



Unity of Being

All thou beholdest is the act of one
 In solitude, but closely veiled is He.
 Let Him but lift the screen, no doubt remains:
 The forms are vanished, He alone is all.

Ibn al-Fāriḍ

Ibn 'Arabī, the greatest Master (al-Sheikh al-Akbar), was denominated *Muhyī-d-dīn*, the animator of religion, by some of his contemporaries; others labeled him *Maḥīd-dīn*, he who abolished religion, or even *Mumīt-ud-dīn*, he who kills religion. These contradictory qualifications of one of the most remarkable representatives of Sufism have survived for more than seven centuries, implying and attesting to the complicated nature of this phenomenon and its multifarious roles.

Islamic mysticism has exercised considerable influence on the cultural and sociopolitical life of Muslims. Sufism has been both a product of elite consciousness and a popular religion. It has been a form of social protest against the dominant political system as well as the legalized religious doctrine that warranted and sanctioned the system. Yet Sufism has also been used to quell, to pacify, and to repress social activity. Sufism counterpoised irrationalism to rational thinking while it also stood forth as a variety of religious free-thought not infrequently contiguous with philosophic theorizing. It persuaded seekers of the Path to renounce

mundane cares and bodily appetites, to practice ascetic self-discipline, and at the same time it gave inspiration to Nizāmī, Ḥāfīz, Djāmī, Omar Khayam, Rūmī, and many other poets who rapturously extolled love and life.

To determine the sources of the ideas of Islamic mysticism is difficult. Its ideas and images resemble those of other mystical doctrines. For that reason certain researchers in the past (and a few recently) declared Sufism to be a derived, dependent system of ideals and looked for its roots in Neo-Platonism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and the like.

The role of external factors in the rise and development of Islamic mysticism was unduly magnified, partly due to the character of Sufi sources (many of them are in Persian or in languages other than Arabic). Also, the interaction of religious and philosophical theories and doctrines in the Near and Middle East, where the ideas of Christianity, Judaism, and Neo-Platonism had been known long before the Prophet Muḥammad appeared, was underscored.

Yet the mystical world outlook is actually uncircumscribed by any geographical, national, or chronological boundaries. Every religion has its own mystical tradition, and the religious dogmas and tenets determine its peculiar features. While Sufism was subject to external influences as much as the whole of Islam, and was doubtless influenced by various non-Islamic schools, it would be more reasonable to consider Sufism as a product of Muslims' spiritual evolution.

Islamic mysticism is a complicated phenomenon lacking a generally accepted ontological conception. Still, the most prominent idea is the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wudjūd*), which presents the culmination of the development of Sufi philosophy¹ (L. Massignon, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 4:581)

The idea as such is evident in the earliest philosophic doctrines. Xenophanes of Colophon, Parmenides, Heracleitus, and Anaxagoras (4th–5th cents. B.C.) pondered it; it was further developed by Plato and the Neo-Platonics.

The idea of Unity of Being is the backbone of the famous “Bhagavadgītā”:

There is nothing else besides Me, Arjuna. Like clusters of yarn-beads formed by knots on a thread, all this is threaded on Me.

Arjuna, I am the sapidity in water and the light of the moon and sun; I am the sacred syllable OM in all the Vedas, sound in ether, and manliness in men.

I am pure odour in the earth and pure brilliance in fire; nay, I am life in all beings and austerity in ascetics.

Arjuna, know Me as the eternal seed of all beings. I am the intelligence of the intelligent; the glory of the glorious am I.

In Sufism the concept of the Unity of Being was first formulated by Ibn 'Arabī;² consequently its main tenets are articulated by this mystic philosopher of Andalusia and by his followers and commentators.

