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Ibn 'Arabi's Garden among the Flames: A Reevaluation

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IBN ʿARABĪ'S GARDEN
AMONG THE FLAMES:
A REEVALUATION

*Marvel, a garden among the flames.
My heart has become receptive of every form.
It is a meadow for gazelles, a monastery for [Christian] monks,
An abode of idols, the Kaʿba of the pilgrim,
The tables of the Torah, the Qurʾān.
My religion is love—wherever its camels turn
Love is my belief, my faith.¹*

These verses are among the more widely quoted passages in Sufi literature and have been used as an epitome of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn

¹ Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn (al)-ʿArabī (born 560/1165, Andalusia; died 638/1240, Damascus), *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1966), pp. 43–44. A textual variant in the last verse would alter the translation slightly: “My religion is love—wherever its camels turn / that religion is my religion, my faith” (reading *al-dīn* for *al-ḥubb*). See Ibn ʿArabī, *Dhakhāʾir al-Aʿlāq*, ed. Muḥammad al-Kurdī (Cairo, 1968), p. 50. Ibn ʿArabī’s wide range of styles and genres poses special problems for the translator. The odes from *The Interpreter of Desires* are written in formal prosody and follow many of the classical Arabic poetic conventions. Ibn ʿArabī’s own commentary on *The Interpreter of Desires* is written in an expository prose and can be translated as such. The majority of his works, however, are written in a style that falls somewhere between prose and verse. This style does not contain the meters, rhymes, and topoi of the classical poetry. However, it is often filled with stylistic effects such as rhymed prose, interior rhythms, and assonance. In addition, it follows in no way the syntactical and argumentative rules which make up modern prose. Thus it cannot be fitted into

ʿArabī's thought in many modern accounts of Sufism.² More recently, the enthusiasm with which they have been treated has come under criticism.³ In this essay I examine the intricate and highly interesting theory on which they are based, the theory of the heart that is receptive of every form.

Before taking up this theory, some words about my approach are needed. Though Ibn ʿArabī is acknowledged in Sufi circles as the grand master (*al-shaykh al-akbar*) of Islamic mystical thought, he has

sentence and paragraph structures without doing violence to both its intent and the forms into which it is being forced. An excellent solution to this problem was accomplished by Toshihiko Izutsu in *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Keio Institute, 1966), the first volume of which is a comprehensive study of Ibn ʿArabī's thought. His study contains a large selection of Ibn ʿArabī's texts in translation. In order to fit the original style into periods and paragraphs, Izutsu makes constant use of interpolations, filling in the ellipses and the logical steps that are missing in the original. I have used the opposite method, a free verse system which attempts to follow exactly the original syntactical and logical rhythms and to reproduce faithfully what I call the "hot discourse" of the original (as opposed to the coolness of systematic argumentation). I emphasize that these verse forms are not an attempt to decorate the original. Rather, they are an attempt to reproduce it as faithfully as possible. Since I have translated both the formal verses and the "prose" of Ibn ʿArabī into English verse form, I have used italics to indicate translations of formal Arabic poetry.

² These verses were cited and made popular by Reynold Nicholson on the first page of his edition and translation of *Tarjumān*, with the comment that "they express the Sufi doctrine that all ways lead to the One God": Ibn al-ʿArabī, *The Tarjumān al-Ashwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, trans. and ed. Reynold Nicholson (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1911), p. iii. Nicholson cites the same verses in *The Mystics of Islam* ([1914; reprint, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963, 1979], p. 105), with the comment that "love is the essence of all creeds: the true mystic finds it whatever guise it may assume." Henry Corbin cites them as a conclusion to his treatment of the Sufis as "fedeli d'amore" seeking union with Sophia, "the figure of wisdom": Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ʿArabī*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 135. They are also cited, with brief remarks similar to those of Nicholson, in the following works: Ignaz Goldziher, *An Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andras Hamori (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 152, which originally appeared as *Vorlesungen über den Islam* (Heidelberg, 1910); Reynold Nicholson, *Translations of Eastern Poetry and Prose* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 148; Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 145; Seyyed Hussein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardī, and Ibn ʿArabī* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 118; Margaret Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam* (London: Luzac & Co., 1972), p. 97; Nasrallah, Faramarz, and Fariborz Fatemi, *Sufism* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1976), p. 60. With the exception of Nasr, none of these writers discuss the verses within the wider context of Ibn ʿArabī's thought, and I have found no treatment of them which links them to a full discussion of the theory of the heart that is receptive of every form.

³ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 272, and *As through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 39. For an exposition of Schimmel's viewpoint, and a critique of it, see below, Mystic Bewilderment, Love Madness, and n. 37 below.

been neglected in modern religious, philosophical, and literary discussion. Perhaps the most important reason for this is the eclectic nature of his subject matter, which includes (to name only a few large areas): pre-Islamic and post-Islamic poetic themes, folk Islam, Islamic and Greek metaphysics, scholastic theology (*kalām*), Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic Hermetic sciences (astrology, alchemy, and magic), Gnosticism, Shi'ism, Islamic law, and of course Sufi thought. The various systems permeate and interpenetrate one another in syncretistic fusion throughout the utterly immense corpus of his writings.⁴

Or one might say, conversely, that his writings consist of a single set of hermeneutical and philosophical principles manifesting themselves in widely eclectic contexts, or "substrata." In each new context the basic principles take on a new hue, clothe themselves in a new vocabulary, and function in a slightly different manner. As in a continually turning kaleidoscope, the configuration changes before we can adequately take it in. Although the various contexts are not systematized in a linear fashion, they are integrated dynamically. Often a given passage will play on several systems simultaneously through the use of terminological polyvalence. Or several themes will be developed concurrently in a fuguelike movement.

No particular expression or manifestation of the central principles is self-sufficient or transparent. Each new passage reveals something and veils something. There is always an obscurity, an undefined term, a new paradox. On a positive level each passage is the expression of a principle. From the negative perspective it is the expression of an *aporia*. We are led from passage to passage, from one difficulty into deeper difficulties. It is the moving image rather than any particular frame that is significant.

Finally, it is impossible to separate what is being said from how it is said and thus impossible to paraphrase faithfully the text (unless one's paraphrase were so modified and qualified that it ended up recreating the original).

The beauty of this mode of discourse is that it reflects dynamically the very principles Ibn 'Arabī wishes to elucidate. The difficulty is that we are not able to remove the principles from their contexts without betraying them. And the alternative to such betrayal is a plunge into a vast ocean of eclectic thought systems and into the serpentine currents of the grand master's style.

⁴ Over two hundred works are attributed to him, one of which, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, will include more than twenty volumes in its new edition. See 'Uthmān Yaḥya, *Histoire et classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1964).

This discussion is a compromise. I begin with a summary of the theory in question and the general world view of which it is part. The summary is provisional, meant only to introduce the terms and sketch the field in which they function. There follows a fuller exposition of the theory, centered on selected citations from Ibn ʿArabī. The aim is twofold: to allow the reader to engage the text directly and to present along with it a set of critical categories which will reflect and reveal its inner dynamic. The essay concludes with a brief reevaluation of the thought of Ibn ʿArabī from the perspective of the theory of the heart that is receptive of every form.

BINDING OF THE INTELLECT, TRANSFORMATION OF THE HEART

The immediate context of the theory is the Sufi critique of rationalism. The Islamic philosophers had associated knowledge (ʿilm) with the intellect (ʿaql) and maintained that the way to knowledge was the way of rational speculation (*naẓar*). The scholastic theologians (*mutakallimūn*) developed a rational discourse (*kalām*) through which they attempted to solve the major problems of Qurʾanic interpretation and Islamic belief.⁵ In contrast, the Sufis pointed to the heart (*qalb*) as the seat and faculty of *maʿrifa* (mystical knowledge or understanding).

