.

Therefore, the Truth of unveiling is the same as the Truth of reason. But Ibn al- 'Arabi does not end with this, for the "no" that comes afterwards is likewise asserting that it is also not the same. The knowledge of unveiling stands in-between the paradox caused by the answers of "yes" and "no". An earlier argument pointed out that although the Truth revealed to philosophy (reason) and Sufism (intuition/unveiling) is the same, the means are different. These differing means speak to individuals through different experiences and develop different characteristics or qualities within them. The difference for the "knower" is that he/she understands, or more properly experiences, Truth more intimately and esoterically than the philosopher ever can, that is, the "knower" experiences it through intuitional encounters while the philosopher gleans it from his/her rational deduction.

The differences between the "knower" and the "philosopher" become clearer by analyzing the second "meeting" between the Ibn al-'Arabi and Ibn Rushd. Ibn al- 'Arabi says:

Subsequently I had the wish to meet him a second time. He was shown to me- God have mercy on him!- in a vision (*waqi'a*), in a certain form. A light veil had been placed between him and me so that I could see him although he could not see me and was unaware of my presence. He was so absorbed that he paid no attention to me, and I said to myself: "This is not someone who is destined to follow the same path as me."²⁶

Importantly, the "knower" is the one who transcends physical limits and travels through the world of imagination. Ibn al- 'Arabi sees Ibn Rushd, but the philosopher, absorbed in his thoughts and contemplations, does not see Ibn al- 'Arabi. Ibn Rushd was so immersed

²⁶ Ibn al- 'Arabi in Claude Addas, *Quest For The Red Sulphur: The Life Of Ibn 'Ibn al- 'Arabi*. Trans. and ed. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 107.

in the intellect that he could not transcend it and attain the special knowledge of the “knower.” The “knower” can see multiple layers of reality, leading to the unveiling in the Presence of God Himself, but the philosopher is stuck in the physical world and cannot transcend this.

Intuition

Sufis, such as Ibn al- ‘Arabi, saw problems within the Islamic religious structure that were detracting from the inherent message of the Qur’an. The theologians and authorities of religious law were shaping Islam into a set of strict rules and rites that every devout Muslim was expected to follow and obey. Ibn al- ‘Arabi saw this version of Islam as lacking the personal and experiential elements that define the Sufi goal of unveiling and *fana*’/extinction²⁷. Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s critique of the religious authorities, is nicely summarized by James W. Morris:

The essential motivation of Ibn al- ‘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 is 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.²⁸

Ibn al- ‘Arabi is not trying to undermine the religious institutions of his day, on the contrary, he aims to make them aware of the necessity of allowing the individual to interpret and understand the Qur’an for him/herself. To do this does not mean that the religious institutions or laws must be destroyed, for, he explicitly says, those individuals content to simply follow the prescripts of the religious authorities should be allowed to do so. But this does mean that the *ulama*/religious authorities should be open to diverse

²⁷ Both of which the individual must experience to become the Perfect Individual, and will be discussed in the last section of this Chapter and in the later half of Chapter Two.

²⁸ James W. Morris, “Ibn ‘Arabi’s ‘Esotericism’: The Problem of Spiritual Authority,” *Studia Islamica* 71 (1990): 56.

interpretations, by giving all individuals the complete freedom and responsibility to understand on their own the essence of the Islamic revelation. Ibn al- ‘Arabi is saying that the current mind-set hinders individuals from taking on responsibility and exploring this freedom. The attitude of *fiqh*, or legalism, leads to conformism and solidification of interpretation. The authorities have declared the “correct” interpretation, with which the community is to conform. Such an environment hinders the exercise of personal faith. The community views any divergence from accepted theological interpretation as blasphemous, thus any unique interpretation or perspective of the individual is viewed as suspect. In sum, Ibn al- ‘Arabi is criticizing the religious authorities for suppressing the individual’s responsibility of interpretation.

How is religious authority supposed to be esoteric, the responsibility of the individual? The heart/*qalb* is the means by which the prophets received revelation and by which the individual accepts revelatory truth. Ibn al- ‘Arabi emphasizes this to support the individual’s responsibility for understanding revelation. In one of the appendixes to Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s *Contemplation of the Holy Mysteries*, Twinch and Beneito explain:

He [Ibn al- ‘Arabi] says, “When the High God wishes to grant his servant some of these [special] knowledges, He disposes the mirror of his heart towards success, He looks at it with the eye of benevolence (*lutf*) and help (*tawfiq*), and supports it with the sea of strong backing (*ta’yid*).” He then describes how the various facets of the heart are each polished in turn, so that the mirror of the heart becomes clear and free from the rust of otherness. Then the revelation which appears in the heart varies according to the heart’s readiness to receive forms.²⁹

According to this passage, Ibn al- ‘Arabi believes that the heart is a transformative tool that becomes open to personal “revelation”.³⁰ The heart, when polished, is “free from the

²⁹ Ibn Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Contemplation of the Holy Mysteries and the Rising of the Divine Lights*, trans. and ed. Cecilia Twinch and Pablo Beneito (Oxford: Anqa, 2001), 118-9.

³⁰ The transformation of the heart is explained as analogous to polishing a mirror, and will be expanded on in the next chapter.

rust of otherness;" it becomes detached from all selfish desire and egotism. This detachment is realized by fully embracing the tenets of Islam, seeking knowledge of the self's connection to God, and using this knowledge to actualize the attributes associated with God. The way this transformation is accomplished can be found in another passage by Ibn al- 'Arabi; in one of his early works, about saintship and religious authority, Ibn al- 'Arabi says: "Thus, [the Prophet] (May God bless and keep him!) established the Imamate for every human being in himself, making him one who is to be rightly Sought, both in the World of his transcendent [being] and of his sensual."³¹ This is followed by the poem, "Be Your Own Ruler", which further explores this idea. Ibn al- 'Arabi here points directly to the problem between systematized religious authority and the differing understandings by the individual. Ibn al- 'Arabi claims that every individual is his/her own Imam, meaning that only the individual can truly guide him/herself because only he/she, other than God, can see within him/herself and change the status of his/her heart-mirror. Only the individual can improve their spiritual self and actualize the essence of revelation.

The emphasis in Sufism is personal understanding. To what extent then is reason utilized? As illustrated by *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, the philosophers believed that reason could lead an individual to a perfect understanding of the world and God.³² Near the end of the

³¹ Ibn al- 'Arabi quoted in Gerald T. Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time: Ibn Al-Ibn al- 'Arabi's "Book of the Fabulous Gryphon"* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 241.

³² Although, this was later qualified, saying that only some individuals could use philosophy. An example in Ibn Tufayl's text:

When he [Hai] finally understood the true nature of people and that the majority are in a state similar to that of dumb animals, he realized that all wisdom and guidance and the only chance of success lies in what the messengers have conveyed and what the religious law has provided and that nothing more is possible.[Ibn Tufayl, *Journey of the Soul*, trans. and ed. Riad Kocache (London: Octagon, 1982), 59.]

book, however, there is evidence that Ibn Tufayl believed that the mystical state provides an intuitive knowledge that outweighs the rational. Hayy finds teaching the community frustrating, and the reader is told:

But although they were a people who loved the good and wanted the truth, Hai's teaching seemed only to induce more and more discord among them. Owing to their lack of native good sense, they did not want to seek the Truth in the way He had indicated nor by experiencing Him nor entering by the door He had provided. They did not want to come to Him through His exponents.³³

The majority of people, who may desire to understand truth, do not want to discipline themselves in the search for it. They would rather have it handed to them, without any personal striving, and follow its dictates. What is of special interest is the idea of "experiencing Him[God]" that Ibn Tufayl places in the passage. This can be interpreted as referring to mystical experience. If this is so, then the philosopher for Ibn Tufayl is also a mystic, i.e., a Sufi. W.M. Watt supports this interpretation:

For Ibn-Tufayl philosophy is seen to be incapable of directing the lives of the inhabitants of the state. It can only lead a few selected individuals to the highest felicity, but to reach this they must retire from active life. In other words the *summum bonum* of the philosopher has become mystical ecstasy.³⁴

Reason, although it can lead an individual to the highest truth, cannot necessarily be taught to every person. In many ways it can be considered to parallel mystical intuition, which can also lead to Truth, and which also cannot be concretely shared with another person. They are both internal mechanisms relying on the capacity of the individual. Reason can be utilized to the capacity the individual has developed his/her intellect, and intuition can be utilized to the extent that the individual has developed his/her spiritual insight or awareness. Any knowledge given to the individual from either mode then is

³³ Tufayl, 60.

³⁴ W. M. Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy* (Edinburgh, 1962), quoted in Michael E. Marmura, *Probing In Islamic Philosophy: Studies In The Philosophies of Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali And Other Major Muslim Thinkers* (Binghamton: Global Academic Publishing, 2005), 421.

tailored to suit the capacity of the individual; and therefore cannot necessarily be meaningful to anyone else. Watts, however, suggests that there is not just a parallel, but that the philosopher becomes a mystic. Since the true philosopher must divorce him/herself from society in order to practice philosophical contemplation, and the mystic/Sufi, in solitude, must seek God through internal reflection, then both strive for the same goal. Thus, the philosopher and the mystic/Sufi become the equivalent. Intuition, like reason, is a “tool” that can be utilized by only a select few. Both sets of individuals have attained the highest knowledge available to humanity. They are given direct access to Truth, or God.

Philosophy/reason coupled with Sufism/intuition leads to God. However, what about those philosophers who are not mystics/Sufis, such as Ibn Rushd? Ibn al- ‘Arabi says of these individuals that:

As for the theorists and thinkers among the ancients, as also the scholastic theologians, in their talk about the soul and its quiddity, none of them have grasped its true reality, and speculation will never grasp it. He who seeks to know it by theoretical speculation is flogging a dead horse.³⁵

The search for knowledge of the divine, the eternal, and the soul cannot rely solely on reason. There is some transcendental truth in these that lies beyond the limits of the intellect. Ibn al- ‘Arabi says the people who look for such only from within the confines of reason are “flogging a dead horse.” They are looking at something lifeless that will never reveal the inner essence of the matter. Ibn Rushd, who could not see past the veil of existence and commune with Ibn al- ‘Arabi, illustrates this. Reason can show the outer, but never the inner; this is why Ibn al- ‘Arabi says complete knowledge can only come from personal revelation. He says:

³⁵ Ibn al- ‘Arabi, 153.

Thus, perfect knowledge is to be had only through a divine Self-revelation or when God draws back the veils from Hearts and eyes so that they might perceive things, eternal and ephemeral, non-existent and existent, impossible, necessary, or permissible, as they are in their eternal reality and essentiality.³⁶

The knowledge that is “unveiled” to the heart shows the individual the spiritual, transcendental nature of things, which reason can never ascertain. This unveiled knowledge is the very knowledge of God. It can only be understood through direct and intuited experience. That is why Ibn Rushd could never fully understand the “knowing” that Ibn al- ‘Arabi had been given.

Ibn al- ‘Arabi believes that every individual should be allowed to interpret and understand the Qur’an and *hadith* on his/her own. But what is the basis for this? Sufism’s knowledge proper of intuition/unveiling is the personalization of revelation. This conclusion is reached through two premises. The first is that the Sufi desires to commune directly with the source of all revelation, that is God, and is therefore more concerned with the source than the knowledge or revelation itself. Secondly, the Sufi believes that the way to reach this communion is to “re-live” Muhammad’s “Night of Ascension,” to experience the revelation for him/herself. Martin Lings illustrates this when he describes the relationship between Sufism and Islam in terms of waves on an ocean and the pools of water left behind: “The mystic is one who is consequently more preoccupied by the ebbing wave than by the water which it has left behind.”³⁷ The wave is the revelation coming from God, the pools of water left behind are the form the revelation takes, in this case, the Qur’an and Islam as a whole. The ocean, the source, is God. Islam is occupied with the revelation left behind, how to interpret it and how to follow its dictates, while Sufism views the revelation as a “drop from the Ocean” that is a path leading backwards

³⁶ Ibid., 166.

³⁷ Martin Lings, *What is Sufism*, 2nd ed. (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1981), 12.

to its source, God. Sufism seeks this source. Keeping with the wave, pool, and Ocean analogy, this means that Islam is focused on the effects of the revelation, the pool and what it means, while Sufism is concerned with finding the wave and understanding who the source, the Ocean, i.e., God, is; that is, Sufism wants to know the cause rather than the effect. *Kalam* seeks to interpret what the waves left behind, the message of the revelation that has been given. In contrast to this, the Sufis seek to go back to the source, to experience the process of the wave as it returns to the Ocean.

The second premise regarding communion suggests the means whereby the Sufi can go from pool, to wave, to Ocean. This means is the re-living of the revelatory experience, the one given to the Prophet Muhammad. Exemplifying or duplicating this experience need not be followed in its empirical sense, each individual does not have to travel to Mount Qaf and wait in solitude for the revelation of the Qur'an. Rather, this should be done metaphorically. In this way the exemplification or duplication means striving for an intensely personal "embodiment" of the knowledge of revelation.³⁸ Schimmel's definition of Sufism in relation to Islam illustrates this: "Sufism meant, in the formative period, mainly an interiorization of Islam, a personal experience of the central mystery of Islam, that of *tawhid*, 'to declare that God is One.'"³⁹ The Sufi does not merely follow the prescripts of the faith, but strives to embody them.

Conclusion

³⁸ It can be argued that Islam itself fosters, or at least claims to foster, an individualized relationship with God. This could be called a type of "personalization" similar to that advocated by Sufism; however, this is constructed under the auspices of a rule-based, systematized religion. Sufism, and especially Ibn al-'Arabi's philosophy (as will be discussed later), is not a static system that applies uniformly to all.

³⁹ Schimmel, 17.