Ibn 'Arabī's treatises *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (1230) and *Futūḥāt* (1230–37) are the most representative and popular of his works. The complete title of *All-Futūḥāt* is rendered in English as *The Book of Revelations Received in Mecca Concerning the Knowledge of the King and the Kingdom*. This huge, encyclopic work evaluated as “a veritable compendium of the esoteric sciences in Islam“ (S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 98) contains the life-stories, teachings, and insights of the generations of Sufis who preceded him, and the principles of Sufi doctrines and esoteric sciences.

The compact *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* is, as Ibn 'Arabī himself stated, his most important work as it presents “the kernel” of his philosophy. The title is translated literally as “Bezels of Divine Wisdom,” but it is generally paraphrased as “Wisdom of the Prophets.” The Arabic noun *fuṣūṣ* (plural of *al-faṣṣ*) denotes the setting that holds the precious stone or the seal of a ring. The “precious stones” of the eternal wisdom mean prophets personifying different aspects of the Divine knowledge.

Each of the twenty-seven chapters of the treatise is dedicated to one of the prophets mentioned in the Koran, from Adam to

Muḥammad. A few of the names (e.g., Ṣālīḥ, Hūd) are unknown in Judeo-Christian tradition.

The monistic principle of the Unity of Being was considered by Ibn ‘Arabī in two planes, which might be called “the cosmic” and “the phenomenal.”³ The Unity of Being is manifested in three levels: the Absolute, the Divine Names (archetypes), and the phenomenal world. To be sure, certain researchers⁴ think it proper to distinguish five levels of planes in the system of *waḥdat al-wudjūd* but they find it difficult to describe each plane accurately. Besides, the admission of five planes results from vouchsafing the disparity between Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysical-ontological system and his theological system. The thinker himself spoke repeatedly and clearly enough of the triple division. Thus, in his short treatise *Kitāb Inshā’ al-Dawā’ir* he wrote:

Know that the things that exist constitute three degrees, there being no other degree of Being. . . . I would assert that of these three (categories) of things the first is that which possesses existence by itself, i.e., that which is existent per se in its very essence. The existence of this thing cannot come from non-Being; on the contrary, it is the absolute Being having no other source than itself. . . . It is, in brief, the absolute Being with no limitations and conditions. Praise be to Him! He is Allah, the Living, the Everlasting, the Omniscient, the One, who wills whatever He likes, the Omnipotent. (Quoted in T. Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, p. 27)

Ibn ‘Arabī gives to the Being of the first plane the names of the Absolute, the God, and Reality. “In truth, there is but one single essential Reality (*ḥaqīqa*)” (*Wisdom of the Prophets*, p. 28), “the perfection or the infinity: *al-Kamāl*, in which are ‘drowned’ all the existential realities as well as the non-existent relations” (*ibid.*, p. 38).

If God is all, what is the world in which we live? “The world is then the shadow of God” (*ibid.*, p. 62). This shadow appeared because God wanted to manifest Himself and thus “to see His own Essence (*al-‘ayn*)” (*ibid.*, p. 8). It is “the sadness of the primordial

solitude that makes Him yearn to be revealed . . . suffering anguish in non-knowledge because no one names” His Divine Names. The world, the creation, is the effect of God’s yearning to be known (H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, p. 184).

Like many other mystics Ibn ‘Arabī finds this explication on the *ḥadīth qudsī* (a ‘sacred’ *ḥadīth*, the authority of which is asserted by Sufis only), stating that when the Prophet David asked God why He had created the world God answered, “I was a hidden treasure, and I wanted to be known, so I created the world.” Sufis start with this *ḥadīth* and treat the origin of the world as God’s wish to manifest Himself, His hidden Essence. Yet God never manifests Himself completely; He always ‘hides’ something. “He hides behind the veils of darkness—which are natural bodies—and the veils of light—which are subtle spirits; for the world is made of crude (*kaṭhīf*) and other subtle matter (*laṭīf*) (*Wisdom of the Prophets* p. 17). Hindu Vedantism describes very aptly this ‘behavior’ of God as *lila*, “the sacred pastime,” in which the Absolute invests Himself with the cloak (*Maya*).