Though Muḥyī al-Dīn's theory is partially rooted in the often polemical controversy among the various modes of Islamic thought, it extends far beyond these original bounds. For Ibn ʿArabī, *al-ḥaqq* (the Truth)⁶ manifests itself to itself through every form or image but

⁵ Muḥyī al-Dīn both admired Islamic philosophy for its brilliance and criticized it for what he believed were its limitations and pretensions. This complex attitude is vividly displayed in the Sufi master's accounts of his meetings with Ibn Rushd (Averroës). The two failed to come to a meeting of the minds because they had radically different notions of "where" and what mind, in the sense of seat and faculty of true understanding, was. The anecdotes appear in Ibn ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* [Meccan revelations], ed. ʿUthmān Yaḥya and Ibrahīm Madhkūr (Cairo: Al-Hayʾa al-Maṣriyya al-ʿĀma li al-Kitāb, 1972–), 2:372–73, and in the older edition: *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, 4 vols. (Bulāq: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya al-Kubrā, 1911), 1:153. The stories are recounted in Corbin and in Ralph Austin's introduction to Ibn ʿArabī, *Bezels of Wisdom [Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam]*, trans. Ralph Austin (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 2–3. For a clear introduction to the *mutakallimūn* (scholastic theologians) and their method of *kalām* (rational argumentation), see Goldziher. Though some of Goldziher's judgments have become controversial, the controversies are usually noted by the modern editor, Bernard Lewis, and the footnotes and bibliography have been updated.

⁶ *Al-ḥaqq* has been translated as "the Reality" (Austin) and "the Absolute" (Izutsu), both of whom break with the older tradition of translating the term as "God." Because I am emphasizing epistemological issues I have translated it here as "the Truth," though this term has the disadvantage of implying that *al-ḥaqq* is a pure abstraction, which it is not. At times the words "truth" or "reality" seem more appropriate, and the use of the definite article involves complicated philosophical questions, as well as

is confined to none. The forms of its manifestation are constantly changing. Through an etymological play, he relates the intellect (^ʿ*aql*, root meaning, rope) to definition, the “binding” (*taqyīd*) of the Truth into fixed and limited categories or forms. Such a function is epistemically necessary since the purely indeterminate cannot be known or manifest. However, a fundamental error arises when the partial categories or individual forms are taken as fixed and total. This error leads to a world of conflicting beliefs, each of which denies the other. And it leads to an individual’s fixation on a particular viewpoint, conception, or experience. In either case, the error is serious, since a belief which denies all other beliefs denies the common root of them all, and an individual who is not in a state of constant change can no longer be said to know and reflect the constantly changing manifestations of the Truth. Thus Ibn ʿArabī’s critique of the intellectual error of binding goes beyond a criticism of rationalist philosophy and dogmatic scholasticism and extends to any context in which a form or image (*ṣūra*) of the Truth appears: religious, scientific, aesthetic, or even mystical. The Sufis themselves are guilty of binding when they stop at a particular station or experience, no matter how exalted, and bind the Truth to it. Through binding, meaning, by nature polyvalent and dynamic, is hidden behind the husks of fixed forms that the Truth has long since shed.

This critique of binding is based on a specific view of human nature and its function in the cosmos: as the microcosm on whose form the universe is based, as the prism through which the undifferentiated divine light is refracted into its various forms and attributes, and as the faculty of perception through which reality discloses its forms and attributes to itself. This archetypal human function is personified in the notion of the “complete human being” (*al-insān al-kāmil*). Muḥyī al-Dīn’s interpretation of the Qurʾānic story of Adam’s creation provides an introductory look at the notion of the complete human being and how that notion grounds the critique of rationalistic binding and the call for a heart that is receptive of every form.

In the Qurʾānic account of the creation, when Allāh informs the angels that he will place a regent (*khalīfa*) on earth, the angels reply: “Will you place there one who will corrupt it and shed blood while we count your praises and affirm your Transcendence?” Allāh answers

grammatical issues. “The Ultimate” might make a good modern translation, though I believe this term tends to emphasize the transcendent aspect over the immanent, at least in many discussions. “God” is the least satisfactory solution because it neglects the complex set of distinctions within Ibn ʿArabī’s notion of divinity (the divine as creator, as source of emanation, as ground of knowledge, as beyond even the distinction divine/nondivine, etc.).

this objection by teaching Adam “the names.” When the angels admit their ignorance of these names, they are made to prostrate themselves before Adam (Qurʾān 2:30–33). Ibn ʿArabī interprets “the names” as the “divine names” (*al-asmāʾ al-ilāhiyya*) and uses the Adam story to illustrate his position on the divine attributes, a central issue in the history of Qurʾānic interpretation.⁷ For Ibn ʿArabī, all divine attributes and predications (seeing, knowing, willing, speaking, etc.) are actualized through Adam in his archetypal role as the complete human being. The angels lack the universality of Adam. Each angel represents a certain divine aspect, but only Adam contains all the names. In their objection to the creation of Adam, the angels commit a double error of binding: they reveal their own limitation, each to a particular aspect, and they would also bind the Truth into a “high” station. To affirm the high without knowing the low is also a binding: true affirmation of the high is a function of human nature which knows both sides of the polarity.⁸

This theory of divinity, humanity, and divine-human attributes is vividly illustrated in Ibn ʿArabī's myth, “the Breath of the Merciful” (*nafas al-rahmān*), a myth based on the Qurʾānic reference to Allah's breathing into Adam in order to bring him to life (Qurʾān 21:91). According to this myth, the Truth was in an undifferentiated state before the creation of Adam. The divine names were in a state of nonrealization or tension: they were the keys to a treasure house without a treasure house. The breath (*nafas*) of the Merciful (the comprehensive divine name) relieved this tension by bringing Adam, the microcosm, to life and thus bringing all the divine names into actuality. The world is a mirror in which the Truth sees itself reflected in its various divine names. Adam is the polishing of the mirror (*jalāʾ*, a verbal play on *tajallī*, manifestation), the pupil of the eye of the Truth, its medium of perception (a play on the two meanings of *insān*, pupil of the eye and human being), and the divine imprint on

⁷ See Goldziher, pp. 92–114, for a brief but clear exposition of how the general problem of attributes split into controversies over the unity of God, the problem of anthropomorphism, and the question of the createdness of the Qurʾān, among the various schools of *mutakallimūn*. The problem of attributes and attribution to the divine is so central in Islamic philosophy (e.g., al-Farābī, *Al-Madīnat al-Fāḍila* [The virtuous city], where it is the question on which the entire philosophy is based) that it would be difficult to find a single account which would do it justice. The same can be said of the question as it appears in Sufi thought, usually in treatment of the divine names.

⁸ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. A. A. Afifi, 2 vols. (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā al-Kutub al-ʿArabīyya, 1946), 1:50–51; hereafter cited as *Fuṣūṣ*. This work is translated by Ralph Austin as *Bezels of Wisdom* (see n. 5 above).

the world, the image or form on which it is based and by which it is held together (Ibn ʿArabī's interpretation of the term *khalīfa*, regent).⁹

In his *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (Ring settings of wisdom, hereafter referred to as *Fuṣūṣ*), Ibn ʿArabī treats twenty-seven Middle Eastern prophets as exemplars of the complete human being. Each represents a different mode of human universality (though some fail to realize—in both senses of “understand” and “make real”—the mode of universality they represent). And each partakes of the divine-human dialectic of reciprocity within which the universal consciousness of the complete human being is actualized.¹⁰

The theory of the heart that is receptive of every form is represented by the prophet Shuʿayb and, in a negative manner, by Noah. As opposed to the analytic function of the intellect which differentiates the Truth into limited, fixed forms, the heart's function is synthetic, or rather it is dynamically integrative. The heart that is receptive of every form is in a state of perpetual transformation (*taqallub*, a play on the two meanings of the root *q-l-b*, heart and change). The heart molds itself to, receives, and becomes each form of the perpetually changing forms in which the Truth reveals itself to itself. In each moment the possessor of such a heart encounters a new form of manifestation (*tajallī*, manifestation, unveiling), and by accepting each form as a manifestation of the Truth unveils these

⁹ One of the fuller accounts of the myth occurs in Ibn ʿArabī, *Inshāʾ al-Dawāʾir* [Construction of the circles], in *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn Al-ʿArabī*, ed. H. S. Nyberg (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1919), pp. 36–38. For Adam as polishing of the mirror, pupil of the eye, and *khalīfa*, see Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 1:48–50. For a translation and discussion, see Michael A. Sells, “The Metaphor and Dialectic of Emanation in Plotinus, John the Scot, Meister Eckhart, and Ibn ʿArabī” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1982), pp. 205–19.