In conclusion, the above explorations can be used to determine the manner in which the Perfect Individual utilizes the knowledge of revelation, reason, and intuition. Ibn al-‘Arabi says of the Perfect Individual:

The Perfect Man- who denotes his Lord by his very essence in an a priori manner (*min awwal al-badiha*)- and only the Perfect Man, is the Crown of the King... He gathers together nature (*al-tab*) and intellect (*al-‘aql*), so within him are the grossest (*akthaf*) and subtlest (*altaf*) of compositions in respect of his nature, and within him is disengagement (*al-tajarrud*) from substrata (*al-mawadd*) and the faculties (*al-quwa*) that govern bodies... Through the Perfect Man the Divine Judgment (*al-hukm al-ilahi*) concerning reward and punishment in the world becomes manifest. Through him the order (*al-nizam* [i.e., of the universe]) is established and overthrown; in him God decrees, determines, and judges.⁴⁰

The first thing Ibn al-‘Arabi explains is that the Perfect Individual, before he/she achieves perfection, i.e., as a normal human being, already signifies God within his/her essence⁴¹, therefore, perfection is achieved by gaining knowledge of this state. Next Ibn al-‘Arabi explains that the Perfect Individual combines nature or creation and intellect or reason. He/She is a rational being, and as such he/she analyzes the natural world around him/her. The Perfect Individual uses rational knowledge, philosophy, to explore and understand the world. However, the Perfect Individual also disengages him/herself from the physical world, he/she practices ascetical renunciation and mystical contemplation. This individual is similar to Ibn Tufayl’s philosopher who must leave society for solitary reflection, i.e., mystical intuition, but unlike Ibn Tufayl’s philosopher the Perfect Individual returns to society. He/she, as denotative of God, manifests the knowledge of revelation within the world. Not only does the Perfect Individual need to practice the right combination of the three modes of knowledge, using revelation as the foundation for truth, reason as a limited mode of discernment, and intuition as the transformative means

⁴⁰ Ibn al-‘Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations: Volume I*, trans. and ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, William C. Chittick, and James W. Morris (New York: PIR Press, 2002), 43-4.

⁴¹ This will be analyzed in Chapter Three.

of understanding, but he/she must also use these three in his/her capacity as the Perfect Individual. Thus, knowledge is tied to the attaining of and the sustaining of perfection.

Chapter 2: The Perfect Individual's relation to Muhammad

Perfection implies the embodying of an ideal state. Socrates equated perfection with “disembodiment”, pure contemplation; in the *Bhagavadgita* it is the sublimation of all difference within the “body” of the One; and finally, for Gregory of Nyssa it is equated with embodying the attributes of Christ. What or who is the *al-insan al-kamil* embodying? The answer to this question can be found by analyzing the relationship between the Perfect Individual, the Prophet Muhammad, and the *haqiqa muhammadiyah*, the Reality of Muhammad, that is the metaphysical essence of perfection for humanity.

Islam acknowledges the Prophet as the exemplary human being; this is no exception for Ibn al- ‘Arabi, as the Prophet is considered the pinnacle of creation, and thus the model of perfection. Ibn al- ‘Arabi says of the Prophet: “His [Muhammad’s] is the wisdom of singularity because he is the most perfect creation of this humankind, for which reason the whole affair [of creation] begins and ends with him.”⁴² If this is the case, can any other individual embody perfection? The answer lies in an earlier passage from Ibn al- ‘Arabi that states: “It is not necessary for one who is perfect to be superior in everything and at every level, since men of the Spirit have regard only to precedence in the degrees of the knowledge of God, which is their [sole] aim.”⁴³ This passage suggests two things. First, that perfection does not entail superiority at every level; and, secondly, that Perfect Individuals are not concerned with superiority per se, only with knowledge of God. What is this superiority then, and how does it function? And, more importantly, what role does Muhammad play in it? What type of superiority does Muhammad have over the rest of humanity? These are the questions that this chapter seeks to answer, and

⁴² Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Bezels*, 272.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 66.

will do so in the following manner: 1) The *Haqiqa muhammadiyya* and the historically actualized Muhammad will be analyzed in relation to one another. This will make the relationship between Muhammad, the world, and the Perfect Individual clearer. 2) *Nabi*’/Prophethood will be explored as a role of the Perfect Individual. The function of prophethood, and its completion in Muhammad as the “Seal of the Prophets” is the first element to be identified. A subsidiary exploration of this section will be the concept of *rasul*/apostleship, which in many ways is directly tied to prophethood, and is the second element in the hierarchy. 3) Finally, the concept of *wali*/sainthood and its pinnacle in the “Heir of the Prophets” will be analyzed. Sainthood is the most basic type of Perfect Individual. Each of these sections will help to clarify the being of the Perfect Individual as, not simply an appellation for Muhammad, but as a reality that remains open for every human being.

Muhammad as the prototype for the Perfect Individual

Clarifying the relationship between the *haqiqa muhammadiyya* and the historical Muhammad aids in understanding the connection between Muhammad and the Perfect Individual. In order to do this the process from primordial reality to actualized person must be analyzed by looking specifically at Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s description of the “Reality of Muhammad,” how it came to be, and what its function is. And, the historical person of Muhammad as the concentrated manifestation of this ‘Reality’ must be examined. Claiming Muhammad to be the most perfect of all individuals does not necessarily imply that the category of Perfect Individual is closed to everyone else, only that a specific type of Perfect Individual is sealed off; in this rests Muhammad’s superiority over the rest of humanity.

Ibn al- 'Arabi describes the primordial beginning in a distinctly Platonic fashion. He begins by stating that “God manifested Himself in theophany through His Light to that Dust... within the Dust was the entire world in potentiality (*quwwa*) and readiness (*salahiyya*).”⁴⁴ Ibn al- 'Arabi had described this Dust as a plaster, or as the prime matter that “arose from that sacred Desire [the desire for the existence of the world contained within his knowledge of Himself]- through one kind of theophany of Incomparability,”⁴⁵ this material can be molded and shaped into any form. From these two passages a picture of the beginning of the universe can be formed: 1) God revealed Himself to “matter.” 2) This revealing came about through God’s Light, His Self-Consciousness. 3) The Light then shone on the Dust, the prime matter of otherness that God created through another theophany, and this Dust was pregnant with the yet unformed universe.

The movement after this is: “Each thing in the Dust received from His Light in accordance with its own preparedness (*isti'dad*) and potentiality, just as the corners of a room receive the light of a lamp and, due to the degree of their proximity to that light, increase in brightness and reception (*qabul*).”⁴⁶ The Light showed Itself to the Dust, God revealed Himself to nothingness, analogous to a lamp shining in a dark room. Just as a lamp will best illuminate the parts of the room that are closest to it, the Light shone brightest in the parts of the Dust most open and ready for It, those closest to the Light, or full of the Being of God. “According to their preparedness and potentiality” means “according to their realizable reflective capacity”. Just as light from a lamp does not equally illuminate all objects, some not being able to reflect light as well as others,

⁴⁴ Ibn al- 'Arabi, *Meccan Revelations*, 35.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 34.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 35.

likewise some objects of creation have less of a capacity to reflect the Light. Ibn al-

‘Arabi elaborates on this when he says:

Within the Dust nothing is nearer to the Light in reception than the Reality of Muhammad, which is called the Intellect. So he is the lord of the world in its entirety and the first thing to become manifest within existence. Hence his existence derives from the Divine Light, the Dust, and the Universal Reality, while his entity (‘*ayn*) comes into existence within the Dust; then the entity of the world stems from his theophany.⁴⁷

The Reality of Muhammad, or the First Intellect, was the configuration of Dust that was closest to the Divine Light; therefore it/he is the most perfect and all-comprehensive component of creation.⁴⁸ Perfection here can be defined as the possession of the full intensity/brightness of the Light. This means that as the pinnacle of perfection within creation, and, as the all-comprehensive reflection, the Reality of Muhammad became the locus of manifestation for the Divine Name *Allah*. This Name combines within itself all the other Names or Attributes of God/Being within itself. The Reality of Muhammad contained within itself all the other Names, which separately became the other varied parts of creation. Earthly existence then is created indirectly from the Being of God, for first the Reality of Muhammad was created, and then out of it individual existents were formed.

What is the historical Muhammad’s relation to the *haqiqa muhammadiyya*? There are two passages in the *Bezels of Wisdom* where Ibn al- ‘Arabi explains this. The first comes from the chapter on the prophet Seth: “Every prophet, from Adam until the last of the

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ A parallel could be made here between Ibn al- ‘Arabi and Plato’s *Phaedrus*. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates explains how souls come into the world in various states. Before souls become placed in bodies, or existence, they all must make a journey to the Forms. The journey upwards to the Forms is long and strenuous and not all the souls will complete it. Depending on where a soul falls along the journey dictates the type of bodily existence it will be given. Those that are closest to the goal, that catch a glimpse of the Forms are given a human body, and are the best and most “perfect” according to how much of the Forms they saw. In a like manner, the Reality of Muhammad is all-comprehensive because it reaches the highest intensity of Light, and thus sees, knows, and reflects all of Being.

prophets, derives what he has from the Seal of Prophets, even though he comes last in his temporal, physical manifestation, for in his [essential] reality he has always existed.”⁴⁹

And the second comes from the final chapter, which discusses the wisdom of the Prophet Muhammad:

His [Muhammad’s] is the wisdom of singularity because he is the most perfect creation of this humankind, for which reason the whole affair [of creation] begins and ends with him. He was a prophet when Adam was still between the water and the clay and he is, by his elemental makeup, the Seal of the prophets, first of the three singular ones, since all other singulars derive from it.⁵⁰

These passages mention two things in particular: first, that Muhammad is the beginning (first) and end (last) of creation and the prophets; and secondly, that due to this he is the Seal of the Prophets. In these two passages a link between the physical person of Muhammad and the Reality of Muhammad can be inferred.⁵¹ He may be the last prophet to arrive, but in his essence he has always been in existence. There is something inherent in Muhammad that places him above everyone else. Muhammad is the physical manifestation of the Reality of Muhammad. Elsewhere Ibn al- ‘Arabi affirms this connection: “He [Muhammad] was the clearest of evidence for his Lord, having been given the totality of the divine words, which are those things named by Adam.”⁵² Muhammad, as a created being, was given the totality of the divine words, that is, he was given all the names of God within himself.

Further proof of this connection is in a passage where Ibn al- ‘Arabi states that the essence or nature of Muhammad was replaced by the name Allah, the Name of God that encompasses all other Names. “He [God] negated the engendered existence (*kawn*) of

⁴⁹ Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Bezels*, 67.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁵¹ His role as the Seal of Prophets will be discussed in detail later on, what is important in this passage at the moment is the idea that Muhammad is the all-encompassing prophet.

⁵² Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Bezels*, 272.

Muhammad and affirmed Himself as identical to Muhammad, giving him the Name Allah.”⁵³ Ibn al- ‘Arabi here indicates that God created the most comprehensive knowledge and perfection within the person of Muhammad, and that due to this the personhood of Muhammad was negated and in its place was put the Name *Allah*, that is, the perfect understanding of God. This process proceeds in a circular manner: 1) God’s Light became manifest within the perfect reflection that was the Reality of Muhammad; 2) the entire world of created existence was born out of this Reality, which culminated in the creation of the most perfect existent, Muhammad. All the rest of creation was only a partial likeness of the Reality of Muhammad, while Muhammad himself was a complete likeness. 4) Muhammad, as a Perfect Individual had his self negated and God put in his place. In this manner perfection is manifested on two levels within Muhammad, but this does not concretely establish that only Muhammad as such can be labeled the Perfect Individual. Muhammad’s position as the Seal of the Prophets needs to be explained before any claims about perfection can be made. What is a prophet, and what does it mean to be the seal of prophecy?

Prophet

There are three things that need to be discussed concerning prophethood: who and what a prophet is; how an individual becomes such; and what the other prophets’ relations are to Muhammad as the Seal of the Prophets. Muhammad was given this role before the creation of the world, but this is not the case for the other prophets. Ibn al- ‘Arabi says: “The Prophet [Muhammad] said, ‘I was a prophet when Adam was between water and clay,’ while the other prophets became such only when they were sent forth [on

⁵³ Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Meccan Revelations*, 138.

their mission].”⁵⁴ No other prophet holds the same place that Muhammad does.

Muhammad, equated with the *haqiqa muhammadiyah*, was created before any other existent. This is not the case for the other prophets. However, this is not to suggest that these other prophets acquired their positions due to personal achievements. Ibn al- ‘Arabi says:

Know that since Prophecy and Apostleship are a special divine favor, there is no question of any acquisition [of merit]. I mean [particularly] the legislative Prophecy. His favors to them are pure gifts and not in any sense rewards for which any compensation will be asked of them, His bestowal on them being a matter of favor and selection.⁵⁵

Prophets are not given this appointment because they somehow merit this appellation, but because God has chosen to favor them with this appointment. With this in mind, it cannot be argued that any prophet, particularly Muhammad, received this appointment because of some internal or external virtue that they developed, that is, the gift of prophecy is not due to the individual embodiment of perfection.

What is the purpose of this gift, and why does it come to an end? In answer to the first part, Ibn al- ‘Arabi says: “By prophethood I mean the bringer of Sacred Law.”⁵⁶ It is a gift of “revelation,” a special message that the individual is required to present to his/her people. He also says: “As for the legislative function of Prophecy and Apostleship, it came to an end in Muhammad. After him there will no longer be any law-bringing prophet or community to receive such, nor any apostle to bring divine law.”⁵⁷ Their function is to teach a particular aspect of divine knowledge, or to explain a specific divinely ordained Law to the people. Chittick in this vein explains:

⁵⁴ Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Bezels*, 67.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

The prophets and great friends of God, as human beings, manifest the name Allah in its relative fullness. Then, in their specific functions, they display one or more of the Most Beautiful Names. They are exemplars who disclose the possibilities of the human theomorphic state. Each is a model of perfection.⁵⁸

Further on he writes: “Each prophet himself becomes a kind of divine name, manifesting the Divine Presence through his earthly career.”⁵⁹ According to Chittick each prophet, not just Muhammad, manifests the name Allah. This is puzzling considering an earlier passage from Ibn al- ‘Arabi where God gave Muhammad the name Allah, that is, unless taking Chittick’s phrasing of “relative fullness” in relation to manifestation to mean that the prophets leading up to Muhammad, insofar as they are individual aspects of the Reality of Muhammad, partially manifest the name Allah. Proof for this interpretation can be found in the *Bezels of Wisdom* when Ibn al- ‘Arabi describes the divine names:

The Names of God are infinite because they are known by all that derives from them which is infinite, even though they derive [ultimately] from a [known] number of sources, which are the matrices or abodes of the Names. Certainly, there is but one Reality, which embraces all these attributions and relations called the Divine Names.⁶⁰

While the Divine Names are many, their Essence and Reality is One. Since the Essence of the infinite Divine Names is One, they are all connotations of God. These specific Names, embodying one distinct relation to God, also denote the complete Reality/Essence of God. Thus each prophet was given a specific revelatory Law/Wisdom, and with that came the distinction of being the embodiment of a specific Name, each one pointing towards the Being of God. However, Muhammad was given the added distinction, being the last of the prophets, to fully embody the all-comprehensive Name of Allah.

⁵⁸ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al- ‘Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 28.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Bezels*, 68.