From the *wudjūdiyya* point of view the Divine act of creation is God’s revelation through the created world. Mirza Ghalib, the great poet of Muslim India, expressed this idea in one of his ghazals:

The world is no more than a manifestation
of the uniqueness of the Beloved;
But for the Beauty⁵ that seems its own awareness,
we ourselves would not exist.
Each place and instant sings, in varying measure,
a song of being and nonbeing; it is fruitless.
Wherever his footprint reveals itself, that handful of
dust is the treaty for the integrity of the two worlds.
(Mirza Ghalib, *Dīwān*, p. 1)

Creation is a passing from the state of potentiality into the state of revelation, that is, the process of realization of the unconditioned Absolute Divine Being in the world of infinite conditioned potencies.

After division has occurred, so that, while the whole is one; our spirits are a wine and our bodies a vine.

Before it is no 'before', and after it is no 'after'; it is the 'before' of every 'after' by the necessity of its nature.

Its grapes were pressed in the winepress ere Time began and it was an orphan although the epoch of our father (Adam) came after it.

(Ibn al-Farīd, quoted in R. A. Nicholson, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 185).

Two planes of God's revelation are distinguished. The first of these (*at-tadjallī*) is revealed in the Divine Names ('*ilm*'), and the other in concrete forms of being of the sensible world. The Divine Names are, "on one hand essentially identical with the Named, and on the other hand, distinct from Him by its particular significance" (*Wisdom of the Prophets*, p. 39). Each Name reveals one of the Divine qualities and differs from all others in its essential determination. It is in the determination that the particular nature, the limitation of each Divine Name belonging to the range of multiplicity are expressed.⁶

The Divine Names form a sphere that is intermediate between the Absolute Being (*wudjūd muṭlaq*) and the limited particular (*wujūd muqayyad*) or phenomenal world. The Names are a sort of link between the Absolute Being and the world, being subject to and dependent on the former and rulers as regards the latter, for the created world is derived from them, is their immediate emanation. Ibn 'Arabī wrote: "We are the fruit of Divine unconditioned generosity towards the Divine Names" (*ibid.*, p. 86). The Divine Names are like light impregnated with the shadow, the Divine shadow projected on the created world. It is by the light that the perception of the shadow takes place. Shadows do not exist in the absence of light; neither is the light possible without the source that produces it.

Ibn 'Arabī made use of complicated Sufi terminology to express his assessment of the universal and the individual. His Divine Names are not only theological categories delineating the Divine attributes but philosophical universals as well. Explicating

the interconnection of the universal idea and individual existence and their relation to the Absolute Divine Being, the great Sufi master wrote: “Universal Ideas (*al umūr al-kulliyyah*), which evidently have no individual existence as such, are nonetheless present, intelligibly and distinctly, in the mental state” (ibid., pp. 13–14). And further, “Everything which exists individually emanates from these Ideas, which remain, however, inseparably united to the intellect and could not individually be manifested in such a way as to be removed from the purely intelligible existence” (ibid., p. 14).

The resemblance to Neo-Platonism can be easily traced in Ibn ‘Arabī’s disquisitions.⁷ The Great Sheikh repeatedly underlined that “Universal Ideas, in spite of their intelligibility, have not, as such, their own existence” (ibid., p. 15). Expounding his position he referred to the *universalia humanitatis* and asserted that the universal ideas “are integrally present in everything qualified by them, like humanity (the quality of man), for example, is present integrally in each particular being of this species without undergoing the distinction nor the number which affects individuals, and without ceasing to be in itself a purely intellectual reality” (ibid.).

The Divine Names are the revelation of God in the nonmanifest world of mystery (*‘ālam al-ghayb*) while the phenomenal world is a manifestation of the Divine Being in the world of testimony (*‘ālam al-shahāda*), of objective perception. The Real Absolute Being is God; the world is the manifestation of His Essence. The term *wahdat al-wudjūd* indicates both the transcendence and immanence of the Absolute Being as regards the phenomenal world.