¹⁰ For a good discussion of the complete human being in the thought of Ibn ʿArabī's successors, see William Chittick, “The Perfect Man as the Prototype of the Self in the Sufism of Jāmī,” *Studia Islamica* 49 (1979): 135–58. For a full study of Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ*, see Izutsu (n. 1 above), vol. 1. It is regrettable that this work is out of print and difficult to find. Such neglect is especially difficult to understand in view of the renewed interest and increased publication in Ibn ʿArabī studies. Joseph and Abraham offer other examples of how the prophets represent the complete human being. Joseph represents the achievement of universality through interpretation, as dream interpreter. Yet even he does not realize the full extent of interpretation. The entire phenomenal world must be interpreted as one interprets a dream, just as history must be so interpreted. Dreams are but dreams within dreams. Abraham, the “intimate friend” (*khalīl*) of Allāh, represents the wisdom of *takhallul*, mutual interpenetration or mutual nourishment. The divine emanation penetrates and nourishes Abraham (as complete human being) by bestowing on him his existence and by actualizing that existence. Abraham infuses and nourishes the divine with the “names,” thus actualizing the divine self-manifestation. Without such mutual interpenetration, the divine remains beyond form and manifestation, and the complete human being remains without existence.

forms (through *kashf*, unveiling). Neither *tajallī* nor *kashf* can exist by itself. Manifestation occurs only between the two poles. At the moment of this double act, there is a union between the divine and human, between *tajallī* and *kashf*, between knower and known. The manifestation is a self-manifestation.

The mutually exclusive and fixed forms of binding veil what they should reveal. When the forms are no longer seen as fixed and mutually exclusive, but rather as perpetually changing forms of manifestation, they become transparent and revelatory. Since an individual, by the very nature of individuality, is predisposed to see the Truth in certain forms, to achieve a heart that is receptive of every form requires a continual process of effacement of the individual self in the universal. And since such knowledge involves a union between knower and known, and consequently the effacement of the individual self of the knower in the known, then such a knower is continually being effaced and reconstituted in each new form of manifestation.

After this very brief summary, I now turn to Ibn 'Arabī's own presentation of the theory. There is no beginning to his nonlinear discourse. One is always in medias res. Thus, the first citations may seem confusing. However, like one backing away from an impressionist painting, we should find the picture gradually coming into focus.

THE BREATH OF THE MERCIFUL, THE HEART OF THE KNOWER

In chapter 12 of *Fuṣūṣ*, Muḥyī al-Dīn treats the ancient prophet Shu'ayb as the archetype of the heart that is receptive of every form. At the beginning of the chapter, he asks whether it is the divine mercy (*al-rahma al-ilāhiyya*) or the heart of the mystic knower (*al-ʿārif*) which is more encompassing. He first takes one position, then the other, using the rhetorical opposition of two positions as a discursive guise under which the central argument develops.¹¹

The term "mercy" (*rahma*) is technical, a reference to the myth of the Breath of the Merciful mentioned above. The mercy or breath signifies the "dilation" (*tanfīs*), emanation (*ḥayḍ*), or manifestation (*tajallī*) through which the divine names are actualized.

In the passage below this myth is interwoven with a dialectic. Two aspects of the Truth are distinguished. The first aspect is the Self (*al-dhāt*),¹² unmanifest, undifferentiated, absolute unity. The second

¹¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 1:119–21. For a discussion of the meaning of Allāh's "mercy," see Ronald Nettle, "Ibn 'Arabī's Notion of Allah's Mercy," *Israel Oriental Studies* 8 (1978): 219–39.

¹² *Al-dhāt* can mean essence or self. The *dhāt* of the Truth presents insoluble translation problems; I have used the term "Self" as the least of many evils. "Essence" implies usually a quiddity but the *dhāt* is beyond quiddity. While using the term "Self,"

aspect is made up of the manifest facets of the Truth: divinity (*al-ulūhiyya*), lordship (*al-rubūbiyya*), and the divine names. The divine names, divinity, and lordship are all dependent on a polar complement (e.g., lordship's dependence on the existence of a servant). The Self is beyond all such duality and polarity. The relationship between the two aspects is dialectical: they are radically distinguished from one another, and yet they are said to be the same. The narrative of the myth of the Breath is based on normal, dualistic logic and distinctions (cause-effect, before-after, here-there, etc.). These logical distinctions are subverted by the dialectic. The tension between the myth narrative and the dialectical relationships forms a discourse which I call "mythic dialectic."

Allāh described himself as breath [*nafas*]
 which is from *tanfīs* [relief]
 The divine names are the same
 as that which they name
 They are nothing but He
 But they demand the realities
 which they express
 And the realities that they demand
 are nothing other than the world
 For Divinity requires that over which it is divine
 and Lordship requires the servant
 Otherwise they would have no meaning or existence
 The Truth, in the inner Self,
 is independent of the worlds
 But Lordship does not have such independence
 So the order lies between
 what Lordship requires
 and the independence from the world
 to which the Self holds title
 But in reality Lordship is the same as the Self

it is necessary to distinguish the *dhāt* from the individual ego-self (*nafs*), from the universal intellectual "Self" of the complete human being, and from the universal "Self" of "intelligible materiality" (the *huwiyya*, he-ness or it-ness), which offers some interesting similarities to Jung's collective unconscious. The *dhāt* corresponds roughly to the Plotinian One and Eckhart's Godhead (*Gotttheit*), in that it is beyond all dualism, all name, and all quiddity. This comparison is discussed throughout my "Metaphor and Dialectic," esp. pp. 287–90.

Though when the situation contradicts itself in relations
 He describes Himself as having compassion on his servants:
 First he relieved the Lordship with his breath
 related to the Merciful
 By creating the world required in its nature by Lordship
 and by the totality of Divine Names
 From this perspective his mercy embraces everything
 including the Truth
 And is just as encompassing, or more so, than the heart.¹³

This passage begins and ends with allusions to the myth, allusions in tension with the dialectic introduced in the central section. The dialectic is both complex and oblique. It operates on two planes simultaneously (one might call them vertical and horizontal): between the Self and the outer aspects of the Truth and within the polar dualisms of the outer aspects—between the Self and the divine names and within the name-named (world) dualism, for example. This oblique dialectic is summed up by the statement that “the order lies between” the absolute unity of the Self and the polarity of the manifest aspects. There is a fundamental *aporia* in any attempt to bring the Self-beyond-relation into a relation: once it has been brought into relation, it is no longer the Self, and a new transcendent Self must be posed, ad infinitum. In a discursive argument such an infinite regress might be considered a fault. Here, it is harnessed within the oblique dialectic, and it will form the central dynamic principle of the succeeding passages.

At this point, the focus is shifted from the “breath” to the “heart”:

¹³ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 1:119. I have translated the word *ʿayn* as “the same” in two places in the above passage. It is clear from the context that this is its primary meaning, and Ibn ʿArabī emphasizes it by placing the words *lā illā hu* (“nothing but He”) after it. However, the term is polyvalent in Ibn ʿArabī’s thought and can also mean “eye,” “source,” “essence,” or “determination.” The latter meaning is most common, and by playing on the equivocation between “same as” and “determination of,” the dialectic is invoked internally. The names are the determinations of the Truth, and of the undetermined Self, but they are also “nothing but it.” “Though when the situation [of unity] is contradicted by its relations, He describes Himself as having compassion on his servants” (*Fuṣūṣ*, 1:119). This “contradiction” functions rhetorically in two ways. It refers to the “tension” in the myth of the names in their nonexistent state, a tension eventually relieved by the “breath” or “sigh.” Dialectically, it refers to the tension between the One and its attributes which is then shifted to a new axis of dialectic, that between the Truth and its creation. In this second meaning the Arabic word *lamma* means “in as much as” rather than the temporal “when.”

Then know that the Truth ()¹⁴
 as is confirmed in the tradition
 transforms itself from form to form
 in its manifestations

And that the Truth ()
 when the heart embraces it—
 then the heart can embrace nothing else whatsoever—
 as if it were filled by the Truth

Concerning the compass of the mystic knower's heart
 Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī said:
 If the throne and what it contained existed
 one hundred million times
 in the heart of the mystic knower
 he would not be aware of it

And Junayd said in the same regard
 When the originated is related to the eternal
 no trace remains of the originated

When the heart encompasses the eternal
 how can it feel the existence of the originated?¹⁵

The passage begins with a reference to the perpetual transformation (*taqallub*) of the Truth. This central notion of Ibn ʿArabī is then related to two classical Sufi notions: the image of the heart being “filled” by the divine emanation and Junayd’s doctrine of “passing away” (*fanāʾ*). Junayd’s notion that the Sufi passes away from the individual self during the mystical experience and that only divine consciousness remains (the complementary notion of *baqāʾ* or remaining) is used here to effect a perspective shift from the normal world of dualisms to the world of unity. Since the realm of unity cannot be stated directly in language, itself inherently dualistic, it is alluded to through what I have called “monistic method”: a statement in dualistic terms (cause and effect, act and being, before and after, subject and predicate, etc.), followed by a fusion of the two terms or

¹⁴ The empty parenthesis stands for the word *taʿālā* which in Ibn ʿArabī cannot be translated since its function is nonreferential. The word is used in Islamic texts whenever the name of Allāh or the Truth is used. It is usually translated as “be He exalted” or “He is exalted.” In Ibn ʿArabī, however, it is used in a specific dialectical sense and would have to be translated as “Be He exalted above every name, attribute, or action, including the one that I am attributing to Him at this moment out of discursive necessity.” The function of *taʿālā* is similar to the apophatic marker *hoion* (as it were) used by Plotinus when attributing names or actions to the One.