The Seal of the Prophets signifies the completion of the Divine Law. Muhammad, in being given the revelation of the Qur'an, completed the Law meant to guide humanity. All the prophets prior to Muhammad, bringing only parts of the whole, in essence were partaking in pieces of the totality of Muhammad's prophethood. As Ibn al- 'Arabi says: "Know that Muhammad... is he who gave all the prophets and messengers their stations in the World of Spirits until he was sent in the body."⁶¹ All the prophets are models of perfection, and all prophets stem from the Reality of Muhammad, which is finalized in Muhammad. Prophethood is not achieved by personal effort; it is a gift from God. Is perfection then merely a gift bestowed on the prophets? That this is not the case is best clarified in the words of M. Chodkiewicz:

Properly speaking, this perfection [of the Perfect Individual] is possessed only by Muhammad, the ultimate and total manifestation of the *haqiqa muhammadiyah*. Yet, on the other hand, it is equally the goal of all spiritual life and the very definition of *walaya*. Hence, the *walaya* of the *wali* can only be participation in the *walaya* of the Prophet.⁶²

Walaya is generally defined as "sainthood," but *wali*, saint, can also be translated as "friend of God." It is one of the closest relationships an individual can have with the Divine. This relationship even competes with prophecy. Ibn al- 'Arabi says: "Prophecy and Apostleship constitute certain degrees of Sainthood,"⁶³ for "the prophet is a special kind of saint."⁶⁴ Izutsu clarifies this by saying that prophethood, as added to sainthood, is

⁶¹ Ibn al- 'Arabi, *Journey To The Lord Of Power: A Sufi Manual On Retreat*, trans. and ed. Rabia Terri Harris (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1989), 56-9.

⁶² Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. and ed. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 71.

⁶³ Ibn al- 'Arabi, *Bezels*, 169.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

“a particular knowledge of things unknown and unseen.”⁶⁵ Therefore, prophethood is a gift added to sainthood.

If prophethood is a gift added to sainthood who and what is an apostle in relation to a saint? Apostleship is also a position added to Saintship. Not all prophets are apostles, although they are both saints. Ibn al- ‘Arabi makes this clear when he says in the *Bezels Of Wisdom*, in the chapter on the prophet Khalid: “Although Khalid was not himself an apostle, he sought to acquire as much as possible of the [all-encompassing] mercy of Muhammad’s mission. He was not himself commanded to deliver God’s dispensation.”⁶⁶ The distinction implied here seems to be that while a prophet is given special wisdom and insight into the Truth of God, the apostle is given a special Divine command to dictate to the people. Ibn al- ‘Arabi says: “the Apostle is a Saint who adds to his ‘saintship’ and ‘prophethood’ one more characteristic; namely being conscious of the mission and capacity of conveying Divine messages to the people who follow him.”⁶⁷ Although the apostle is a prophet, the apostle transmits a message or law to the community; this is not necessarily the job of a prophet. This distinction is illustrated by comparing the prophets Seth and Job to the prophet-apostles Jesus and Muhammad. The first two were given a specific wisdom to be shared with their respective communities, but this sharing did not carry with it an explicit instruction to teach the community a new law or order of worship. The second two figures were specifically given a message and new order to teach their communities. In the case of Jesus, this was, or what was misinterpreted as, the message of Christianity. Muhammad, as the last prophet and apostle, taught his people

⁶⁵ Toshihiko Izutsu, *A Comparative Study Of The Key Philosophical Concepts In Sufism And Taoism* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute Of Cultural And Linguistic Studies, 1966), 255.

⁶⁶ Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Bezels*, 268.

⁶⁷ Izutsu, 255.

the final revelation that was the Qur'an and Islam. This however, explains nothing about the embodiment of perfection.

Ibn al- 'Arabi stated that both Prophethood and Apostleship are types of Saintship. This means that there is another important aspect for who can be given the title of Perfect Individual, which is more enduring than that of prophet or apostle. Ibn al- 'Arabi says: "Saintship... is that degree which remains to the prophets and apostles in the Hereafter where there is no occasion for lawgiving to any of God's creation once they have entered either into Paradise, or into the Fire."⁶⁸ While prophethood comes to an end, sainthood remains, therefore it remains to be seen who and what the saint is.

In relation to this, Muhammad's superiority can be discerned to lie in the fact that as the Seal of the Prophets he closes both prophethood and apostleship. As the Seal, all prophethood stems from him and culminates in him, therefore Muhammad, through his absolute prophethood, gained complete knowledge of the Divine, thus making him superior, but not more perfect than the rest of humanity.

Saint: Heir of the Prophets

Sainthood is the key to understanding the Perfect Individual in relation to Muhammad. According to Ibn al- 'Arabi: "Know that Saintship is an all-inclusive and universal function that never comes to an end, dedicated as it is to the universal communication [of divine truth]."⁶⁹ Unlike prophethood, which ends with Muhammad, sainthood will continue until the end of time. Sainthood provides the key to understanding how there are Perfect Individuals other than the Prophet Muhammad. The

⁶⁸ Ibn al- 'Arabi, *Bezels*, 170.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

discussion will be divided into three parts: 1) the saints as the heirs of the prophets; 2) the saint in general; 3) the two seals of sainthood.

Ibn al- 'Arabi describes the saints as the heirs of the prophets in the *Bezels of Wisdom*. He outlines the various types of knowledge associated with twenty-seven specific prophets. (The exact number of prophets according to Ibn al- 'Arabi numbering twenty-seven thousand.) The knowledge given to the prophets can be handed down to the saints, but while the prophets were given the knowledge with God as their only guide, the saints must follow in the footsteps of these prophets. The saints are guided by the prophets as well as by God. Chittick explains: “[I]t is utterly impossible for people to understand their own innate disposition, made in the form of God, without God’s help. This help comes as prophetic guidance. The only way to reach perfection is to follow the authority of the prophets.”⁷⁰ The prophets-apostles left laws for humanity to follow, and the prophets left behind stories and their lives as examples. Through this inheritance people come to the knowledge of God. This “inheritance” comes from directly experiencing the station of a prophet.⁷¹ The experience of the prophetic knowledge and the specific station corresponding to this knowledge is different from the experience of the prophets. According to Ibn al- 'Arabi: “[T]he Station of his Lord which [the Prophet Muhammad] had witnessed cannot be witnessed by [his] Heirs (*al-warathah*) except from behind his Mantle... Were that not so, we would have revealed what he revealed

⁷⁰ William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn Al- 'Ibn al- 'Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), xxiii.

⁷¹ Every Prophet was given a specific type of knowledge or wisdom about God and the structure of the world. The stations where the individual Saints inherit this knowledge refers to the actualization of the form of this wisdom. A station then is a spiritual place and state where the individual learns how to understand the world from the perspective of a specific prophet and his mode of knowledge. Staying in a particular station means understanding God in a specific manner, i.e., in the manner of the Prophet in question.

and made known what he made known.”⁷² This passage specifically refers to knowledge given to the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood; however, in general terms it can be posited that any prophetic station has to be viewed behind the mantel of the appropriate prophet⁷³, meaning that the saints are dependent on the prophets. The prophets were given a specific knowledge or wisdom, and it is through their “eyes” that this wisdom is handed down to the saints. In this vein, Ibn al- ‘Arabi says: “He [Muhammad] saw, for example, a level ground without any distinguishing marks, and he walked upon it; while you, [following] in his tracks, see nothing but the trace (*athar*) of his feet.”⁷⁴ The prophet is given knowledge that no one else has yet achieved or actualized, and this is like walking along a path that no one has yet traversed. The saint, however, follows in the footsteps of the prophet, and this means that the wisdom already gleaned by the prophet is there to guide him/her. This guidance is also physically transformative.

The inheritance is not merely intellectual or spiritual, but also certain character traits and abilities are adopted. In this manner, it is both spiritually and physically transformative. Chodkiewicz explains:

The relationship which is established between the saint and the prophet who is his model is not a vague “patronage”, but may rather be compared to the transmission of a genetic inheritance. It confers a precise and visible character on the behaviour, virtues and graces of the *wali*.⁷⁵

The prophet acts as a type of father for the saint; with the saint’s new station of a particular prophet, he/she in a way is re-born, physically exhibiting characteristics of this

⁷² Ibn al- ‘Arabi quoted in Elmore, 592.

⁷³ The prophet who first attained the station in question was like the discoverer of an unexplored island. This was a special gift from God. The saints, are not given this gift, and must view the station from behind the understanding and experience of a prophet. In Sufi schools the teacher will give the student a mantel symbolizing that the student must proceed along the Path through the guidance of the teacher. The mantel analogy here symbolizes the fact that the saint must view the station through the eyes of the prophet in question. The prophet acts as a guide for the saint in understanding a station’s specific wisdom.

⁷⁴ Ibn al- ‘Arabi quoted in Elmore, 592.

⁷⁵ Chodkiewicz, 75.

new parent. Chodkiewicz also writes: “The same *wali* may, during the course of his existence, accumulate several prophetic heritages, which of necessity obscures the distinguishing features of each and effectively prevents us from mechanically employing the Shaykh al-Akbar’s typology.”⁷⁶ What this means is that a saint can inherit from more than one prophet during his/her lifetime, thus the genealogical inheritance becomes muddled; it becomes impossible to separate the traits into different prophetic categories.

How is this “inheritance” linked to Muhammad? The answer parallels Muhammad’s relationship to the prophets. Just as all of the prophets ultimately derived from the Reality of Muhammad, which was completely manifest in the Prophet Muhammad, so to all saintly inheritances ultimately come from the Reality of Muhammad. Ibn al- ‘Arabi says:

Among the saints of the community of Muhammad- the Gatherer of the states of the prophets, peace and blessings be upon him- there may be an inheritor of the states of Moses, but he inherits from the Light of Muhammad, not from the Light of Moses. His state is from Muhammad, just as the state of Moses was from Muhammad.⁷⁷

The saint does not inherit directly from the prophet; the specific prophetic inheritance is given to the individual via the all-encompassing Reality of Muhammad. The Reality of Muhammad acts as a link between the Perfect Individual and saintly inheritance and knowledge. Saintly inheritance comes from parts of the Reality of Muhammad. The Reality of Muhammad is the most perfect reflection of God’s theophany, which means that the Reality of Muhammad is an exact mirror reflection of God. The pieces of this exact mirror reflection are given to the saint through the inheritance from the prophets. Put more precisely, the inheritance of the saints is knowledge of a particular attribute of God.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 80.

⁷⁷ Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Journey*, 56.

How does an individual become an heir of the prophets? The path to sainthood is identical to that of the Perfect Individual, for the saint is the Perfect Individual in general. Izutsu explains: “The highest of all human degrees is ‘saintship’ (*walayah*). The Saint (*waliy*) is the highest ‘knower’ of God and consequently (in terms of the world-view of Ibn ‘Ibn al- ‘Arabi) of the essential structure of Being.”⁷⁸ From this it can be posited that the appellation of saint, in one sense, ranks higher than that of prophet. Saintship, an eternal attribute, implies knowledge of the complete structure of Being or God.

There are two parts to the Path of the Perfect Individual: 1) the moral/spiritual cultivation of the individual, and 2) the experience of unity with God. R.A. Nicholson describes these as follows:

The Sufi’s “path” is not finished until he has traversed all the “stages,” making himself perfect in every one of them before advancing to the next, and has also experienced whatever “state” it pleases God to bestow upon him. Then, and only then, is he permanently raised to the higher planes of consciousness which Sufis call “the Gnosis” (*ma’rifat*) and “the Truth” (*haqiqat*), where the “seeker” (*talib*) becomes the “knower” or “Gnostic” (*‘arif*), and realizes that knowledge, knower and known are One.⁷⁹

The stages can be defined as ethical submissions that must be fully embodied by the individual, and the states are the psychological or spiritual feelings that God gives to the seeker in the various stages. The stages are within the control of the seeker while the states are not. The stages are all aspects of ascetical discipline modeled on the embodiment of *tawhid*. After these stages have been traversed, the seeker becomes the knower, which means that the individual realizes his/her essential affinity with God; he/she reaches the state of *fana’*. The details of this journey cannot be described in detail here, so, instead, the core concept of *fana’* (annihilation) will be analyzed.

⁷⁸ Izutsu, 253.

⁷⁹ Nicholson, 29.

The concept of *fana'*, the goal of the Sufi path, is realized through the extinction of the individual self. From this moment onward the individual sees and acts through a double lens; one looks at the world of difference, and the other sees the unity of Being, that it is all a manifestation of God. It is the complete negation of all selfhood within the individual. Ibn al- 'Arabi says of the individual's journey: "God said... 'Gain proximity to Me through that which I do not possess: Lowliness and poverty.'"⁸⁰ This means that the way to achieve union with the divine is to negate all position and possession. Only God has Being, all else only has relative being, and therefore the individual must actualize this lack within him/herself, becoming low and impoverished. Chittick describes this: "Hence the spiritual journey involves discarding the specifically human limitations that are called 'not He' with the ultimate aim of identifying totally with the specifically divine self-disclosures that are called 'He.'"⁸¹ The only way to become a vessel for the self-disclosure of God is to become empty of all qualities that cannot be associated with God except for those of lowliness and poverty. The state of *fana'*, however is not simply a two part process. Izustu identifies three stages in Ibn al- 'Arabi process of self-annihilation:

Ibn 'Ibn al- 'Arabi distinguishes three stages in "self-annihilation." The first is the annihilation of the attributes... The second stage is called *tahaqquq*. It means that the mystic has his essence (*dhat*) "annihilated" and realizes (*tahaqquq*) in himself his being one with the Absolute... The third and last stage is called *ta'alluq*. It corresponds to what is more usually known as the state of "self-subsistence" (*baqa'*) which comes after the state of *fana'*. In this spiritual state, the mystic regains his self which he has once annihilated, but he regains it not in himself but in the very midst of the Divine Essence.⁸²

The first is what has primarily been discussed already. It is the negating of all that is identified as other and self. The second is achieved the moment the first is actualized.

⁸⁰ Ibn al- 'Arabi, *Meccan Revelations*, 131.

⁸¹ Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn Al- 'Ibn al- 'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 37.

⁸² Izustu, 255-6.