Affirmation that God is incomparable to things, denial of world’s resemblance to God, are decried by Ibn ‘Arabī as “ignorance” or lack of tact (*adab*) (ibid., p. 32). He wrote, “The exoterist who insists uniquely on the Divine transcendence (*at-tanzīh*) slanders God and His messengers. . . for he is of those who accept only one part of the Divine revelation and reject the other” (ibid.).

Acceptance of the principle of transcendence leads to dualism, discarding the inherent connection of the general and the particular, of the individual and the many. Contrary to this, the monist adepts of the conception of *waḥdat al-wudjūd* insisted, “Thou art not Him; and yet thou art Him; thou wilt see Him in the essence of things” (ibid., p. 34).

Ḥaydar ‘Alī expressed the relation between God and the world by metaphorically comparing God, or the Absolute Being, to a boundless ocean and concrete things and individual beings to numberless waves or streams differing from the ocean in their definiteness and particularity, yet not diverging from it in their substance and reality. Considered in this sense, the world for Ibn ‘Arabī “has not a veritable existence. . . it is in itself nothing” (ibid., p. 64).

Such statements made certain of the Great Sheikh’s opponents and interpreters assume that he considered the world to be a mere illusion existing in the imagination of men. One of the most prominent Sufi opponents of the conception of *waḥdat al-wudjūd*, Sheikh Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564–1624), who set against it the ideas of *waḥat al-shuhūd*, “unity of vision” or “testimonial monism,” started with interpreting Ibn ‘Arabī’s theories in that way. Yet it is memorable that in his later years Sirhindī practically accepted the position of *wudjūdiyya* and conceded that “in most assertions about reality (*tahqīqāt*) the Sheykh is in the right and his detractors far from the truth” (quoted in Y. Friedmann, *Sheikh Aḥmad Sirhindī*, p. 65).

In fact, Ibn ‘Arabī continually emphasized the world as created and dependent on the Divine Being. Nonetheless, the world is a manifestation of the Divine Absolute, the realization of the necessary in the casual. “God first created the entire world as something amorphous and without grace (*rūḥ*), comparable to a mirror not yet polished” (*Wisdom of the Prophets*, p. 9). The ‘receptacle’ produced by God received the inexhaustible effusion of the Divine revelation.

God’s manifestations are infinite; hence the boundless variety of the phenomenal world.

Know the world from end to end is a mirror;
 In each atom a hundred stars are concealed.
 If you pierce the heart of a single drop of water,
 From it will flow a hundred dear oceans;
 If you look intently at each speck of dust,
 In it you will see a thousand beings;
 A gnat in its lines is like an elephant;
 In name a drop of water resembles the Nile,
 In the heart of a barley-corn is stored an hundred harvests,
 Within a millet-seed a world exists.
 In an insect's wing is an ocean of life,
 A heaven is concealed in the pupil of an eye,
 The core in the centre of the heart is small,
 Yet the Lord of both worlds will enter there.⁸

(Maḥmūd ash-Shabistārī, *Rose-Garden*, p. 52)

The inexhaustible infinity of indefinitely various forms in which the Divine Being goes on manifesting itself is conditioned by the continuous, uninterrupted process of the Absolute's self-manifestation. "The Divine Order (*al-'amr*) is movement disengaging itself from repose. . . , the movement of the world from non-existence to existence" (*Wisdom of the Prophets*, pp. 104–5).