¹⁵ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, I: 119–20. Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (died ca. 261/874) and Junayd (died 298/910), two influential early Sufis, are considered to represent the inebriate and the sober school of Islamic mysticism, respectively.

an elimination of one of the terms from the proposition. The method is especially effective when combined, as it is here, with a metaphor such as the vessel-content image. The normal dualism that the image requires is undermined by the perspective shift of "passing away" so that the vessel is the content or, stated otherwise, there is no longer vessel but only content. The combination of perspective shift with metaphor leads to a "metaphoric dialectic,"¹⁶ similar to the mythic dialectic mentioned earlier. The metaphoric dialectic will achieve its greatest dynamism as it is in turn combined with the doctrine of perpetual transformation.

The question then arises whether the divine manifestation determines the form that the heart takes or whether the predisposition (*istiʿdād*) of the heart determines the form of the manifestation it receives. Ibn ʿArabī "answers" this question in a new simile: the heart of the knower is like the bezel or setting (*faṣṣ*) of a ring, and the manifestation is like the stone which the setting receives. Ultimately the entire question of whether the heart determines the manifestation or the manifestation, the heart, is "answered" through the perspective shift of *fanā*[?]: in the mystic experience of passing away the very duality of heart and manifestation, vessel and content, setting and stone, is transcended.¹⁷ It would be unfair to accuse our author of evading the problem of determination here. Rather than attempting to solve it, he attempts to deepen its mystery by relating it to the central *aporia* of the perspective shift (though on the level of surface rhetoric the question is posed as if it could be "solved").

This shift involves a double process: a downward regression to pure receptivity, *materia prima*, empty vessel, blank mirror, and a complementary mystic union in the universal consciousness of the complete human being. When one realizes (in both senses of the term) one's pure receptivity by giving up the ego-self and all its images, one realizes the divine self-reflection. Or conversely, when one realizes the self-reflection, one's ego-self passes away. (The causal relation here is reciprocal.) This perspective shift of *fanā*[?] in which the one manifesting itself (*al-mutajallī*) becomes (is) the one receiving the manifestation (*al-mutajallā lahu*) is not described in Ibn ʿArabī's text but rather reenacted through dialectical language as a meaning event.¹⁸

¹⁶ For a fuller discussion of monistic method and metaphoric dialectic, see Sells.

¹⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 1:120. This is clearly one of the passages on which the title *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* [Ring settings of wisdom] is based. However, the use of the term is complex, and one is not always sure whether it means the setting or the stone, an ambiguity that seems deliberate.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121. In a recently completed article, "Ibn ʿArabī's Polished Mirror: Perspective Shift and Meaning Event" (presented to the Middle East Studies Associa-

Here I wish to emphasize two points. First, the complete human being is not so much an entity or object as an event, the process of perspective shift, of *fanā*³, the polishing of the divine mirror. Second, individuals cannot hold onto the event, but must continually reenact it.

GODS OF BELIEF

Ibn ʿArabī goes on in the same passage to state that the “solution” to the problem of the heart and manifestation is that there are in fact two manifestations: the visible manifestation (*tajallī al-shahāda*) and the paradoxical hidden manifestation (*tajallī al-ghayb*, literally, manifestation of the hidden). The visible manifestation corresponds to the particular form or image in which each individual sees the Truth. The hidden manifestation corresponds to the inner reality of the heart which is at once universal and undifferentiated and, at the same time, determines the particularity and individuality of each individual. This hidden manifestation or predisposition is dialectically identical to the visible manifestation it determines (just as the Truth is dialectically identical to the divine names and to each divine name), and it is also identified with the divine *huwiyya* (self-identity). It is on the relation between the visible manifestation and the hidden that Ibn ʿArabī founds his critique of rationalistic binding and dogmatism, with the visible manifestation corresponding to one’s “belief” (*iʿtiqād*):

The Truth which resides in the belief
 is that whose form the heart encompasses,
 what reveals itself to the heart to be known

The eye sees nothing but the Truth of its belief
 And there is no secret about the variety of beliefs

Whoever binds Him [in a belief] denies Him in any belief
 other than that in which he has bound Him

And affirms Him in the belief
 in which he bound Him in His manifestation

But whoever liberates Him from binding, denies Him not at all
 But affirms Him in every image into which He transforms Himself

He/he gives him/Him of Himself/himself
 in accordance with the image in which He/he appears to him/Him

tion, November 5, 1983, in Chicago, under the title “Ibn ʿArabī: Translation, Interpretation, and the Texture of Discourse”), I suggest several modes of interpreting the meaning event and its nondescriptive language. The modes are metaphoric, mimetic, meditative, and existential.

Infinitely, since the forms of manifestation
have no end at which to stop

And, likewise, knowledge of Allāh has no limit for the knower
at which he might stop

Rather, the knower asks in every moment for an increase
in his knowledge of Him

“My lord, increase me in knowledge” [Qurʿān 20:116]

“My lord, increase me in knowledge”

“My lord, increase me in knowledge”

So it continues, perpetually, from both sides.¹⁹

The Qurʿanic sentence, “My lord, increase me in knowledge,” is repeated three times, thus indicating that it is a *dhikr* (constantly repeated formula of remembrance). In this passage it fulfills two functions simultaneously. It serves discursively to indicate that true knowledge is always in a state of change and increase (and is, ultimately, that very change or increase itself). On the practical level, the *dhikr* is the chief means whereby the Sufi and, necessarily, the writer and reader of the text attempt to break the spell of binding and achieve perpetual transformation: through the incessant process of reminding, one is able to achieve with each reminder the release from binding and “increase” in knowledge.

The critique of binding is based finally on a redefinition of idolatry and infidelity. The individual image that one has of the Truth is the “god” of one’s belief. Idolatry is the worship of the god of one’s own belief. Infidelity is the denial of the gods of others’ beliefs (since by denying these manifestations of the Truth one is denying the Truth itself, which is dialectically identified with each of its manifestations). The point is made indirectly, through a reference to the Qurʿanic attack against the polytheists, of whom it is said that at the last judgment they will appeal to their gods, but the gods will not be able to help them: “They have no saviours” (Qurʿān 3:22, 56, 91; 16:38; 29:35; 30:29):

“In that is a reminder [*dhikr*] for one who has a heart [*qalb*]” [Qurʿān 50:33] because of its constant transformation in forms and attributes.

¹⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, I:121. “He/he gives him/Him of Himself/himself . . .”: Muḥyī al-Dīn plays continually on the referential ambiguity of the pronoun *huwa* and *hu* to fuse the human and divine referents in the perspective shift. In such cases, it is easiest to show what the pronoun is doing by translating it “He (the Truth)/he (the human being).” I use the male gender for the divine referent only for economy, since the pronoun means both “he” and “it.” The question of gender and personality in the Truth is exceedingly complex and eludes any single translation we might choose.