The individual in this state realizes that there is no individual, only God. The third and final state is the step immediately following *fana* '. In this state the individual re-gains his/herself, but this regaining is not merely a giving back. It is the full reliance on God. The individual goes back into the world as a manifestation of God's Essence. Ibn al- 'Arabi says: "And I shall describe absorption in Him, which is a station less than the station of return."⁸³ This absorption is the state of the Perfect Individual, and it is from this state that he/she can begin to grow in the knowledge of the prophets.⁸⁴

Is this an eternal process? The saints, like the prophets have a Seal. In fact, the Saints have two Seals, one to seal all sainthood, and another to seal Muhammadan sainthood. The Muhammadan Seal, which Ibn al- 'Arabi identifies as himself, closes the inheritance from Muhammad. All saints actually inherit from the Light or Reality of Muhammad, and this Seal closes off the most complete type of inheritance. Ibn al- 'Arabi says:

For, indeed, among the Saints are those who inherit from [the Prophets] Abraham, Moses, and Jesus [etc.], so that these may well be found to exist after the Muhammadan Seal; but after him there shall be no Saint belonging to the Heart of Muhammad... This is the meaning of the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood.⁸⁵

This individual seals the specific station of Muhammad; he/she seals off the comprehensive knowledge associated with Muhammad. The individual, who inherits directly from Muhammad, sharing in his all-comprehensive knowledge, is granted a share in complete understanding of all the Divine Names of God. Thus, after the Seal only saints who partially inherit from the *haqiqa muhammadiyah* will come into being.

The second Seal of the saints is the Seal of general sainthood. Ibn al- 'Arabi explains who this Seal is in *Meccan Revelations*:

⁸³ Ibn al- 'Arabi, *Journey*, 26.

⁸⁴ This state will be analyzed in the last chapter that deals with the actions of the Perfect Individual.

⁸⁵ Ibn al- 'Arabi quoted in Elmore, 595.

For [Jesus] will descend [from Heaven at the end of time] as a Saint, possessor of an Absolute Prophethood (*dhu nubumat mutlaqut*), in which the Muhammadan Saints shall participate with him. He is one of us; indeed, he is our Master (*sayyidu-na*). The first in this matter- I mean [this specialized type of Prophecy (*nubuwa al-ikhtisas*)]- was a Prophet- namely, Adam- and the last [will also be] a Prophet- Jesus.⁸⁶

Jesus, as this Seal, will return at the end of the world and close off sainthood forever.⁸⁷

Just as prophethood and apostleship had an end, so too does sainthood, but with one difference, the end of sainthood signals the end of the world. With sainthood gone the Perfect Individuals disappear, and the world cannot sustain itself, for it too must disappear.⁸⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion then, the embodiment of perfection is linked to Muhammad on two levels: through the *haqiqa muhammadiyah* and the historical prophet. However, perfection does not necessarily entail embodying all the attributes of Muhammad. The *haqiqa muhammadiyah* is the spiritual being that is the source of all creation and existential perfection. Muhammad is the concrete manifestation of this, and as such he holds the position as the Seal of the Prophets. He possesses complete knowledge and understanding of the intricate relationship between the world and God. All the other prophets can only claim partial knowledge and understanding of them. This, however, does not mean that perfection is unattainable to any other than Muhammad, for a status upholding prophethood exists, that of sainthood. Sainthood is equated with the Perfect

⁸⁶ Ibn al- 'Arabi quoted in Elmore, 594.

⁸⁷ Jesus in this role should not be confused with the Mahdi, who is supposed to come to earth unifying all Muslims and forming a united kingdom on earth. The Mahdi is supposed to be born from the lineage of Muhammad, and thus will be a blood relation.

⁸⁸ The Perfect Individual's role in sustaining the existence of the universe will be discussed in the next chapter.

Individual in general and is the seat of perfection. Becoming a Perfect Individual or saint requires the individual to have purified his/her self of all otherness and to have reached the state of *fana'*, extinction in God. In this state the individual becomes a mirror image to God, and it is here that perfection is obtained. Once in this state, however, the individual can reach the stations of the various prophets and gain their knowledge. These are the different degrees, or levels of superiority, within perfection; however, the Perfect Individual is not concerned about the hierarchy between the Prophet, Saint, and Apostle, for his/her sole desire is intimate knowledge of God. Although sainthood must remain in the world for the continuation of temporal existence, there are two Seals on sainthood. The first, the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood closes off the highest degree of sainthood, the station of Muhammad. The second, the general Seal of Sainthood closes the status of perfection and signals the end of the world. How and why the Perfect Individual must remain in the world will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Perfect Individual as a Mirror

The Perfect Individual, as a perfect reflection of God, is given special status in the world. The Perfect Individual is the only creature that manifests all the Names or Attributes, of God, and therefore is the only creature that fully manifests Being. The question arises: “if the Perfect Individual perfectly and completely reflects God or Being, then is this individual somehow more ‘real’ than other individuals?” The answer to this question will always be yes and no. The reason for this paradoxical answer/non-answer is evident within the mirror analogy employed by Ibn al- ‘Arabi.

The being of the Perfect Individual is not conducive to a linear or systematic description. Much like radii extending from the center of a sphere, the different themes outlined here could be discussed in any order, each one leading to and connecting with the others. A key concept within Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s school of Sufism is the idea of unveiling, which refers to the process by which the initiate is made aware of a previously unknown level of existence or truth. The knowledge was already in front of this person, but hidden under a veil. Through various unveilings, the individual is granted a progressively clearer vision of true Reality. This chapter seeks to lift away veil after veil to present a clear vision of the Perfect Individual’s ontological and metaphysical status. This will be accomplished by: 1) discussing and analyzing the specific elements within the mirror analogy as a rhetorical tool used by Ibn al- ‘Arabi; 2) Analyzing and exploring the Ibn al- ‘Arabic term *wujud* and its two meanings of “being” and “finding,” and the implications it has for the Perfect Individual; and finally, 3) using the conclusions from the previous sections to form a picture of how and why the Perfect Individual exists in a paradoxical state of being.

Mirror

The mirror plays a key role in understanding and describing the paradoxical claims of Ibn al- ‘Arabi. Because of this, it has to be the point of departure for this chapter. The mirror analogy is important, especially in its relation to the being of the Perfect Individual. The first clue to understanding this is to look at how the mirror is used to describe the creation of the universe. In the first chapter of the *Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn al- ‘Arabi lays out the basics of his ontology and metaphysics by describing how God created the universe.⁸⁹ He begins by explaining that God or Reality wanted to see the manifestation of His Essence in another object, which would allow Him to see “His own mystery”, so He created the universe. He further explains that:

...For the seeing of a thing, itself by itself, is not the same as its seeing itself in another, as it were in a mirror; for it appears to itself in a form that is invested by the location of the vision by that which would only appear to it given the existence of the location and its [the location’s] self-disclosure to it.⁹⁰

In order for God to see His own mystery, He has to see His Attributes manifested in an object other than Himself. Ibn al- ‘Arabi describes this need as similar to the phenomenological experience of viewing oneself in a mirror. An individual can look at him/herself using only his/her own naked eye, but this is fundamentally different from looking at oneself through the means of a mirror. The mirror manifests a quality of otherness upon the individual that would otherwise remain hidden and unknown. The otherness is not given to the individual by another person, but is given by him/herself, for the other is none other than him/herself. The image in the mirror, as Ibn al- ‘Arabi says, imbues the individual with a form that “would only appear to it given the existence of the location” and which is only knowable to the individual because of the location’s “self-

⁸⁹ This description is very different from the one given in the last chapter, but it is in no way contradictory.

⁹⁰ Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Bezels*, 50.

disclosure.” Meaning that, from one perspective, the form in the mirror is no different than the form of the individual, but from another perspective, it is intrinsically different given the altered location. This distinct location denotes this otherwise unknowable quality to the individual, this quality of comparability. Only through another can a person begin to understand and manifest such qualities as compassion, anger, wrath, mercy, etc. By these means the original subject (God) can manifest all the varying aspects of (His) Being, and can find or discover these new attributes that would not concretely exist if there were no other to whom to relate (Himself).

The second aspect of the mirror analogy, relates to humanity and the Perfect Individual. A mirror only functions when it possesses the attribute of reflectivity. A mirror for Ibn al- ‘Arabi was a finely polished sheet of metal. The flatter and smoother it was polished, the better its reflective capacity. Any blemish or roughness would hinder the subject’s ability to see itself, the resulting image being distorted or hazy.⁹¹ Humanity, in particular the Perfect Individual, imbues the universe with its reflective quality: “Thus the [divine] Command required [by its very nature] the reflective characteristic of the mirror of the Cosmos, and Adam was the very principle of reflection for that mirror and the spirit of that form.”⁹² According to the Qur’an, Adam (humanity) was the final and ultimate act of creation. This ultimate act culminates in the Perfect Individual of whom Adam was the prototype. The Perfect Individual is the most concrete actualized form of God. This means that the Perfect Individual is accorded a special and important position: “It is by his [the Perfect Individual’s] existence that the Cosmos subsists... So he is

⁹¹ R.W.J. Austion, ed., *Bezels*, 48-9 R.W.J. Austin explains this in his introduction to the first chapter of the text. He describes this type of mirror as serving “to illustrate better the metaphysical problems” with which Ibn al- ‘Arabi was dealing.

⁹² Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Bezels*, 51.

called the Vice-Regent, for by him God preserves His creation, as the seal preserves the king's treasure... Even so is the Cosmos preserved so long as the Perfect Man remains in it.”⁹³ The Perfect Individual's position then, according to Ibn al- ‘Arabi, is one of preservation and dominion. If Perfect Individuals were to cease existing, the universe itself would cease to exist. Ibn al- ‘Arabi further elaborates on this idea: “God made him [Adam] a spirit for the Cosmos and subjected to him what is high and low, by virtue of the perfection of his form.”⁹⁴ The Perfect Individual is here described as the spirit of the Cosmos. He/she, as the crowning piece of creation, is the soul of all existence, which means that if this soul vanishes then the rest of existence would become a dead lump of matter. The mirror image has these two aspects that are important for understanding the link to the Perfect Individual: 1) the universe was created to function as a mirror for God; and 2) the Perfect Individual is the conscious agent who is the means for this function of the universe to take place.

Mirror Analogy

It could be argued that the mirror analogy is merely a literary device, a specific convention that is meant to describe the ambiguous relationship between God and the universe. Ibn al- ‘Arabi himself says that true understanding of this relationship is the highest level of knowledge available for any created being, and that only a select few are granted this.⁹⁵ He goes on to say, describing this highest knowledge, that “In your seeing of your true self, He is your mirror and you are His mirror in which He sees His Names and their determinations, which are nothing other than Himself. The whole matter is

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 253.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 65.

prone to intricacy and ambiguity.”⁹⁶ Thus suggesting that, even if this knowledge is only fully comprehended by a select few, Ibn al- ‘Arabi is using it in his writings in such a manner that these knowers would immediately understand what he is describing.

This convention, for the purposes of philosophical dialogue, will be considered a specific form of argumentation that forces the reader to accept paradoxical assertions. What is the distinct thought process that the reader is meant to go through when encountering this analogy? How does this thought-process lead to conclusions that cannot adequately be stated in words? Three points related to these questions will be discussed: 1) the ambiguous nature of the mirror analogy; 2) how it is fertile ground for paradoxical argumentation; and 3) the form of the paradoxical argument.

The ambiguity inherent in the mirror analogy is due to the shifting relationship between the subject and the object. R.W.J. Austin, in his translation of *The Bezels Of Wisdom*, comments that:

In the mirror we have a very apt symbol of the divine-cosmic polarity. At one extreme of the relationship cosmic Nature threatens to absorb and assimilate the subject in the infinity and complexity of his creative urge, while, at the other, the divine Subject seems to annihilate Nature in the reassertion of identity, each being, at once, another and non-other.⁹⁷

Austin identifies two vying perspectives within the mirror analogy. The first perspective, that of Nature, the universe, involves subsuming the subject/God into the mirror’s reflection. The object/nature, in the form of a creative act of the subject, desires to consume the entire subject. The cosmos, in order to fulfill its purpose, must reflect all aspects of the Divine. In doing so it pulls Being into the objective realm of non-being. The second is the perspective of the subject, which requires that at every moment it be

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 48-9.

affirmed over the object. The reflection or creation, in relation to the Subject, is nothing. The reflection only has a form so long as the subject stands in front of the mirror and sustains its, the reflection's, being. In this relationship, the subject can always hold this power over the object, creation or the reflection. At any moment, the subject can move away, yet it chooses not to because the object or reflection offers the subject a new understanding of itself; therefore, the relationship between the subject and object is one of give and take. The two are in a perpetual dialogue; the one trying to pull the other fully into it, while at the same time the other attempts to negate it and assert its absolute and sole being. However this is not the full picture, there is a third perspective that is given being within this dialogue. At the point where the two extremes meet a third moment is created, the moment where the subject and object realize their identity. It is within the dialogue of struggle that the two sides realize their identity. The one can never triumph over the other, because it is simultaneously another and non-other. Thus, the mirror analogy is constantly shifting between the relationship of duality and the struggle of the two sides, and the relationship of identity, the moment of transcendence beyond the struggle.

Michael A. Sells outlines the purpose of this ambiguity. The mirror analogy points out the insufficiency of a single statement or perspective given on its own. Each part, which opens and hides something, always leads to a further paradox, never to a concrete answer, but only to another question. Sells explains:

It is the moving image rather than any particular frame that is significant. The perceptual shift symbolized by the mirror serves as a bridge between what is said and how it is said. It constitutes not only the subject of Ibn 'Ibn al- 'Arabi's discourse (the mystical experience of passing from duality to nonduality) but also the meaning event, the semantic dynamic of the text.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 64.

The mirror analogy is used to illustrate the experience of mystical union or identity. It attempts to elicit an understanding in the reader by forcing him/her to go beyond the paradox, to grasp the essence of the connection that is beyond words. As a meaning event it is not merely a literary device, but a specific type of argumentation. In the introduction to his book, Sells refers to this type of reasoning as *apophasis*, saying through unsaying.

Sells says:

Apophasis can reach a point of intensity such that no single proposition concerning the transcendent can stand on its own. Any saying (even a negative saying) demands a correcting proposition, an unsaying. But that correcting proposition which unsays the previous position is in itself a “saying” that must be “unsaid” in turn. It is in the tension between the two propositions that the discourse becomes meaningful. That tension is momentary. It must be continually re-earned by ever new linguistic acts of unsaying.⁹⁹

Sells describes precisely what is happening in the mirror analogy. The tension between the two sides within the analogy creates a similar process in Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s thought. The one side affirms that the subject and object, the thing and the reflection, are identical, while the other side denies this, saying that only the subject exists, the object has no being and therefore falls into nothingness. Over and over again the paradox will be used to assert this tension, but it is not meant to remain in a duality. In fact, this tension of “unsaying” is meant to unveil to the disciple the mystical truth that lies between the two. Neither statement can stand on its own, the identity of the reflection and object or the non-identity/duality of the two; taken together they create a paradox. The reader is not meant to stay within the paradox, but to transcend this and reach the understanding of imagination and the place of *barzakh*, more of which will be discussed in the exploration of *wujud*, the state of being and finding, which is indispensable to the mirror analogy.

⁹⁹ Sells, 3.