The multiplicity of infinitely variegated things in the world is created and derived in contrast with the Absolute Unity of Existence, the Divine Being. This idea was interpreted by Ibn 'Arabī in a way very similar to that of Proclus (410–485), the last of prominent representatives of Greek philosophy—as a dialectic interconnection of the One and the many. In the triad of Proclus it resides in itself, then it goes out of itself, and at last it returns to itself. In the system of *wahdat al-wudjūd* the Divine Being has neither name or attributes, manifests itself in the phenomenal world, and perpetually strives 'to return' to its primordial state. "The entire reality (*al-'amr*) from its beginning to its end comes from God alone, and it is to Him that it returns" (*ibid.*, p. 10). In terms of Djīlī's metaphor the process is similar to water becoming ice and then water once more (R. A. Nicholson, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 84).

It is the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) that effects the return to the One and single Essence, and the Perfect Man is considered the most perfect of all beings, the crown and completion of creation. The Perfect Man is to the universe what the bezel is to the seal; he is a sign, a mark engraved on the seal with which God's treasury is guarded. "Man is called the Representative of God, Whose creation he safeguards, as one safeguards the treasury by a seal" (*Wisdom of the Prophets*, p. 12). The world had remained an "unpolished mirror" until God breathed His spirit into Adam, the forefather of Mankind and the Perfect Man as well. In the Koran God says to the angels about Adam, "When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him" (Sura 15, ayat 29). Ibn 'Arabī took up for comment God's words from another ayat (Sura 38, 75): "O Iblis! What prevents thee from prostrating thyself to one whom I have created with My hands?" (The Arabic noun *biyadayya*, "hands," is used in the form of the dual number.) The thinker interpreted the ayat as evidencing the union in Adam (created with two hands) of the two forms: "the exterior form is created of realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) and of the forms of the world, and the interior form corresponds to the 'Form' of God (that is to say to the 'total' of the Divine Names and Qualities)" (ibid., pp. 17-18).

Man (the genus *Homo*) is the most perfect being in the universe. All other beings are mere reflections of numberless aspects, attributes of the Absolute, while Man's nature synthesizes all the forms of Divine revelation, contains virtually all other natures created (ibid., p. 12) and "receives in himself all the different Essential realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) which constitute the world" (ibid., p. 86). Still, since the world in its entirety is the macrocosm (*'ālam-i-akbar*), Man is the microcosm (*'ālam-i-asgar*). In other words, the principle of the Unity of Being obtains in the phenomenal world just as consistently. If on the cosmic level the Unity of Being means in fact that "All is God," on the phenomenal level the Unity of the Absolute means "All is Man."

Therefore in form thou art the microcosm,
 Therefore in reality thou art the macrocosm.
 (Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, Book 4, 521)

The idea of macrocosm and microcosm is not to be found in Sufism only. Anaximenes, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Empedocles, and other Greek philosophers up to the Stoics and Neo-Platonists held the concept. It is also found in the theories of the Orphics and Gnostics. A similar concept of the Universum is typical of taoism in which Man is contemplated as system not just analogous or similar to that of cosmos but identical with it both structurally and essentially. The idea was expressed by Muslim thinkers before Ibn 'Arabī. Thus al-Ghazālī, interpreting the *ḥadīth* "God created Adam in His form," maintained that Man was created in the semblance of the macrocosm but as its diminished variety and that Adam's component parts were similar to the component parts of the macrocosm.

Primitive Man did not distinguish himself from his natural environment. This was largely due to a "natural economy" way of life. Man found in nature a continuance of his ego and the clan and tribe social relations. In the Middle Ages Man no longer blended with nature. In that period, as prominent Russian scholar A. Ya. Gurevich writes, Man no longer assumed an attitude toward the world as object but rather comprehended himself in the exterior world and apprehended the cosmos as the subject. Discovering a sequence of himself in the world he elicited the universe in himself. Man and universe discerned each other (*Categorii*, p. 69).

The concepts of macrocosm and microcosm were widespread in medieval times, yet they frequently had different connotations with unique accents. It is easy to trace in the opinions of Ibn 'Arabī and his adherents an endeavor to override the dualistic worldview (typical of the Middle Ages in general and of Muslim mentality in particular) that accepted the existence of both the Divine world and the sensible world associated (especially by Christians) with the world of evil, of the devil's malevolence.