He did not say “for one who has an intellect” [*‘aql*]
 For the mind binds [*qayyad*] and limits the matter in one characterization
 So it was not a reminder to one who has an intellect
 And they are the affirmers of a belief
 Who call one another heretics and infidels
 Who curse one another
 “And they have no saviors”
 The god of one has no authority over the god of the other.²⁰

THE STATION OF NO STATION

This view of the monotheist-polytheist controversy of the Qur^ʿān is made more explicit in Ibn ‘Arabī’s interpretation of the Qur^ʿānic story of Noah (Qur^ʿān 71:21–27). Noah had called the polytheists to the one God, but they stubbornly refused to renounce their gods. Finally, Noah called on his Lord to destroy the idolators lest they lead the people astray. In his commentary on this story, Muḥyī al-Dīn redefines the monotheistic-polytheistic struggle in keeping with the dialectical nature of his thought. Noah had accused the polytheists of *makr* (deception, guise), but in reality both parties practiced deception, hiding the true dialectic behind the guise of monotheism and polytheism. Noah and the polytheists each represent one side of the dialectic of transcendence and immanence. Neither side is sufficient in itself. Each side by itself is a binding:

*If you affirm transcendence
 you bind
 If you affirm immanence
 you define
 If you affirm both
 you hit the mark
 You are an Imam in knowledge
 and a master.*²¹

Noah practiced deception by calling his people to Allāh (as if Allāh were absent from them, from their beliefs, and from any object in the world, including the wood and stones they worshiped). The polytheists practiced deception by insisting that their idols were “gods”

²⁰Ibid., p. 122. “They have no saviours” (*mā lahum min nāṣirīn*): in addition to the six places where these exact words occur, there are numerous other references in the Qur^ʿān to the same, very common theme, with slightly different phrasing.

²¹Ibid., p. 70.

rather than manifestations of the Truth. It is unclear whether or not Noah and his opponents realized their roles in this complex guise and deception. The mystic knower through the unveiling (*kashf*) can peel back the surface arguments and reveal (subjectively and objectively) the inner dynamic:

*You are not He
But you are He
You see Him in the essence of things
Boundless and limited.²²*

Applying the hermeneutic of *kashf*, Ibn ʿArabī proceeds to unveil the rest of the story. Noah's accusation that the polytheists lead people astray is actually a reference to the fact that they lead people into mystic perplexity or bewilderment (*ḥayra*). Bewilderment is caused by an abandonment of the linear, dualistic logic represented by Noah's calling his people "to" Allāh.²³ Commenting on Noah's statement, "You [Allāh] only increase them in delusion," Ibn ʿArabī says:

That is the bewilderment [*ḥayra*] of the Muhammadian

"Lord, increase me in bewilderment in You . . ."

For the bewildered one has a round [*dawr*]
and a circular motion around the Pole
which he never leaves

But the master of the long path
tends away from what he aims for
seeking what he is already in

A master of fantasies which are his goal

He has a "from" and a "to"
and what is between them

But the master of the circular movement
has no starting point
that "from" should take him over

and no goal
that he should be ruled by "to"

He has the more complete existence

And is given the totality of the words and wisdoms.²⁴

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 71–72.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

The statment "My lord, increase me in bewilderment in you" is a reformulation of the *dhikr* seen above, "My lord, increase me in knowledge," which was itself a Qur^ānic citation. It also stands on its head the explicitly stated goal of the Islamic philosophers, which was to dispel perplexity or bewilderment (*ḥayra*) through rational inquiry.²⁵ With such intratextual and extratextual allusions in mind, Ibn ʿArabī asserts that the highest knowledge is *ḥayra* in the continual transformation from form to form and in the circular motion beyond the dualism of origin and goal.

The water and fire in which the polytheists perished is reinterpreted as the universality in which the individual perishes in the experience of *fanā*², with a special ironic twist on the notion of savior:

"They did not find any savior besides Allāh"

Allāh was their savior

In whom they perished eternally

If you had placed them on the shore

[of the seas of knowledge-bewilderment],
the shore of nature

²⁵ The attempt to dispel *ḥayra* or perplexity through a method leading to philosophical certainty is the explicitly stated goal of al-Farābī, in his *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1962); and Maimonides, in his *Guide of the Perplexed* [*Dalālat al-ḥāʾirīn*], trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), to name only two examples from Islamicate philosophy. Ibn ʿArabī inverts the entire range of philosophical methods. Instead of rationally distinguishing among various manners of argumentation, a distinction al-Farābī believes will dispel perplexity (al-Farābī, p. 14), he deliberately mixes and fuses them. Unlike Maimonides, who claims that the allegorical interpretation of scripture will dispel the perplexity caused by literal readings (Maimonides, p. 6), Ibn ʿArabī affirms an esoteric hermeneutic which guarantees perplexity by seeing history, text, the phenomenal world, and dreams as various levels of dreams and dreams within dreams. And instead of resolving contradictions, the Sufi master inverts the very principle of contradiction by appealing to an ultimate *coincidentia oppositorum*. I should emphasize that, throughout his works, he shows a lucid awareness of the rules he is breaking. Toshihiko Izutsu (p. 81) states that Ibn ʿArabī affirmed a station beyond *ḥayra*: "In the mind of a sage who has experienced the Unity of Being in its real depth there is no longer any place for any 'perplexity.'" Izutsu bases this opinion on a very obscure passage (Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 1:78–79), which can be read in different ways depending on how one punctuates it, and on the opinion of the commentator al-Qāshānī. I suggest that Qāshānī, like many commentators, attempts to rationalize and tame the open system of his master. It may be true that Ibn ʿArabī does affirm a state beyond *ḥayra*, but such a state should be seen in dialectical relationship with the *ḥayra*. The individual that breaks free from the chains of binding will be in a state of *ḥayra*, qua individual, though on a deeper level (the complete human being), the state of certainty (*yaqīn*) is achieved. The greater the *ḥayra* on the level of individual consciousness, the greater the certainty on the level of universal consciousness. The highest understanding is the deepest awareness of mystery. To affirm a static, nondialectical state of knowledge would be to invite the error of binding.

you would have taken them down from their high station

though everything [including the shore]

is Allāh's, and in Allāh, and is Allāh.²⁶

Noah called on his Lord as if he could call on a fixed reality. The mystic knower, on the other hand, realizes the union of servant and lord (“Who knows his self, knows his Lord”)²⁷ and realizes the merging of his particular lord with all the lords (all the personal aspects of divinity and individual essences). Thus there is a very different way of addressing the Lord, between Noah and between the mystic knower who chants, “My lord, increase me in bewilderment in you.”

The critique of epistemic reification and linear logic is not confined to the categories of religious belief, philosophical concept, and scholastic dogma. It extends to Sufism itself and to the Sufi hierarchy founded on the notion of *maqām* (or *muqām*), the station. A station is a kind of plateau along the Sufi path (*ṭarīqa*). It is opposed to the *ḥāl*, the momentary condition. At a given moment one's condition may be above or below the station. (For this reason one cannot judge the station of another.) Yet even the mystic station may be a binding. Even those who achieve the highest station, that of “pole” (*qutb*), the closest realization of the complete human being in a particular individual existence—even such a station can be a binding. Speaking of the notion that each pole is modeled on a given prophet or prophetic wisdom, Ibn ʿArabī deconstructs the entire Sufi hierarchy by speaking of a Muhammadian pole (a pole modeled on the Muhammadian *rūḥ* or spirit-logos), the pole of transformation, the station that is no station:

Each “pole” is related to a particular prophet

except for one who is in the Muhammadian mode

Nothing is more universal in its distinction

than the lack of limitation [*taqyīd*]

to a distinguishing station

The Muhammadian is distinguished

only by his lack of distinguishing station

²⁶ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 1:73.

²⁷ A central Sufi *ḥadīth*. The importance of Sufi *ḥadīth* accounts, either the reported words of Muhammad or the divine words reported to have been spoken to Muhammad (*ḥadīth qudsī*, sacred hadith), is overwhelming in the case of Ibn ʿArabī. This importance is brought out admirably in the indexes to *ḥadīth* in the Yahya edition of *Futūḥāt*.

His station is that he has no station

This means that a condition [*ḥāl*] can prevail on a person
so that only through it is he known [or does he know]:
he is related to it and determined by it

But the relation of stations to a Muhammadian
is like the relation of names to Allāh

He is not determined in any station to which he may be related

Rather, in every breath, in every time, in every condition
he is the image of what that breath, time, or condition requires

His limitation does not remain

The divine decrees [*aḥkām*] vary in every moment
and he varies in accordance with them

For He (): “Every day He is in a different state” [Qurʾān 55:29]

And so, similarly, is the Muhammadian

Thus His word (): “That is a reminder [*dhikr*] for one who has a heart.”

He did not say “intellect” [*ʿaql*], something which would bind Him

The heart is named “heart” [*qalb*]

because of its perpetual transformation [*taqallub*]

in stations and orders

in accordance with the breaths . . .