***Wujud*: The Starting Point of the Ontological and Metaphysical Problem**

Having presented a picture of the type of argumentation implied by the mirror analogy, it is now time to examine the specific elements of the argument's premises to demonstrate its paradoxical conclusion. The key to unraveling this complexity lies within the concept of *wujud*, for essentially this whole problem revolves around being. The Ibn al- 'Arabi word has multiple English translations. William Chittick explains:

“Finding” renders the Ibn al- 'Arabi *wujud*, which in another context, may be translated as “existence” or “being”. The famous expression “Oneness of Being” or “Unity of Existence” (*wahdat al-wujud*), which is often said to represent Ibn al- 'Arabi's doctrinal position, might also be translated as the “Oneness” or “Unity of Finding.” Despite the hundreds of volumes on ontology that have been inspired by Ibn al- 'Arabi's works, his main concern is not with the mental concept of being but with the experience of God's Being, the tasting (*dhawq*) of Being, that “finding” which is at one and the same time to perceive and to be that which truly is.¹⁰⁰

Chittick here presents two concepts. Firstly, *wujud* can refer to “being”, thus pointing to a traditional ontological framework, and leading to an enquiry about the state of the Perfect Individual. The term, in this sense, signifies the status of God and the cosmos or creation. Being belongs solely to God, thus *wujud* can only be rightly attributed to Him. However, the cosmos and humanity are said to reflect the Names and Attributes of God, therefore, on one level, they have *wujud* through God, that is, they have relative *wujud*. Used in this sense, *wujud* refers to the framework of the being of “existents” in relation to God. Secondly, the term can refer to “finding”, which infers discovery and exploration. In this sense it is not static, but experiential. The emphasis, no longer on structure, is on the act of discovering God in the world and the self. The individual must uncover the identity

¹⁰⁰ Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 3.

between the two. Only by consciously “looking” into the mirror can identity be discovered. “Being” must be “found.”

The two different meanings of *wujud* lead to an understanding of the same thing. The first, “being”, is the exploration of the reflection in the mirror compared to and contrasted with the object; while the second, “finding”, is the exploration of the act of reflection, uncovering the purpose behind looking into the mirror and the knowledge sought in doing so. Each aspect helps answer the questions about the Perfect Individual, but in doing so two other terms or concepts must be made clear, those of *barzakh* and imagination. These terms refer to being and finding respectively, and, as will be shown, are both interconnected and indispensable to understanding the Perfect Individual.

Barzakh

Barzakh is a boundary or isthmus between two things. As such, it is neither one side nor the other, but relationally can be said to be either or both. Ibn al- ‘Arabi defines it as “between-between, a station between this and that, not one of them, but the totality of the two.”¹⁰¹ *Barzakh* is a specific state or position within the cosmological and ontological structure of existence. Ibn al- ‘Arabi describes this state in terms of the mirror analogy: “Try, when you look at yourself in a mirror, to see the mirror itself, and you will find that you cannot do so. So much is this the case that some have concluded that the image perceived is situated between the mirror and the eye of the beholder.”¹⁰² How does the *barzakh* link the un-relatable together? How does the Perfect Individual as a *barzakh* him/herself become a mirror?

¹⁰¹ Ibn al- ‘Arabi in Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, 333.

¹⁰² Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Bezels*, 65.

The *barzakh* borrows attributes from both sides of that which is separates, and links the formerly un-linkable together. Ibn al- ‘Arabi explains this concept as analogous to the structure of a syllogism. He says:

Thus, bringing or coming into being is based on a triplicity, or rather a bipolar triplicity, one being of the Reality, the other of the creature. This [principle of triplicity] pervades to the existence of ideas arrived at by logical proofs. Thus, a proof arrived at by syllogism is made up of three parts in a particular way that inevitably yields a result... The proof comes into being when this particular arrangement occurs, which is the binding of the two premises together by the repetition of one term, producing a triplicity.¹⁰³

This refers to the act of creation. Creation cannot occur out of a solitary “one”, rather, it must stem from a triplicity, from a syllogistic relationship. God is infinite and perfect. He is complete *wujud*. Creation is finite and imperfect. It only has relative and dependent *wujud*. A triadic relationship is found in the triplicity of the syllogism. Ibn al- ‘Arabi explains this in terms of the *barzakh*: “Know that nothing is produced from the One (*al-ahad*)... and nothing is originally produced from the two unless there is a third that joins them together (*yuzawwijhuma*) and becomes the unitor.”¹⁰⁴ The three terms are God, the universe and the Perfect Individual. The Perfect Individual is the middle term, thus the *barzakh*. This relation of the two premises might be phrased something like this:

All Perfect Individuals are a reflection of the universe.

All things that are a reflection of God are Perfect Individuals. (Here assuming that a reflection is identical to the thing reflected.) ∴

All things that are a reflection of God are things that are a reflection of the universe.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Ibid., 142.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Al-Futuhāt al-makkiya* vol. 3 (Cairo, 1911), 166, quoted in Huda Lutfi, “The Feminine Element in Ibn Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s Mystical Philosophy,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 5 (Spring 1985): 12.

¹⁰⁵ The details of this argument’s soundness will be analyzed in the coming section on ontology.

This is a valid, AAA-1 syllogism that relies on the rule of the distributed middle. The middle term, humanity, is needed to establish a link or common ground between the subject, God, and the predicate, the universe. In order for this to be a valid syllogism, the middle term needs to be distributed at least once in the premises. Distribution means that X is related to the whole of Y, while non-distribution implies that X is related to only part of Y. Let A≡ Perfect Individual, B≡ God and C≡ universe. In the first premise A, as the subject, is distributed, meaning that it is related to the whole of C. In the second premise A, as the predicate, is undistributed, meaning that it is related to only part of B. Since A is related to the entirety of C this implies that the part of A that is related to B is also a part that is related to C. This being the case, the conclusion, linking B and C, follows from the premises, because B and C are related to each other through their relationship to A. The question is: “what is the status and being of this middle term?” The easy answer is that A is a *barzakh*. Ibn al- ‘Arabi says:

The perfect human being brings together the form of the Real and the form of the cosmos. He is a *barzakh* between the Real and the cosmos, a raised-up mirror. The Real sees His form in the mirror of the human being, and creation also sees its form in him. He who gains this level has gained a level of perfection more perfect than which nothing is found in possibility.¹⁰⁶

The Perfect Individual holds a fluctuating position where he/she is or reflects the Real or God and the universe. This perfection seamlessly combines the spiritual and the physical. But it is not enough to understand this position, and this is where imagination becomes important.

Khayal/Imagination

¹⁰⁶Ibn Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Futuhāt Makkiyya* (Beirut, 1968), 398, quoted in Salman H. Bashier, *Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 116-7.

Imagination is the active faculty whereby the individual perceives the permeation of God within creation, where he/she experiences both sides of the *barzakh*. Chittick says: “Just as our imagination is the *barzakh* between our spirits and bodies, so also existence is the *barzakh* between Being and nothingness.”¹⁰⁷ Imagination lies between the Spirit, Being or God and the physical universe. The following section explores how the mirror of imagination works in the individual, and especially in the Perfect Individual.

The interpretation of the realm of imagination requires an active consciousness on the part of the Perfect Individual. Bashier comments: “To understand the manner of this interpenetration, a special kind of knowledge is needed, which is possessed by the Perfect Man alone.”¹⁰⁸ Imaginal knowledge is knowledge of the permeation between the Real/God and creation. This knowledge is not readily available. An individual must attain a special position. He/she must attain the perfection of the perfect mirror. Izutsu expands on the idea that this knowledge is hidden from most of humanity:

He [God] has concealed the reality by an infinite number of particular ‘determinations’, all of which are regarded as ‘other’ than God Himself, so that, in this view everything appears as something ‘other’ than the rest of the things as well as ‘other’ than the Absolute. And the view of ‘other-ness’ covers the reality of Being from the eyes of ordinary people.¹⁰⁹

God has covered up or veiled His true nature from creation through differentiated existence. Each and every thing within existence is a concrete manifestation of one or more of the Divine Attributes. These Attributes, when analyzed into Names, such as the Loving, the Merciful, the Wrathful, etc., are revealed to be nothing more than relationships. The ordinary person can only see these as individualized and separate items within the world. Ibn al- ‘Arabi says:

¹⁰⁷ Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 113.

¹⁰⁸ Bashier, 117.

¹⁰⁹ Izutsu, 240.

The spirit becomes corporealized to
eyesight through imagination,
so halt not with it, for the affair is a
misguidance.¹¹⁰

Imagination sustains both the manifest other-ness of creation and the spiritual Oneness of God's true Essence. The key for the Perfect Individual is to acknowledge both of these at every moment. The purely physical is transcended, not through rational reflection, but through acts of *dhikr*, remembrance, that is, by actively sustaining conscious awareness of the presence of God. The exact nature and importance of this remembering will be discussed in the section on metaphysics.

Ontology

The static meaning of "being" needs to be analyzed in greater detail as it relates to the ontology of Ibn al- 'Arabi. In the section on the *barzakh*, a syllogism about God, the universe and the Perfect Individual was given. Here the soundness of the argument will be analyzed. Analyzing the being of the cosmos and of humanity reveals three levels of reflectivity. Each level is a line in the syllogism. The first line, "All Perfect Individuals are a reflection of the universe", refers to the connection between the universe and humanity. The second line, "All things that are a reflection of God are Perfect Individuals", refers to the intricate relationship between God and humanity. By analyzing these two levels/relationships the part of the soundness of the syllogism can be deduced.

The idea that humanity¹¹¹ is a reflection of the universe comes from Ibn al- 'Arabi's creation story. The universe was created so that God might see all His Attributes or Names manifested, but, as Ibn al- 'Arabi explains, there was a flaw:

¹¹⁰ Ibn al- 'Arabi quoted in Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, 333.

The Reality gave existence to the whole Cosmos [at first] as an undifferentiated thing without anything of the spirit in it, so that it was like an unpolished mirror. It is in the nature of the divine determination that He does not set out a location except to receive a divine spirit, which is also called [in the Qur'an] *the breathing into him* [Qur'an XXI: 91]. The latter is nothing other than the coming into operation of the undifferentiated form's [innate] disposition to receive the inexhaustible overflowing of Self-revelation, which has always been and always will be.¹¹²

He qualifies the idea about the nature of the universe as a reflection in a mirror, by saying that the Cosmos was created as an unpolished mirror. Essentially this says that it was merely a rough piece of metal, an object that is not yet fully formed to be what it in essence should be. The Cosmos was not created to stay in this undifferentiated form, but rather to eventually hold the spirit of consciousness. Ibn al- 'Arabi posits that nothing is created without being inherently designed to furnish the "inexhaustible overflowing of Self-revelation". Every existent is created to house Self-revelations, which are the manifestations of the divine Names or Attributes.

The mirror of the Cosmos, while being of the best quality, remains unfinished if left by itself. This is why God created humanity to act as the reflective agent of the universe. With humanity in place, in the middle, the universe can fulfill its reflective function. Having said this, it becomes clear why the relationship between humanity and the cosmos is a reflective one. The cosmos could not reflect the Attributes of God on its own, but needed this ability of humanity. Humanity as the *barzakh* between God and the cosmos serves as the mirror, reflecting both sides. As a reflection of the universe, humanity reflects the entire universe within itself; this being the case, it can then be positively affirmed that humanity is a reflection of the universe.

¹¹¹ Here the connection will be made referring to humanity in general and not the Perfect Individual, because in a broad sense the totality of humanity manifests perfection, in the sense that perfection lies within every individual even if it is waiting for manifestation.

¹¹² Ibn al- 'Arabi, *Bezels*, 50.

The second premise, that all reflections of God are humanity, allows God to see His attributes as fully actualized and differentiated from one another. The difference here between humanity and the cosmos is that humanity can be conscious of this reflection and its properties, while the cosmos in general cannot. While the cosmos can be referred to as the “Big Individual” humanity can be referred to as *al-kawn al-jami*, “the being that gathers together” or the small universe, the microcosm. Humanity, like the cosmos, reflects all of the Names or Attributes of God, but unlike the cosmos, it does this in a more concentrated manner. Again, this refers to the status of humanity as *barzakh*. In such a position, humanity is also open to the reflection of God, and in this role humanity becomes, on one level, identical to Him.

God’s reflection is identical to that of the universe. The universe can be described as *al-insan al-kabir*, the “Big Man”. This is because its outward form is the manifestation of all the Names or Attributes of God. Taken as a whole, the universe reflects all aspects of God. Each of its individual parts is the manifestation of one aspect of God, no more. Izutsu explains: “The most salient feature of the Big Man is that every single existent in it represents one particular aspect (Name) of God, and one only, so that the whole lacks a clear delineation and definite articulation, being as it is a loose conglomeration of discrete points.”¹¹³ This means that the cosmos in general manifests the entirety, but when looking at its specific features, it lacks a clear and comprehensive articulation. Thus in its entirety the cosmos is seen as a complete reflection of God, but upon closer inspection it is found to be of a vague nature. The purpose of creating the cosmos was for God to see Himself as other. The cosmos fulfills this by manifesting all of the Names. However, the cosmos fails to do so completely because it lacks a clear unity, but this is why humanity

¹¹³ Izutsu, 210.

is necessary. Humanity, particularly the Perfect Individual, provides the means whereby the cosmos and God can be connected in a meaningful relationship.

Metaphysics

The metaphysical aspect of *wujud* as finding pertains to the concept of imagination. Finding involves the Subject or God, actively searching to discover new qualities in His mirror image, and the “object”, humanity, searching to discover God. This section explores how the act or state of finding links Creator and creation in a mutually dependent relationship.

Creation is a personal mode of discovery for God. Humanity is the means whereby God can discover Himself. However, paradoxically, the means to God’s discovery is through humanity discovering their Oneness or identity with God. Two passages from Ibn al- ‘Arabi explain this: “For the Reality, he [humanity] is as the pupil is for the eye through which the act of seeing takes place.”¹¹⁴ And, “Thus He suggests that knowledge of Him is inferred in knowledge of ourselves.”¹¹⁵ The first passage suggests that humanity is the reflective and conscious element in the universe, and that it is through this element that the seeing by God takes place. Not only is humanity the consciously reflecting *barzakh*, but it is also the organ through which sight occurs. The second passage refers to the other side of the *barzakh*. Humanity also reflects the universe. The Perfect Individual uses imaginal understanding to see God within the universe and within him/herself. Henry Corbin elaborates on this idea:

It is true, of course, that without the divine (*haqq*) which is the cause of our being, and without us who are the cause of its manifestation, the order of things would not be what it is and God would be neither God nor Lord. But on the other hand, though it is *you*, the vassal of this Lord, who hold the “secret of his suzerainty”

¹¹⁴ Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Bezels*, 51.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

because it is realizing through you, nevertheless, because your *action* in positing Him is His *passion* in you, your passion for Him, the active subject is in reality not you.¹¹⁶

Although God is the source of humanity's being, humanity is the source of God's knowledge about Himself and His status as God and Lord; His Divinity is acquired only through humanity postulating Him as such. However, this finding does not originate in the individual, but is inherent in God's purpose for creation. This does not separate God and creation, but links them in a mutually dependent relationship, like the connection and relation between subject and object in the mirror.

The specifics of the relationship between God and creation revolve around the individual's unique understanding of and personal relationship to God. God in His Essence is One, but in respect to His Attributes or Names is many. Izutsu explains: "All men are naturally endowed with the same ontological 'comprehensiveness', but not all men are equally conscious of the 'comprehensiveness,' in themselves."¹¹⁷ This consciousness is contingent upon the level of unveiling the individual has undergone through spiritual awakening or Divine revealing. What is important is that each individual, given the depth of his/her understanding, has a different conception of God. The Perfect Individual understands this complex theory of divinity, and acknowledges God in all forms. Ibn al- 'Arabi affirms this by saying: "So, beware lest you restrict yourself to a particular tenet [concerning the Reality] and so deny any other tenet [equally reflecting Him], for you would forfeit much good, indeed you would forfeit the true knowledge of what is [the Reality]."¹¹⁸ The Perfect Individual understands that one view

¹¹⁶ Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Ibn al- 'Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 125.

¹¹⁷ Izutsu, 237.

¹¹⁸ Ibn al- 'Arabi, *Bezels*, 137.

is not necessarily truer than another. God, in respect to His Attributes or Names, is infinitely diverse. Most people are confined and limited to a specific view or understanding of God and think anything that is different from their conceptions is wrong. The truly knowledgeable, i.e., the Perfect Individuals, know, however, that God cannot be limited to the specific beliefs of any one person or group. They understand that while God, in reference to His Names, can be considered comparable and limited, in accordance with His unknowable Essence he is neither. The key is to understand the two in relation with one another. The Perfect Individual acts as a bridge between the two, and manifests them both. Bashier says in this vein:

These forms of belief, which resemble transcended moments in the intellectual growth of the Perfect Man, can be reduced eventually to two fundamental moments: the moment in which the Real is represented as related to the finite forms of manifestation, and the moment in which the Real is represented as totally unrelated to any finite form of manifestation.¹¹⁹

Thus, in conclusion, the Perfect Individual not only fulfills the role of a *barzakh*, but he/she also embodies complete understanding of the paradoxical ambiguity of *barzakh*. It is in this position that the individual can be said to have being.

¹¹⁹ Bashier, 121.

Chapter 4: Ibn al- ‘Arabi and Iqbal: Action and the Perfect Individual

If the Perfect Individual is a mirror reflection of God, then as such he/she becomes the eyes ears, hands, etc. of God. But to what extent can it be said that it is the individual acting and to what extent is it God who acts? At the end of the last chapter, on page 68, the quote from Corbin pointed out the dependent relationship between God and humanity. He concluded, “The active subject is in reality not you.” The purpose of this chapter is to explore what action is and who truly performs it.

To discuss this issue, Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s concept of the Perfect Individual will be compared and contrasted with a similar concept within the thought of Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), a modern scholar, poet, Muslim reformer, and Sufi from India. Throughout his life, Iqbal had a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards Ibn al- ‘Arabi. In a letter from 1916, he writes: “I have no misgivings about Al-Shaikh al-Akbar, Ibn al- ‘Arabi, rather, I cherish a love for him. My father had a profound attachment to *Fusus al-Hikam* and *Al-Futuh al-Makkiyyah*. Since the age of four my ears were acquainted with the name and teachings of Ibn ‘Ibn al- ‘Arabi.”¹²⁰ Later on, in the preamble to his poem “Secrets of the Self” (*Asrar-I-Khudi*), Iqbal criticizes the pantheistic theory of *wahdat al-wujud*, “The Oneness of Being,” associated with Ibn al- ‘Arabi, which he says deeply influenced all of Islam. He says the Iranian poets eventually were completely enamored with these concepts, and that in interpreting it “they appealed to the ‘heart’ with the result that the idea reached the masses and nearly all the Islamic peoples became victims of inactivity and passivity.”¹²¹ In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* he says:

¹²⁰ Iqbal, letter to Shah Suleman Phulwarwi, dated 24th February 1916 quoted in Muhammad Suheyl Umar “Contours of Ambivalence (Iqbal and Ibn ‘Ibn al- ‘Arabi: Historical Perspective)” *Iqbal Review: Journal of the Iqbal Academy Pakistan*, 21-50, 34:1, April 1993, 25.

¹²¹ Iqbal quoted in Umar, 31.

“This spirit of total other-worldliness in later Sufism obscured men’s vision of a very important aspect of Islam as a social polity, and offering the prospect of unrestrained thought on its speculative side attracted and finally absorbed the best minds in Islam.”¹²²

He criticizes the fact that Sufism in general has been concerned with other-worldly mystical experiences, the realm of inward speculation, *fana*’, and separation from the earthly body, that have historically consumed the best Islamic minds. Iqbal sees his philosophy as a response to this, and calls for worldly action. What must be determined now is whether or not Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s version of the Perfect Individual was actually intended to lead a life of passivity and inaction. Is the Perfect Individual actively involved in the world? Iqbal himself created his own theory of the Perfect Individual (*Mard-i-Momin*), which in many ways is similar to that of Ibn al- ‘Arabi.¹²³ It is by comparing these two that answers to these questions about freedom and action can be found.

¹²² Ibid., 150.

¹²³ Iqbal never explicitly mentions that Ibn al- ‘Arabi influenced his *Mard-i-Momin*, but it is acknowledged by many scholars that this idea arose out of Islamic/Sufi ideals, although Anne-Marie Schimmel suggests that Nietzsche still largely influenced it. [See: Syed Nadwi. *Glory Of Iqbal*, trans. and ed. Mohammad Asif Kidwai (Luoknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1973), 92. Anne Marie Schimmel. *Gabriel’s Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), 323. Dar, B. A. “Inspiration from the West.” In *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, ed. Hafeez Malik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 207. And, Lakshmi Biswas. *Tagore And Iqbal: A Study in Philosophical Perspective* (Delhi: Capital Publishing House, 1991), 88.] Aziz Ahmad says that:

Iqbal’s own reaction to Ibn ‘Ibn al- ‘Arabi was more categorically repudiatory and even hostile. In a letter to Sirajuddin Pal dated 19th July 1916, he categorically describes all that is in *Fusus al Hikam* as anti-Islamic and mere recantation and blasphemy. It is, therefore, not surprising that while agreeing in details about the moral and spiritual qualities of the Perfect Man, he had rejected Jili’s main thesis- namely, totally and essentially mystical and unworldly approach to the problem. [Aziz Ahmad. “Sources of Iqbal’s Perfect Man.” In *Studies In Iqbal’s Thought And Art: Selected Articles from the Quarterly “Iqbal,”* ed. M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore: Bazm-I Iqbal, 1972), 115.]

With this we can assert that the ties between Iqbal and Ibn al- ‘Arabi are more than just conceptual. In fact Iqbal seems to have been influenced by both Ibn al- ‘Arabi and his predecessor, Jili, in the formulation of his philosophy of the Perfect Individual.

To begin, a conceptual link between these two thinkers must be made, because historically, they lived in different geographical regions and time periods. Iqbal's self-proclaimed position as a reformer of Islam will provide the grounds on which a comparison can be made. Iqbal's claim to reform Islam will be analyzed to understand how he proposes to change Islam and Sufism. Next, the main points surrounding the conception of self within Iqbal and Ibn al- 'Arabi will be briefly outlined. In conclusion, these points will be summarized and a final position on action will be articulated.

Iqbal as Reformer

One of the ways Iqbal's Perfect Individual can be linked to Ibn al- 'Arabi's is through an analysis of Iqbal's concept of the Islamic reformer. It is in this concept that Iqbal's thought is rooted. This section will first elucidate Iqbal's concept of reform and growth. Secondly, it will demonstrate how his ties to mysticism, that is, Sufism are affected by this concept.

Iqbal sought to re-invigorate Islam with a modern sense of purpose in order to stir Muslims to act. His message can be seen as both political and spiritual in nature. It is political because he was concerned with, and driven by, a vision of a universal, utopian community of Muslims, unhindered by geographical boundaries, who actively shape the destiny of the world. This political attitude, perhaps shaped by his Muslim-Indian heritage, is first and foremost religious in nature. Action is tied to a strong mystical consciousness of God. Iqbal may be termed a reformer, but his progressive attitude is concerned with moving forward, without severing all ties with the past. He explains the necessity of this in *The Reconstruction*: "No people can afford to reject their past entirely; for it is their past that has made their personal identity... and the responsibility of the

reformer assumes a far more serious aspect.”¹²⁴ Muslim self-identity, like any other religious identity, is largely shaped by an intimate relationship with the historicity of the religion. Iqbal makes it clear that any changes that a reformer proposes within Islam must still hold a strong appreciation and respect for the past. According to Iqbal, change and progress are necessary, especially since Islam had been in a state of stagnation for too long. In this regard he refers to the increasingly long period of time, since the Middle Ages, in which Islam has remained dormant as a leader in philosophy and the sciences. Yet this necessity to become a modern influential force in the political and cultural world must not sever all ties with the past, but bring the spirit of the past into the future with a new and fresh understanding. In the same book, Iqbal states:

The task before the modern Muslim is, therefore, immense. He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past... The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before.¹²⁵

The Muslim reformer then, in order to not sever ties with the past, has to blaze a new path in the midst of modernity. He/she has to find a way to merge the tradition with modern knowledge and thought. This merging does not mean accepting Western scientific and philosophical thought as an authority over the Qur'an, rather it means approaching this knowledge with a Muslim mind-set and, in many cases re-understanding the Qur'an in terms of modern scientific knowledge. Iqbal gives many examples in *The Reconstruction* of how modern scientific thought conforms to the message of the Qur'an, or rather, how the Qur'an can be seen as harmoniously expressing the tenets of modern science. However, this is no easy task, for creating this evolving link between the past

¹²⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Dubai: Kitab al-Islamiyyah), 167.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

and present has to be undertaken by strong individuals who are firmly rooted in their religious identity. The reformer, for Iqbal, is an active, creative, and forceful participant in the world.

How might Iqbal's concept of the reformer work in relation to Sufism? In order to answer this question Iqbal's "ties to the past" must be explained. This will be accomplished by exploring his understanding of mysticism. A basic impetus in the mystical tradition of Islam is the belief that the individual can experience unity with God, and that this affirmation of a deeper Reality changes the way he/she views the world. The first chapter of *The Reconstruction* is where Iqbal outlines the importance of mystical experience and intuition for the modern Muslim. The thinking individual is not confined to the finite data of the physical world, because within his/her finiteness lays the infinite. Iqbal explains:

Thought...is, in its essential nature, incapable of limitation and cannot remain imprisoned in the narrow circuit of its own individuality... Its [thought's] movement becomes possible only because of the implicit presence in its finite individuality of the infinite, which keeps alive within it the flame of aspiration and sustains it in its endless pursuit.¹²⁶

To think that the individual is confined within the limits of his/her own self, to the knowledge and experience of his/her own situation, is to place undue barriers on human nature. This was discussed in relation to Ibn al- 'Arabi and early Sufism in the first chapter, namely, that the Sufi believes that true knowledge cannot be gained through the intellect, but only through the intuitive faculty of the heart. Nicholson outlines this:

The *qalb*, though connected in some mysterious way with the physical heart, is not a thing of flesh and blood. Unlike the English 'heart,' its nature is rather intellectual than emotional, but whereas the intellect cannot gain real knowledge

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

of God, the *qalb* is capable of knowing the essences of all things, and when illuminated by faith and knowledge reflects the whole content of the divine mind.¹²⁷

Similar to Iqbal, Nicholson says that for the Sufi the heart can reflect the entire divine mind, that is, the heart of the individual can hold the infinite knowledge or Being of God, even though the individual is a finite being. In this manner Iqbal agrees with the classical Sufi notion of the immanence of the Divine. The eternal and the finite are not two opposing forces in the world. The finite is not cut off from knowing the eternal; rather, the finite discovers the eternal within itself. Affirming this, Iqbal says: "It is the mysterious touch of the ideal that animates and sustains the real, and through it alone we can discover and affirm the ideal."¹²⁸ The ideal here stands for the Infinite or God, and the real stands for the physical world. God upholds the world. Without Him the world would lack any movement, for it is this Divine infinite nature that provides the world and the individual with goals and growth. However, the individual can only come into contact with the infinite or ideal through the finite or real. It is through the exploration of the physical world and the self that the individual first catches glimpses of God or Reality. The physical in many ways is like a closed circuit. It only reveals itself and nothing beyond, yet imbedded within it is the infinite, that very beyond. Ibn al- 'Arabi asserts a similar belief when he says:

The Prophet said, "Who [truly] knows himself knows his Lord," linking together knowledge of God and knowledge of the self. God says, *we will show them our signs on the horizons*, meaning the world outside you, *and in yourselves*, self, here, meaning your inner essence, *till it becomes clear to them that He is the Reality*, [Qur'an XL:53] in that you are His form and He is your Spirit. You are in relation to Him as your physical body is to you. He is in relation to you as the spirit governing your physical form.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Nicholson, 68.

¹²⁸ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 9.

¹²⁹ Ibn al- 'Arabi, *Bezels*, 74.

Ibn al- 'Arabi states that the link between the individual and his/her Lord, the God of belief,¹³⁰ is like the relationship between the body and the life-spirit or soul. The individual is the outer, the body, and God is the inner, the soul. Just like an observer infers the presence of the soul or spirit from observing the workings of the body, so too the individual can infer the presence of God, true Reality, from observing the workings and signs of nature. Just as the individual learns about his/her possession of a personality and soul from observing and reflecting on his/her inner self or mind, the same individual can, through reflection, begin to see his/her connection to the Divine. This is an affirmation of the Sufi experience. Only through the self can the individual come to know the Divine. This coming to know culminates in the ultimate experience of *fana*’, where the individual self is annihilated in the true Reality. Iqbal says of this experience that: “The mystic state brings us into contact with the total passage of Reality in which all the diverse stimuli merge into one another and form a single unanalysable unity in which the ordinary distinction of subject and object does not exist.”¹³¹ This experience of union with the Divine by the individual is classically conceived of as the loss of all individual consciousness and ego-awareness. With this concept Iqbal’s re-formation comes into effect.