The Muhammadian pole or Individual changes perpetually with each breath
in knowledge

just as all creation changes in condition

The Muhammadian increases in knowledge

of what he is transformed in and through

not of the transformation itself

For transformation pervades the world entire and pervades him.²⁸

“Nothing is more universal in its distinction than the lack of distinguishing station.” This statement reflects the dialectical logic of Ibn ʿArabī’s critique of Noah. By affirming transcendence without immanence, Noah limited his god by marking it off from the world and thus subverted his own affirmation of transcendence. True affirmation of transcendence demands the transcendence of the normal notion of transcendence. It demands a dialectic of transcendence and immanence. Similarly, the highest mystic station is that

²⁸ Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* (1911) (n. 5 above), 4:76–77. The Yaḥya edition has not yet reached this point in the text.

which transcends the high-low polarity. This also entails a transcendence of the distinction between sacred and profane, between the mystical experience and everyday reality. These two realms are powerfully fused in the theory of moments and breaths hinted at in the above passage.

ETERNAL NOW: MOMENT, BREATH, *dhikr*

In using the term *waqt* (moment), Ibn ʿArabī is following the Sufi tradition. The early Sufi called himself the “son of his moment” (*ibn al-waqt*), by which he meant that he gave no consideration to planning his future livelihood. Instead, he practiced the virtue of *tawakkul*, putting one’s trust in *Allāh*.²⁹ Muḥyī al-Dīn has taken this term out of its earlier ascetic context and combined it with the *kalām* scholastic notion of the instant (*ān*).

The theory of the instant was part of the controversy over causality, free will, and determinism in which the scholastics were embroiled. In the course of this controversy (called the “occasionalist” dispute), an atomistic physics was developed. The world was seen as made up of discrete, invisible atoms and accidents which are destroyed and recreated by *Allāh* in every instant. There is thus no causal necessity operating on a physical plane between one instant and the next. The instants themselves have the same characteristics as the atoms, since the temporal must be in keeping with the spatial. Instants are thus discrete, discontinuous, indivisible moments of time. One might call them temporal atoms.³⁰

The occasionalist theory and the problems out of which it developed (an attempt to solve rationally the question of divine freedom and causal necessity) can have no final meaning in a system based on subverting the dualistic bases of the controversy. Yet the theory of the instant, stripped of its occasionalist context, was to exert a special fascination for Ibn ʿArabī. The recreation of the world in every instant is no longer seen as an occasionalist recreation of the objective, physical world by an exterior creator, but rather as the continual passing away and creation that occurs in *fanā*³ and *baqā*³ and in the perpetually self-transforming process of *tajallī-kashf* (self-unveiling/unveiling). Using a Qur³anic reference to the new creation, Ibn ʿArabī accuses the scholastics of misunderstanding the theory:

²⁹ For a discussion of this early Sufi, ascetic notion of *waqt*, see Goldziher (n. 2 above), p. 133.

³⁰ One of the clearer accounts of these atomistic theories is to be found in Maimonides, bk. 1, chap. 73, where they are discussed under the rubric of the ten premises of the *mutakallimūn*. The third premise treats the temporal aspect of the atomic theory (Maimonides, pp. 196–200).

And “they are in confusion about the new creation.” [Qurʾān 50:15]

But the people of unveiling [*kashf*]
see that Allāh manifests Himself in every breath

And that the manifestation never repeats itself

And they see as witnesses that every manifestation
presents a new creation and removes the old

And its removal is nothing other than passing away [*fanāʿ*]
which is implicit in the manifestation

And the remaining [*baqāʿ*] is what is presented
by the new manifestation—so understand.³¹

Just as the moment represents a combination of Sufi and scholastic notions of time, so the term “breath” is also complex. It refers on the first level to the Breath of the Merciful mentioned earlier. But here the mythic dualisms of time and causality are all but effaced. The one primordial breath by which the world flowed into actuality is seen now as the eternal breath that always has occurred, and always is occurring. The breath is the eternal moment in which Allāh exhales into being a new form and inhales or contracts from the old form even as the knower actualizes that process by receiving the new form and giving up the old. In Sufi meditation the knower pronounces a *dhikr* in each breath. In the following passage the complex terms *dhikr*, “moment,” and “breath” are fused in a unified dynamic of recreation and transformation, a dynamic where the moments vary with the subject, as opposed to the uniform instants of the physical theory on which the new theory has been superimposed:

The seeker continues to say with every breath
“My lord, increase me in knowledge”
as long as the sphere of the universe turns in His breath
So that he attempts to make his moment his/His breath . . .

The moment lengthens or shortens
in relation to the presence of its master

The moment of some is an hour
of others a day, a week, a month, a year, or once in a lifetime

And some have no moment at all.³²

³¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 1:125.

³² Ibn ʿArabī, “Risālat al-Anwār” [Treatise on the lights], in *Rasāʾil Ibn ʿArabī* (1948; reprint, Cairo: Dār lhyāʿ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1968), pp. 17–18. This treatise has been translated by Rabia Terri Harris under the title *Journey to the Lord of Power*

The moment is the nexus for the *tajallī-kashf*, the manifestation that comes about when the self-manifesting Truth and knowing human subject come together. The physical objectified recreation of the scholastics is merely a shadow reality, a phantom (*shabah*), the shadowy mirror that is the universe without the polishing of the complete human being.

By combining the classical Sufi doctrine of *fanā*³³ and *baqā*³³ with the dynamic notion of the moment of eternal now, itself an amalgam of Sufi and scholastic notions of time, Muḥyī al-Dīn forms his theory of perpetual transformation. Though he has abandoned the occasionalist arguments of the scholastics, the dilemma of divine providence and human freedom still remains central. One is compelled to wonder. Is it through union with the perpetually changing Truth in *fanā*³³ and *baqā*³³ that the mystic knower achieves perpetual transformation? Or is the ability to achieve such transformation, to achieve the heart that is receptive of every form, the precondition for the union of *fanā*³³ and *baqā*³³? The causality is equivocal. Such causal equivocation is the mark of enigma. That one cannot trace an unequivocal chain of cause and effect indicates a modal shift beyond the dualism of cause and effect. Rather than "solving" the question, Muḥyī al-Dīn's discourse evokes its mystery, a mystery which motivates the text, an *aporia* which lies always beneath the chain of surface argument.

MYSTIC BEWILDERMENT, LOVE MADNESS

*Marvel, a garden among the flames.
My heart has become receptive of every form.
It is a meadow for gazelles, a monastery for monks,
An abode of idols, the Kaʿba of the pilgrim
The tables of the Torah, the book of the Qurʾān
My religion is love. Wherever its camel mounts turn
That is my belief, my faith.
We have a model in Bishr, Hind, and her sister,
In Qays and Layla, Mayya and Ghaylān.³³*

(New York: Inner Traditions, 1981). The Harris translation includes an interesting passage not found in the edition I have used (pp. 62–63): "For one who is heedful of the breaths has the hours in his power, and all that is beyond that; and the one whose Moment is the presence of the hours loses the breaths; and the one whose Moment is the days loses the hours; and the one whose Moment is the weeks loses the days; and the one whose Moment is the years loses the months; and the one whose Moment is his lifetime loses the years; and whoever has no Moment has no lifetime and loses the afterlife."

³³ Ibn ʿArabī, *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* (n. 1 above), p. 44.

In returning to these verses, I have cited them with their final verse (the last two lines in the translation). This last verse is usually left out of citations since it refers to personalities familiar only to those versed in the Arabic poetic tradition: the most famous unrequited lovers. This reference was prepared for by the previous mention of the gazelle, which in pre-Islamic poetry was often associated with the poet's beloved and later had come to signify the beloved herself. With the meadow for gazelles, the rich classical tradition of Arabic poetry becomes another of the many contexts in which Ibn ʿArabī's thought takes form.

This discussion has centered on the theory of the heart that is receptive of every form and the complex matrix of ideas which make it up. This matrix appears again in Ibn ʿArabī's commentary on the last verse of the poem concerning the unrequited love of the classical poets: "Allāh has driven them mad with love. He afflicted them with love of their fellow [human beings] as a rebuttal to those who claim to love Him, but are not in like manner driven mad with love. Love deprived these [unrequited lovers] of their wits. It made them pass away from themselves at the sight in their imagination of the beloved."³⁴

The term *hayyam* means to "bewilder with love" or "to drive mad with love." The lovers cited in the poem have been deprived of their wits (ʿuqūlihim, the plural of ʿaql, intellect), a direct play on the intellect-heart (ʿaql-qalb) issue. The lovers are made to pass away in *fanā*³ just as the mystic is made to pass away from his or her ego self into the Truth. In another part of the *Interpreter of Desires* the connection between mystic bewilderment and love madness is drawn even more explicitly.

³⁴ Ibn ʿArabī, *Dhakhāʾir al-Aʿlāq* (n. 1 above), p. 50. In the same commentary, Ibn ʿArabī gives a dense interpretation of his statement "My heart has become receptive of every form." I did not rely on this commentary in the body of my exposition because Muhyī al-Dīn has often been accused of writing an artificially concocted commentary to defend his mystic odes from charges of sensuality and heresy. Now that the meaning of the heart that is receptive of every form has been tied into the general body of his mystical philosophy, I cite his own commentary: "'My heart has become receptive of every form.' Another [an evident reference to himself, as the persona who authored his other works] has said that the heart [*qalb*] takes its name from its own perpetual transformation [*taqallub*]. It varies with the variation [*tanawwuʿ*] of the influences [*wāridāt*] upon it, which vary with the variation of its conditions [*aḥwāl*], which vary with the variation of the divine manifestations to its secret identity [*sirr*]. Religious law [or revelation, *sharʿ*] calls this 'perpetual itinerancy and substitution in forms' [*al-taḥawwul wa al-tabaddul fī al-ṣuwar*]." Since there is no such doctrine that I know of in the *sharʿ*, considered either as revelation or as law, the use of the term here seems to be esoteric, perhaps a reference to the eternal revelation and law of which each prophet is a representation, but which the mystic can contact directly in the mystic union and the unveiling of *kashf*.

Before turning to this passage for a conclusion, I would like to mention several well-known opinions concerning Ibn ʿArabī's thought and to evaluate them in the context of the above discussion. The theory of the heart that is receptive of every form has been seen to consist of a complex dynamic involving a wide set of mutually dependent ideas. In order to show how these elements fit together, I have presented a series of critical categories: monistic method, the *tajallī-kashf* dynamic, the perspective shift as the meaning event, and the modes of dialectic (oblique dialectic, mythic dialectic, metaphoric dialectic).

The first question we are led to ask is whether the terms "monism" and "pantheism," which have so often been applied to Ibn ʿArabī's thought, are accurate. Do they reflect the oblique dialectic which was seen to be his guiding principle? This dialectic was capsulized in the statement that "the order lies between" the independence of the Truth from all relation and duality (in its aspect of Self) and the dynamic polarity of its manifest relationships (divine-human, lord-servant, names-world). The paradoxical nature of such a formulation is reflected in the statements that the highest station is the station of no station and that the most distinct is that which is distinct by its own lack of distinction. These are not explicative paradoxes or apparent contradictions. The contradiction lies at the very heart of the inner dynamic, although that dynamic follows its own rigorous and consistent dialectical logic.

Thus, while it is true that the Self-beyond-all-relation is ultimately the only reality, this ultimate state does not nullify the other half of the oblique dialectic. Though "nonexistent" in themselves, it is the dynamic polarity of the divine names, the perspective shift they represent, that constitutes the meaning event. For this reason I prefer the phrase "monistic method" to the term "monism," if only because monism is so often seen as a doctrine rather than as a linguistic strategy. Muḥyī al-Dīn uses the internally paradoxical assertion that "all things are one" to guide the fusions and shifts which make up his writing. He is aware that no pure monistic doctrine can be expressed, since any expression involves dualisms of language and thought that contradict a pure monism. Louis Massignon's accusation that the grand master's monism destroyed the element of transcendence in Islamic mysticism seems particularly wide of the mark.³⁵ It does not

³⁵ Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1922), p. 285: "Ibn ʿArabī, épris de logique formelle, élimine, en fait, toute intervention transcendante de la divinité, du domaine de la mystique." This opinion is based on a misunderstanding of

address the oblique dialectic: the more something is said to be immanent, the more it is affirmed to be transcendent; the most distinct is that which is distinct by its very lack of distinction. If one is to claim that transcendence has been abandoned, it is first necessary to discuss Ibn ʿArabī's critique of Noah's affirmation of transcendence and the dialectical logic that underlies his own. As for Charles Adams's statement that the followers of Ibn ʿArabī "teach outright pantheism, that there is only one reality, God, who is the sum of all things"³⁶—such a formulation also neglects the dialectical and dynamic nature of the thought. No well-versed follower of the Sufi master would affirm the static, nondialectical notion that the one reality is the sum of all things.

Other opinions touch even more directly on the theory of the heart that is receptive of every form. Annemarie Schimmel has characterized the poem with which this essay began as "highest self-praise" and states that "this seemingly tolerant statement contains, rather, a statement about the author's own lofty spiritual rank."³⁷ It is certainly

dialectical logic outlined in this essay, a logic which attempts to transcend formal logic through the dialectic of immanence and transcendence and through the dynamic, existential notion of *tajallī-kashf*, a notion which is radically experiential. Unfortunately, Massignon's misunderstanding has formed a stereotype which is as deeply rooted as it is inaccurate. Among many other instances of Massignon's attack on the Andalusian Sufi, I cite the following as an example (Massignon, p. 62): "C'est elle [the school of Ibn ʿArabī], également, qui a consommé le schisme entre les vocations mystiques musulmanes et leur rayonnement social—substituant au devoir de correction fraternelle la discipline qarmate de l'arcane,—réservant l'apanage de la mystique, science ésotérique qui ne doit pas être divulguée,—a des cercles initiatiques fermés, corporations intellectuelles fossiles, 'Gobineau-Verein' ou 'Stendhal-Club' de l'extase, fumeries d'opium surnaturel."

³⁶ Charles Adams, "The Islamic Religious Tradition," in *Religion and Man*, ed. W. Richard Comstock (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 597.

³⁷ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (n. 3 above), pp. 271–72. Schimmel has confused the question by injecting into it the issue of tolerance. Of all those cited in n. 2 above who refer to these verses, only Goldziher used the term "tolerance." Tolerance was socially and politically defined in Islamic law, and Ibn ʿArabī was neither a social nor a political revolutionary. Thus it is true that he did not advocate tolerance. This does not at all detract from the significance of these verses as a call for universality, a universality which was to be achieved not through political or social confrontation of the Islamic law but through the inner transformation of the individual's heart—a transformation which would make the question of tolerance irrelevant. Tolerance is a very weak virtue (we tolerate those whom we refuse to understand). Ibn ʿArabī's theory calls not for the toleration, but for the complete embracement, of all forms of belief and manifestation. In *As through a Veil* (n. 3 above), pp. 38–39, Schimmel once again states that the verses do not express tolerance and then goes on to say that "the poem is, however, a glowing tribute to Islam." This statement does not reflect Ibn ʿArabī's own explicit comment that this love and religion is the love of the Muhammadians. This term was mistakenly translated by Nicholson as "Moslems" (Ibn ʿArabī, *The Tarjuman al-Ashwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes* [n. 2 above], p. 69). As has been made clear in this essay, the term does not refer to Muslims but rather to

true that Ibn ʿArabī speaks often in his works of his mystical experiences and stations. The establishment of one's rank or station was part of Sufi life and involved sophisticated procedures for validation of these "credentials" that are still largely unstudied. But Schimmel's characterization neglects the irony involved in Ibn ʿArabī's assertion: to celebrate the achievement of the station of no station is a very ambivalent assertion of high rank, since the very high-low dualism on which it is based is being transcended. Furthermore, since this station (of no station) can only be achieved through the passing away of the individual in *fanā*³⁷, the voice here cannot be simply identified with the ego-self of the author of the poem. The "I" is the complete human being that the mystic can realize only through passing out of his or her self. The entire theory of binding is brought to bear against the danger Ibn ʿArabī perceived in the Sufis' assertion of lofty spiritual stations, and the very terms "lofty spiritual rank" figure in one of his most scathing critiques of binding. No one bound within a station, no matter how lofty, could achieve the heart that is receptive of every form.³⁸

Abdurrahman Badawi, in a discussion of Islamic mysticism and existentialism, maintains that Ibn ʿArabī, unlike earlier mystics, did not live any of his ideas and is thus of little interest to modern existential thought.³⁹ Ibn ʿArabī's Sufism certainly differs from that

those who have achieved the station of no station and who refuse to bind themselves to any one prophetic wisdom. The verses are a tribute to the religion of the Muhammadian, the religion of the heart that is receptive of every form. Schimmel, who relies on Nicholson in her interpretation, has mistakenly identified the "religion" referred to in the verses with Islam when, in fact, as is made clear throughout Ibn ʿArabī's writings, very few Muslims are Muhammadians. See Ibn ʿArabī, *Dhakhāʿir al-ʿAlāq* (n. 1 above), p. 50.