While the classical Sufi experience is the loss of one’s individuality, as well as the attribute of otherness, within the otherwise unknowable Essence of God, the experience Iqbal describes is a converging of the ideal and real. The converging is the physical and the spiritual uniting where no individual features are distinguishable. In this experience,

¹³⁰ This is referring to the fact that, for Ibn al- 'Arabi, God is conceived of differently by each individual. This difference is not to say that God essentially is nothing other than the sum of one’s beliefs, but that God reveals Himself to each individual in a unique manner.

¹³¹ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 18-9.

the individual cannot identify any thing as his/her self, that is, within such a unity the categories of subject and object have no place. But while the Sufi claims that annihilation within the infinite Ego is realization of the highest degree, Iqbal asserts just the opposite. “[The] climax of this development is reached when the ego is able to retain full self-possession, even in the case of a direct contact with the all-embracing Ego... This is the ideal of perfect manhood in Islam.”¹³² This passage comes from a discussion in the *Reconstruction* claiming that the ultimate goal of the individual is to cultivate the ego within him/herself to such a degree that he/she becomes like the Ultimate Ego or God. In Iqbal’s system then, it is not the lack or transitori-ness that is emphasized, but the gaining and persisting of the self.

Iqbal and Ibn al- ‘Arabi on the Self

The previous section looked at how Iqbal understood the mystical experience, but how he understood the self was left unanswered. By comparing the two thinkers’ conceptions of the self, the subtle differences inherent in Iqbal’s re-formation will become clearer. This exploration will lead to the conclusion that Iqbal and Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s conception of the self is essentially the same. From this, it can further be proven that Iqbal and Ibn al- ‘Arabi both have similar views on action and freedom.

In a passage from *The Reconstruction*, Iqbal criticizes the pantheistic tendencies and interpretations of Sufism. The passage specifically claims that the famous expression of al-Hallaj, *ana al-Haqq*, “I am the Reality/God,” or “I am the creative truth”, has been mistakenly interpreted as a declaration of pantheism or monism:

The development of this experience [of the unity of inner experience with outer experience] in the religious life of Islam reached its culmination in the well-known words of Hallaj- ‘I am the creative truth.’ The contemporaries of Hallaj, as

¹³² Ibid., 118.

well as his successors, interpreted these words pantheistically; but the fragments of Hallaj... leave no doubt that the martyr-saint could not have meant to deny the transcendence of God. The true interpretation of his experience, therefore, is not the drop slipping into the sea, but the realization and bold affirmation in an undying phrase of the reality and permanence of the human ego in a profounder personality.¹³³

Iqbal says that Hallaj's famous declaration is not meant to convey an attitude of unreality, which leads to the assertion that only the One, God, is truly real, everything else is an illusion. Instead, he is re-interpreting this to mean not that the individual must lose his/her self in the greater Reality of the true Self, but that a greater Self supports each individual and unique self, and that this Self is what allows individuality to exist in the world. From this attitude three key components of Iqbal's theory of the self can be identified:

- 1) The self of the individual is an actual separate entity from the Universal Self.
- 2) There is an underlying inner reality that coincides with an outer reality. They are in many ways like two sides of the same coin.
- 3) The mystical experience of union with the One is not self-negating, on the contrary, it is self-affirming and strengthening.

Ibn al- 'Arabi's theory contra Iqbal can be summed up as follows:

- 1) The self of the individual can only claim existence, or being, only insofar as it is a reflection of God or Being. ∴ In a sense is the Being of God.
- 2) The outer reality, which is the physical world and the data of the senses, is not illusory per se, but only has contingent reality or being in relation to the inner reality, which it relies on for this status.
- 3) The mystical state of union with the One or God results in *fana'*, extinction of the self. Thus, in this event, the individual actualizes true Reality. True Reality, in this case means only God has Being or Self, and that the unreal self of the individual must be destroyed and replaced by the Self of Being.

These points contrast the attitudes these two philosophers adopt towards the individual self. The points, although seemingly contradictory, are actually in agreement, at least in

¹³³ Ibid., 96.

their implications. The final point is the most important, because on it hinges the connection between the self and action.

Reality of the Self/self

The first point deals with the ontological status and reality of the self. This is essentially the problem of identity. Is the individual identical to God, or are they two separate beings? The answer to this question is a vital component for understanding action. It seems that the two positions are in irreconcilable opposition, for on the surface it seems Iqbal says that the individual and God are two separate realities, while Ibn al-‘Arabi says that the individual’s reality is subsumed into God’s Reality, therefore there is only One.

For the congruence to be made clear, the two positions must be analyzed in greater detail. What does Iqbal mean by asserting the distinction between the individual and God? It is important to understand that for Iqbal the self or ego is a progressive phenomenon. He says: “There is nothing static in my inner life; all is a constant mobility, an unceasing flux of states, a perpetual flow in which there is no halt or resting place.”¹³⁴ The individual self does not remain the same. It does not have a fixed identity that subsists throughout time. Instead, it is constantly evolving, outwardly growing, and gaining new experiences and knowledge. Similar to how Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Perfect Individual acts as a link between Being or God and the universe, this ego changes and reflects new things. Iqbal’s examination of the relationship between the Infinite Ego and finite egos can strengthen this parallel. He says:

True infinity does not mean infinite extension, which cannot be conceived without embracing all available finite extensions. Its nature consists in intensity and not

¹³⁴ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 47.

extensity; and the moment we fix our gaze on intensity, we begin to see that the finite ego must be *distinct*, though not *isolated*, from the Infinite.¹³⁵

He makes a distinction between infinity as extended in space and time, being an object that includes all other objects, and infinity as an intensity of characteristics, being an actualization of attributes. This is an important distinction, because the first implies that God is the totality of all the finite existences that have been, are, and will ever be. The second implies a dualism, in a loose sense, in which finite existents strive to manifest the intensity of God's characteristics. Infinitude is due to intensity, because if God is the true Ego, that all of creation aspires to, then God is most present in those things that are closest to becoming Perfect Individuals. God, as the essence of perfection, is the most intense, and therefore, is Infinite. He is the Ultimate Ego. The finite self, in contrast, is always evolving, intensifying, trying to become like the Infinite Self. Thus, if the finite self or ego is successful, this dualism is resolved in a unity. The finite self or ego has the potential to become the Infinite Self.

Iqbal's concept of infinity and identity is similar to Ibn al- 'Arabi's own concept of identity. In chapter three, the paradoxical position of the Perfect Individual was elucidated. As a *barzakh* between God and the universe, between Being and non-being, the individual is neither and both. The individual is both identical to and different from the Self of God. Ibn al- 'Arabi says:

As for the Reality as other than God, [as manifested] in some place or form, then qualitative disparity [necessarily] occurs, as between one location and another. If the form be a [synthetic] form [the Perfect Man], it embraces [essentially] the essential perfection, since it is identical with the [universal] location in which it is manifest. The [all-embracing] totality inherent in the Name "God" is implicit in that form, which is at once not He and not other than He.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Ibid., 118.

¹³⁶ Ibn al- 'Arabi, *Bezels*, 88.

This passage describes the intricate relationship between God, who is “Elevated in Himself” and in the possession of highest perfection simply due to His natural Essence, and the Perfect Individual who is elevated due to his/her position. Izutsu elucidates:

Thus the Absolute and the creatures are the same in a certain respect, but a fundamental distinction separates the one from the other: the “necessity of existence” (*wujub al-wujud*) which is peculiar to the Absolute alone... Man is certainly the highest of all in the world of Being... The “height”, however, is not the “height” of the Absolute. Unlike the latter, Man’s “height” is only “consequential” (*bi-al-tab’iyyah*) or “secondary.”¹³⁷

The Perfect Individual’s height or position is only secondary and contingent; it is not the essential or non-contingent height of God. God gives this height to the Perfect Individual as a gift, it is not his/hers in essence. The Perfect Individual is in such a position because he/she manifests the true essence of Reality or Being, that is, God. He/she is distinct from God because the individual manifests in a different location, Thus the Perfect Individual in this manner both is and is not God.

Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s analogy of the individual as a mirror reflection relates nicely to Iqbal’s concept of infinity. The individual self is defined by its potential to fully reflect the self of God. The farther the individual is from actualizing this potential the less reality he/she may be said to possess. Referring to Iqbal’s concept of intensity, this un-actualized individual lacks the intensity by which it can stand in relation to the Infinite. Since God is the Ultimate Ego with all ego-ness coming from Him, and reality is relative in terms of the amount of ego-hood a thing contains, then God is immanently present in a greater or lesser degree in things dependent upon their relative ego-ness. Intensity, or being, is due to the amount of ego a thing has, and this can change, increasing or decreasing, over time. It would seem that this claim of relative existence does not negate the dualism between

¹³⁷ Izutsu, 232-33.

the individual and God: God and humanity are separated by their respective Infinite and finite natures. Humanity is in movement towards becoming like the Infinite. If an individual reaches this position, of similarity to the Infinite, then he/she both is and is not the Infinite. Put in these terms, Iqbal and Ibn al- 'Arabi rely on a similar movement within the individual self. For both, the self is in a state of becoming. Thus, the self is here active, in the sense that it has the potential to move upward and become more like the Ultimate Ego or God.

Structure of the world

The points about inner and outer reality deal with the structure of the world in which the individual resides. In many ways this is an abstraction from the first point; while the first point dealt solely with the relationship between God and the individual, this point deals with the relationship between the world and God, and because humanity is part of the world, a similar structure holds. Analyzing this similar structure has important consequences for action, for it is within the world that human action takes place. Both philosophers agree that there are two aspects or sides of existence, the inner and the outer, and that these two sides are dependent on each other. Iqbal claims, like all mystics, that the physical world is upheld by a spiritual essence. There is an unseen reality that engulfs and underlies the seen. Iqbal termed this the Ideal, saying that the Ideal sustains the Real, that the spiritual makes the physical possible. Only through exploration of the real, the physical world, can an individual discover the spiritual. Concerning this, Iqbal says:

Personally, I believe that the ultimate character of Reality is spiritual: but in order to avoid a widespread misunderstanding it is necessary to point out that Einstein's

theory, which as a scientific theory deals only with the structure of things, throws no light on the ultimate nature of things which possess that structure.¹³⁸

Even though the ideal or spiritual can only be ascertained through abstraction from the real or physical, and through mystical experience, Iqbal still asserts that the ideal or spiritual is the ultimate nature of Reality. The universe is real, meaning that it has a discoverable, although a subjective structure, but this structure is not the ultimate reality. The ultimate nature of things, that is, the nature behind these structures cannot be discovered by scientific theory. Science, for Iqbal, explains how the universe works, but it cannot explain what exactly the universe is, or its purpose, essence or meaningfulness. Science cannot describe the relationship between the universe, humanity and God, let alone discover what God ultimately is. Therefore, by declaring that “the ultimate nature of Reality is spiritual,” Iqbal declares with Ibn al- ‘Arabi that Reality, at its roots, depends on the Spiritual being of God. The outer then is the external world that can be scientifically discovered, while the inner is the spiritual nature that underlies the external.

This is similar to Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s concept of the physical world being the manifestation of the Divine Attributes. He says: “The Essence is Unique of the whole in the whole. Multiplicity exists only in respect of the divine Names, which are themselves purely relationships and thus not manifest [in themselves].”¹³⁹ The Essence of Being or God is also the Essence of all existents within the world. In chapter one, intuitive knowledge of this proposition was discussed as the special mode of knowledge used by the Sufi. It allows the practitioner to experience the underlying Reality or Essence, and to merge with It. In chapter three, the realm of imagination, as a symbolic realm of existence, was discussed as a realm of knowledge only understood fully by the Perfect

¹³⁸ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 38.

¹³⁹ Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Bezels*, 85.

Individual. For Ibn al- 'Arabi, the Essence that is experienced in mystical union is the Essence of everything within the world. The multiplicity of the physical world is reduced, in the realm of imagination, to relationships between the Divine Names, the qualifications or attributes of God, which signify the Divine Essence. Ibn al- 'Arabi says: "The natural order may thus be regarded [at once] as [many] forms reflected in a single mirror or as a single form reflected in many mirrors."¹⁴⁰ Depending on the perspective, the Divine or the finite, this can be interpreted as multiplicity reflected in the Divine or the Divine reflected in multiplicity. The Perfect Individual understands that both of these happen at the same time. Likewise Iqbal says:

The universe, as we have seen before, is not an "other" existing *per se* in opposition to God. It is only when we look at the act of creation as a specific event in the life-history of God that the universe appears as an independent "other." From the standpoint of the all-inclusive Ego there is no "other." In Him thought and deed, the act of knowing and the act of creating, are identical.¹⁴¹

Iqbal affirms that from one perspective there is multiplicity within the world, but from another, higher, perspective, everything is a part of the Ultimate Ego. There is an "Oneness of Being". From this it can be gathered that both Iqbal and Ibn al- 'Arabi assert the same propositions in regard to the structure of the universe, both in terms of its physical and spiritual aspects.

Subsistence of the self/Self

The final point to be considered before looking at action is the distinction between self-affirmation and self-negation. Iqbal's concept of self-affirmation in the face of the divine is a result of his unique understanding of the individual self. In classical Sufism, the self is something to be destroyed. It is the center of all pride and separates the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 87.

¹⁴¹ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 77.

individual from God. Schimmel tells us: "One must think of the highly negative significance in Persian of the word *khudi*, Self, with its implications of selfishness, egotism and similar objectionable meanings. Iqbal gives this word a new meaning as Self, Personality, Ego in an absolutely positive meaning."¹⁴² The self or ego becomes a positive goal. Iqbal gives new life to the mystical tradition, such that it can become a force in modernity. In classical Sufism the individual aims to lose all traces of his/her personality. Iqbal turns this around, saying that the individual must mold and strengthen his/her self into the Self of God. Along with this he also gives the concepts of desire and asking or poverty a different emphasis. In his poem *Secrets of the Self* he says:

From the flame of desire the heart takes life,
And when it takes life, all dies that is
Not true.¹⁴³

And:

By asking, poverty is made more abject;
By begging, the beggar is made poorer,
Asking disintegrates the Self
And deprives of illumination the Sinai-bush
of the Self.¹⁴⁴

In the first passage, desire is the impetus for growth and change. It creates tension and drive within the individual, that is, it gives the individual a purpose and goal to strive for. In classical Sufism desire, specifically the desire for the beloved or God, propels the individual to give up all personal want and self-desire for the well being of the beloved. The desire for the beloved consumes the individual to such an extent that he/she becomes empty of all else. The Sufi, engulfed in this desire, no longer has a will of his/her own. In

¹⁴² Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, 42.