³⁸ See just above, n. 37 above, and Ibn ʿArabī's denunciation of the angels who claim a high rank and exalted position: *mansab ʿāl wa manzila raftʿa ʿind allāh* (*Fuṣūṣ*, 1:49). The angels violated the principle of *adab*, propriety. It is a knowledge of *adab* (which can also mean nobility, refinement, wit, sagacity) that guards an individual from falling into arrogance, presumption, and binding. According to the principle of *adab*, one never praises one's ego-self in anything. The only self-praise that is valid is the Self-praise of the complete human being, which is only realized when the individual ego-self passes away. The angels' self-praise was a violation of *adab*, and thus Allāh humbled them by making them prostrate themselves before Adam (the complete human being). Ibn ʿArabī exhorts his readers to learn from the example of the angels that to claim a lofty rank is to fall from it (*Fuṣūṣ*, 1:51).

³⁹ Abdurrahman Badawi, "Les Points de rencontre de la mystique Musulmane et de l'existentialisme," *Studia Islamica* 27 (1967): 75. Badawi also faults Ibn ʿArabī for his effort to include all wisdoms in a comprehensive universality: "La preuve en est son chef-d'oeuvre *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*: tandis qu'al-Ḥallāj se limite à une seule personnalité, celle de Jésus, et Suhrawardī s'attache à Zoroastre, nous voyons Ibn ʿArabī, par suite de sa tendance encyclopédique et syncrétique, je dirais même éclectique, embrasser tous les prophètes dans son expérience—rationnelle?—existentielle" (ibid.). Badawi, who on the previous page has mentioned Massignon's work on al-Ḥallāj as the exemplar of the

of the earlier, more ascetic Sufis. But the attempt to look through the Andalusian master's life for evidence that he actually lived his ideas ignores the continuous quality of his notion of *fanā*³ and *baqā*³: to think of some particular experience or form as universally ratifying makes no sense in a system which not only sees every moment as a living of the idea, but sees the "idea" as the unfolding of life itself. From the perspective of the moment, the notion of living one's ideas is redundant. If Ibn ʿArabī does not act out his ideas, it is because his effort is focused on transcending the distinction between idea and life, idea and experience. I suggest that his view of meaning as involved in a continual process of self-creation within the *tajallī-kashf* and divine-human polarities is of interest not only to existentialism but to other forms of modern thought as well.

Both the specific ideas discussed here and Ibn ʿArabī's thought in general pose other problems for historical and comparative study. The similarity of these ideas to many forms of Eastern thought, as well as to the Christian mysticism of Meister Eckhart,⁴⁰ raises complex comparative issues. I should emphasize that, although Hindu and Buddhist ideas were known in Ibn ʿArabī's Spain in a very general way and though he could well have been influenced by some of them, his thought is neither anomalous nor extraneously induced. It is both deeply rooted in the spirit of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Islam and one of the major expressions of it. The grand master traveled from Andalusia to Anatolia in a flourishing and developed Sufi society where the general premises on which his writings are based were inherent.⁴¹ His ideas also represent a strong permanent strain within Islam and have found vibrant expression in modern

effort at finding an existential interpretation of Islamic mysticism, is following Massignon's criticism of the grand master: "Tendance théosophique, perceptible chez Manès et chez Ibn ʿArabī; qui ne comprennent pas que l'accès au but mystique dépend avant tout du choix judicieux d'un seul moyen, fortifiant l'intention dans son orientation inflexible; eux s'imaginent trouver plus sûrement accès à l'union divine, en usant concurremment de tous les 'moyens cultuels,' et cet éclectisme syncrétiste les prive d'apercevoir la différenciation transformante, irréparable, qui s'opère graduellement, en cours de route, entre ceux qui se prosternent le long de la 'Via Crucis,' et ceux qui s'étendent sous le char de Jaggernaut" (Massignon, p. 30, n. 1).

⁴⁰ For specific parallels, see Sells, "Metaphor and Dialectic" (n. 9 above), pts. 3, 4.

⁴¹ Throughout his works, Muḥyī al-Dīn recounts stories of his encounters with other Sufis, the kind of language and dialogue they engaged in, and their implicit and immediate recognition of the premises on which his thought is based. These encounters extend from his homeland of Andalusia (especially the centers of Cordoba and Seville), through the great cities of North Africa (Fez, Marrakesh, Kairouan, Cairo), to the Arabian peninsula (where he wrote his *Futūḥāt* or Meccan revelations), and eastward: Baghdad, Konya, and Damascus, where he is buried. The only place his ideas encountered dangerous opposition was in Egypt.

times.⁴² At the very least, a reexamination of these ideas shows the need for a more careful and nuanced treatment of Islam in comparative studies.⁴³ Finally, I suggest that the theory of the heart that is receptive of every form may offer insight into a methodology of comparative study. Ibn ʿArabī's discussion of the "gods of belief" is based on a logic which sees unity and difference not as mutually exclusive but as dialectically reinforcing. Such a dialectic may offer a richer mode of inquiry than the present argument about whether or not religions or mystical experiences are essentially the same or essentially different. The oblique dialectic represented in the reinterpretation of the Noah story poses a dynamic notion of identity between the particular and unique forms of manifestation and the unity beyond all form and relation. In this perspective, to deny either the plurality or the unity is to fall into reification and binding and to lose the dialectic.

There is no room to pursue these questions in this essay, already growing long. I hope they have been shown to be of interest. I would like to close by addressing again the impression that Ibn ʿArabī's Sufism is "intellectual" (as opposed to emotional), "gnostic" (in that it makes salvation dependent on some special knowledge available only to an elite), and even "cold" (all of these characterizations are interrelated). In the introductory poem to the *Interpreter of Desires*, and in the commentary on it,⁴⁴ Ibn ʿArabī treats the divine "appearances" (*ẓawāhir*) as the beloved of the mystic lover. Once again the *tajallī-kashf* dynamic polarity of unveiling is invoked: the appearance cannot happen without the viewer, and the viewer cannot exist without the appearance. The ephemeral nature of the appearances

⁴² See Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961, 1973).

⁴³ For example, see Stephen Katz's attempt to show that the Sufi doctrine of *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ* has nothing in common with the Buddhist notion of nothingness. Katz defines *baqāʾ* as "everlasting life in Allah" and states that there is no "God or God-like Being in Buddhism": Stephen Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. S. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 54. Though his description of *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ* might be valid for many Sufis, the terms he uses could not apply to Ibn ʿArabī's version of the doctrine. In Muḥyī al-Dīn, the human and divine are invoked in a continual process of Self-creation through mutual determination, so that terminology like "everlasting life in Allah" does not apply very well. See also n. 6 above on the imprecision of the term "God" when applied to the thought of the Andalusian master. I suggest that we speak of modes of Islamic thought and modes within the mode of mysticism. The mode represented by Ibn ʿArabī may well have more in common with certain modes of other traditions than it does with other modes of Sufism. The attempt to come to a one-paragraph definition of a central Sufi doctrine and then to compare it to other traditions simplifies the wide divergences within Sufism.

⁴⁴ Ibn ʿArabī, *Dhakhāʾir al-ʿAlāq* (n. 1 above), pp. 9–10.

(and consequently of the “lives” of the viewer) is a source of *halāk* (perishing of the lover) and of bewilderment (*ḥayra*). And the notion of love madness is invoked by the context so strongly that it does not have to be mentioned explicitly. The intensity of the lover’s experience is directly proportional to its ephemerality. This tension infuses all of Ibn ʿArabī’s writings, not just the love odes. The more the Sufi achieves the transformation of the heart, the greater is the temptation to stop at a given point and bind.⁴⁵ And the greater is the sorrow at giving up the old form and joy at finding the new. While Muḥyī al-Dīn is intellectual in the sense that he is willing to consider seriously any thought or belief system, his is hardly a rationalistic or abstract philosophy. To give up binding, to achieve a state of continuous passing away in each new appearance or manifestation demands neither a special gnosis (the secret is that there is no secret in the sense of an objective “known”) nor high intellectual rank. Rather, it demands a transcending of the classical distinction between the way of knowledge and the way of love.

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⁴⁵ See Ibn ʿArabī, *Journey*, where the Sufi master describes a series of mystical experiences with the constant exhortation not to stop at any of them. The final experience is the *fanā*² and *baqā*² which, as was seen, turns out to be a continually repeated transformation in each moment and each breath.