¹⁴³ Muhammad Iqbal, *Secret of the Self*, trans. and ed. R.A. Nicholson (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann Publishers, 1978), 39.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

this state the lover will even give up his/her own life for the sake of the beloved, for the beloved is the only object worthy of being or life. According to Iqbal, desire has quite the opposite effect. This stirring of the heart strengthens the self of the individual. He/she uses this strength to assert his/her will, to adopt all the qualities that will allow the object of desire to come into his/her possession. This is illuminated by the second passage from Iqbal's poem. In it, Iqbal is claiming that asking and begging weaken the individual's self. According to Ibn al- 'Arabi, the individual is required to approach God by adopting the qualities that God lacks, i.e., poverty and weakness. It is only by destroying the self that the individual can receive direct communion with God, i.e., the beloved. However, for Iqbal the individual can only receive this direct communion by raising him/herself up to God, by becoming like the Ultimate Ego. Therefore, asking or begging for something, i.e., a specific attribute associated with Ego, shows signs of weakness and lack, while cultivating and striving for it on one's own shows the strengths and qualities of Ego. Having to rely on the work of others deprives the individual of true selfhood. In this manner, the enlightened individual approaching union with God is not destroyed, but remains standing in His presence as an exact replicate, returning to earthly existence with all the power and Self possession of God. This seems to be forever opposed to the viewpoint of Ibn al- 'Arabi, but as will be shown below the end result, the individual becoming a locus for the action of God, is the same for both.

Although Ibn al- 'Arabi claims that the individual must become annihilated within the divine, he still acknowledges that the individual must return to earthly existence. In *Journey To The Lord Of Power* he says, "I shall answer your question, O noble friend and intimate companion, concerning the Journey to the Lord of Power (may He be exalted)

and the arrival in His presence, and the return, through Him, from Him to His Creation, without separation.”¹⁴⁵ He acknowledges that the mystic has to return to the world after achieving the mystical connection with God. This return is another step forward, for it is a continued oneness with God, but in the midst of the world. This is called *baqa*, the return after *fana*. Nicholson explains this concept:

To abide in God (*baqa*) after having passed-away from selfhood (*fana*) is the mark of the Perfect Man, who not only journeys *to* God, *i.e.* passes from plurality to unity, but *in* and *with* God, *i.e.* continuing in the unitive state, he returns with God to the phenomenal world from which he sets out, and manifests unity in plurality.¹⁴⁶

The Perfect Individual returns to earthly existence still (internally) communing with God. In this Ibn al- ‘Arabi also brings God down to earth. The Perfect Individual becomes a conduit for God’s will and action. Izutsu cites one of Ibn al- ‘Arabi’s disciples as saying in relation to this:

Al-Qashani, a pupil and commentator of Ibn al- ‘Arabi describes the person who has been completely “annihilated” within the Divine: “A man of this second category is one who has ‘annihilated himself’ totally with his essence and is ‘subsistent’ in the Absolute. This is the kind of man by whom the Absolute hears and sees. Thus such a man is the hearing of the Absolute itself and the sight of the Absolute. Nay, he is the Form of the Absolute. To him refer God’s words: ‘thou wert not the one who shot the arrows when thou shotest, but God it was who really shot’ (VIII, 17).”¹⁴⁷

In this manner, the individual “re-gains” his/her self. Annihilating him/herself means the individual can re-clothe him/herself in the Self of God. The Perfect Individual, then, subsists in the Self of God. For Iqbal, even though the individual never “loses” his/her self, he/she must work to cultivate all the attributes of God, and destroy all that is not Ego. When he/she does this, and can face union with God without losing identity, he/she

¹⁴⁵ Ibn al- ‘Arabi, *Journey*, 25.

¹⁴⁶ Nicholson, 168.

¹⁴⁷ Izutsu, 91.

is the Perfect Individual, is a mirror image of the Ultimate Ego. He/she then can act within the world and bring about the Kingdom of God on Earth. In this manner, both Ibn al- 'Arabi and Iqbal's Perfect Individuals come back to the world and live as representatives of God. Although one approaches this through active assimilation and one through negation and passive receptivity, both Individuals return from the experience of union still directly communing with God, thus becoming God manifest on Earth.

Freedom and Action

At this point it seems that although Iqbal and Ibn al- 'Arabi both agree that the Perfect Individual must participate within the world, Iqbal's Individual has more freedom to do as he/she chooses, for he/she actively creates him/herself and the world. This final section will show that both Individuals must essentially act according to the will of God, and this will be accomplished by exploring the meanings of freedom and action for both philosophers.

Freedom is linked to responsibility for both Iqbal and Ibn al- 'Arabi. Iqbal says:

The element of guidance and directive control in the ego's activity clearly shows that the ego is a free personal causality. He shares in the life and freedom of the Ultimate Ego Who, by permitting the emergence of a finite ego, capable of private initiative, has limited this freedom of His own free will.¹⁴⁸

God limited His freedom to allow humanity the freedom to follow Him. The individual is free to choose whether or not to find God, to become an Ego. However, this is not an unlimited freedom, for Nicholson explains that:

The Ego attains to freedom by the removal of all obstructions in its way. It is partly free, partly determined, [According to the Tradition, "The true Faith is between predestination and freewill."] and reaches fuller freedom by approaching

¹⁴⁸ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 108.

the individual who is most free- God. In one word, life is an endeavour for freedom.¹⁴⁹

Although the individual is free to choose the path to Egohood, to God, he/she is still partially determined by God, that is, he/she is determined to exist in a certain place with certain characteristics and abilities. Adopting all the characteristics and traits of the Ultimate Ego allows the individual to attain a higher freedom. As described in the section above, this means that the individual, in essence, becomes the active will of God. Iqbal's Perfect Individual then has the freedom to act out the divine will of God; in fact it is the individual's responsibility to achieve this, to become a true Ego.

Just as Iqbal claims humanity is partially determined, another type of determinism is found in Ibn al- 'Arabi. Because the ultimate truth, for Ibn al- 'Arabi, is the "Oneness of Being," the fact that God is the Being of everything in existence, everything is pre-ordained in the Being of God. Any existent is a locus for the manifestation of a particular Name or attribute of God. Inherent within the specific Name are certain unique characteristics that manifest themselves within the individual, thus the nature of the individual is determined by the Names of which he/she is a manifestation. However, Ronald Nettler explains:

The 'determinism' introduced with the *a'yan thabita* [the latent essence, that is, the pre-ordained existence of a thing] is metaphysical, not personal. Its ineluctable nature in this sense does not detract from or diminish the moral agency and accountability of the individual or God's authoritative power. The structure of divine injunction and human response, with the assumption of human choice and responsibility, remains rock-solid, *as one dimension* within a cosmology of timeless fixed essences in a universal unity of absolute being.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ R. A. Nicholson "Introduction." In Muhammad Iqbal, *Secret of the Self*, trans. and ed. R.A. Nicholson (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann Publishers, 1978), 18.

¹⁵⁰ Ronald L. Nettler. *Sufi Metaphysics and Quranic Prophets: Ibn Ibn al- 'Arabi's Thought and Method in the Fusus Al-Hikam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003), 214.

This determinism does not diminish human responsibility, a human beings birth within a certain time period and society does not diminish his/her moral agency. For layered with this determinism is the dimension of finding, the individual discovering God, the personal responsibility to discover their inherent nature and link to the divine. The metaphysical nature of the world is not immediately knowable or realizable to every individual; therefore it is the individual's responsibility to follow the Laws of God.

It is in this responsibility that freedom is discovered. For Ibn al- 'Arabi freedom means freedom from, and he defines it: "*Hurriyyah* [Freedom]. He who performs all the duties of being a servant to Allah Most High is free from all that is other than Allah."¹⁵¹ True freedom lies in understanding and actualizing the correct relationship between humanity and God. Only God truly has being, therefore the individual must empty him/herself of all assumption of lordship and power.¹⁵² Essentially this is what the individual is accomplishing along the Path to *fana*'. Reaching union with God the individual realizes the true nature of the universe and of him/herself. At this point he/she actualizes the cosmic role of *barzakh*, and resides in the space between the paradox of being and non-being. Thus, while the unenlightened individual acts on the assumption that it is he/she as an individual acting, the Gnostic/Sufi understands that in reality it is God who is the actor, for everything is essentially, metaphysically, God. Ibn al- 'Arabi says of this:

Thus, He forbade excesses [relative existence], that is, He prevented the real secret from being known, namely that He is the essential Self of things. He conceals it by otherness, which is you [as being not He]. Otherness asserts that the hearing [referred to in the Tradition] is Zaid's hearing, while the Gnostic [who sees beyond that to the Oneness of Being] asserts that it is the Reality Himself,

¹⁵¹ Ibn Ibn al- 'Arabi, "Sufi Terminology: Ibn 'Ibn al- 'Arabi's *Al-Istilah Al-Sufiyyah*" trans. and ed. Rabia Terri Harris. *The Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Ibn al- 'Arabi Society* 3 (1984), 41.

¹⁵² See p. 50.

and similarly with the other organs and faculties. Not every one knows the Reality, some men excelling others according to [known] spiritual ranks, so that it is plain who is superior [in this respect] and who is not.¹⁵³

It is a truth that is hidden from the majority of humanity; in fact it is a truth that many cannot grasp. For these individuals, it is their duty to follow the laws of Islam, for this truth would only confuse them. It would make many assume they could act in any manner they pleased. The Perfect Individual understands though that both perspectives, that of individual autonomy and the Oneness of Being, must be viewed at the same time. The Perfect Individual gives up his/her selfhood in order to be open to the will of God. Thus, action for him/her is non-action. It is not the individual's action, but God's action.

In both Iqbal and Ibn al- 'Arabi it has been shown that the individual finds true freedom in forming or merging his/her self with the Self of God. True action for both of these Perfect Individuals means relinquishing all personal desires and goals, allowing the self to be consumed by Self, thereby making all actions they perform the actions of Self. They are able to do this because they sustain a direct communion with God after returning from the mystical experience of union or *fana*'.

¹⁵³ Ibn al- 'Arabi, *Bezels*, 133.

Conclusion

In general this thesis is a study of perfection within the individual, or humanity's potential for perfection. Specifically this was accomplished by analyzing Ibn Ibn al- 'Arabi's concept of the Perfect Individual. In conclusion it is important: 1) to summarize the aspects of perfection analyzed in the chapters, and 2) to link the conclusions in the chapters to form a complete picture of Ibn 'Ibn al- 'Arabi's concept of perfection.

Chapter one sought to discover the type or types of knowledge linked to Ibn al- 'Arabi's concept of perfection. It explored revelation, reason, and intuition as related to Islam, Islamic philosophy, and Sufism. The exploration showed that intuition, as a form of knowledge separate from the intellect, is the prime mode of understanding for the Perfect Individual. Revelatory knowledge, while closely related to intuition, is knowledge specifically given to the prophets; therefore, it is now closed, open only to individual interpretation. Reason is a tool that must be developed in an individual, and this varies according to the capacity of the individual. Intuition, unlike revelation or reason, is equally open and accessible to all individuals. It is God speaking directly to an individual via his/her heart. The Perfect Individual uses all three forms of knowledge, but the knowledge of intuition outweighs the other two. Because of this, perfection is linked to spiritual knowledge or understanding.

In order to discover how status is related to perfection chapter two analyzed the relationship between the Perfect Individual and Muhammad. This was done in two parts. First it outlined how Muhammad is the physical manifestation of the Reality of Muhammad. Due to this he has the most complete knowledge of God, and he is given the position of the Seal of the Prophets. The second part made a direct link between

Muhammad and the Perfect Individual by analyzing the rankings of prophet, apostle, and saint, all of which stem from the Reality of Muhammad. Prophethood and apostleship are ranks, gifts from God, added to sainthood, and the saint is the Perfect Individual in general. The saints inherit their wisdom or knowledge from the prophets. The prophets and saints partake of pieces of the knowledge of Muhammad, except for the Seal of the Saints, who partakes in the full knowledge of Muhammad. The chapter concluded that perfection is linked to the realization of the “Oneness of Being,” to the experience of *fana*’. The wisdom gained after this realization, are gifts from God. They increase individual understanding of God and the world, but do not increase perfection. Therefore, status among individuals is not equated with greater perfection.

In chapter three, perfection was explored as a state within the cosmological order. The Perfect Individual is analogous to a mirror that reflects God, and he/she holds the ontological and metaphysical position of a *barzakh*, a limit or boundary between two things that shares the qualities of both sides. The chapter analyzed the various perspectives of this position. It looked at the creation of humanity as a means of God “discovering” Himself. Humans, specifically the Perfect Individuals, are conscious and active agents who explore and analyze the world, discovering God inherent in everything. In a position between God and the world, the Perfect Individual can find qualities to link the two together. The Perfect Individual can use imagination to consciously exist in the paradoxical state of the *barzakh*. He/she understands that the world and everything in it are both identical and not identical to God, this allows him/her to discover a higher plane of understanding. The chapter came to the conclusion that this higher understanding is

due to the individual's position within the universe; therefore perfection stems from the individual's ontological and metaphysical position.

The final chapter questioned how the Perfect Individual exercises action and freedom. Iqbal criticized Ibn al- 'Arabi's school of Sufism as leading to inaction, therefore a comparison was undertaken to see if this was in fact true. This was accomplished by first looking at how Iqbal understood himself as a reformer, and how this meant a re-emphasis on the classical tenets of Sufism, and secondly, by comparing how the self was understood by both thinkers. The analysis of both points showed that the self, in relation to God and the world, although approached differently, was essentially the same for Iqbal and Ibn al- 'Arabi. Finally, this led to the discussion of freedom and action, and it was concluded that although Iqbal's Perfect/Ideal Individual initially has more freedom, e.g., to choose the path he/she will take, action in both cases means doing what the will of God guides the individual to do. The conclusion reached was that perfect action is accomplished by the individual relinquishing his/her own will and self, which is imperfect, lacking true Being, and replacing it with the will and Self of God.

With this summary, a final position on perfection can be articulated. Each chapter dealt with a specific aspect of perfection within the individual, chapter one with knowledge leading to perfection, chapter two with the fact that perfection is not linked to individual status, chapter three with the ontological and metaphysical position perfection has within the universe, and chapter four with perfect action. From all of this it can be concluded that for Ibn al- 'Arabi perfection is linked to spiritual understanding and realization. Humanity in general was created in a position of perfection, but individuals must realize this position for themselves. It is complete understanding that allows the

individual to actualize this perfection within him/herself, and this understanding leads to perfect action. Perfect action is acknowledging the true nature of existence and actualizing this state, and understanding the true meaning and implications of “God being the seeing, hearing, etc. of the individual. Thus, perfection is the realization, understanding, and actualization of the true nature of the self, God, and the universe.

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