In the *wahdat al-wudjūd* system Man is not only a microcosm viewed as an epitome, a measure of the universe, of the whole world of being, of the macrocosm, but as something incomparably more significant, as an intermediate link between God and the phenomenal world, thus ensuring the unity of cosmic and phenomenal being.

The monism of this system is summarized most plainly by Ibn 'Arabī: "From its existential unity, the shadow is God himself, for God is the Unique (*al-wāḥid*), the One (*al-ahad*); and in respect of the multiplicity of sensible forms, it is the world" (*Wisdom of the Prophets*, p. 64). The Divine Essence is the immanent cause of all being; it is eternal and at the same time perpetually manifesting itself in an unfathomable number of creatures.

Wahdat al-wudjūd belongs to the variety of religio-philosophical doctrines that may be defined a mystical pantheism.⁹ Contrary to the naturalistic pantheism that dissolves God in nature, its maxim being "God is all,"¹⁰ mystical pantheism dissolves nature in God, insisting on the principle "All is God." Still, the qualifications of Ibn 'Arabī's and his adherents' Sufi views as a pantheistic doctrine has been confuted. Most ostentatious is the position of S. H. Nasr, F. Schuon, and other modern promulgators of Sufism. Nasr, for example, disclaims such classification as depreciative and disclaims 'accusations' of pantheism as false (*Three Muslim Sages*, pp. 104-5).

Nasr argues that "pantheism is a philosophical system" while Sufi views, and those of Ibn 'Arabī in particular, are not any philosophy at all for they (Sufis) "never claimed to follow or create any 'system' whatsoever," their way of thinking being merely "Islamic esoterism," Gnostic knowledge. Both Nasr and Schuon take it for granted that metaphysics and Gnostic theories are outside the sphere of philosophy since "a metaphysical doctrine is the incarnation in the mind of a universal truth. . . . A philosophical system is a rational attempt to resolve certain questions which are put to ourselves" (*Understanding Islam*, p. 11).

Of more importance is Nasr's insistence that while "pantheism implies a substantial continuity between God and the universe" Ibn 'Arabī claims "God's absolute transcendence over every category, including that of substance" (*Three Muslim Sages*, p. 105); "it is true that God dwells in things but the world does not 'contain' God" (*ibid.*). Nasr does not accept the possibility that there are different varieties of pantheism.

The vulnerable point of Ibn 'Arabī's pantheistic position is his acceptance of the act of creation; nature and Man are created

by God, the Absolute, who is above all qualities. In Ibn 'Arabī's treatise *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* creationist ideas, while subtle, are nonetheless present: "God first created the entire world" (*Wisdom of the Prophets*, p. 9); "Man is . . . a being created perpetual and immortal" (*ibid.*, p. 12).

The pantheism of *waḥdat al-wudjūd* is manifested in religio-mystical ideas. While the thesis "God is all" may logically lead to materialism (as, for example, in Spinoza who started with a pantheistic tradition), the thesis "All is God" limits the chances of such an approach. God is, then, essentially the same as the world but infinitely more 'voluminous': "I am God," but "God is not I." As Ibn al-Fāriḍ says:

I was ever She, and She was ever I, with no difference;
 nay, my essence loved my essence.

I was nothing in the world except myself beside me,
 and no thought of beside-ness occurred to my mind.

If I recant my words, 'I am She', or if I say—and
 far be it from one like me to say it!—that She became
 incarnate (*ḥallat*) in me, (then I shall deserve to die
 and death).

(Quoted in R. A. Nicholson, *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 224–25)

Man's pretension of being the same as God, expressed in the famous utterance "*anā'l-Ḥaqq*" (I am the Absolute Truth) for which Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallādī paid with his life since it was a direct challenge to the Islamic religious system, was amended by Ibn 'Arabī. He substituted the formula "I am God's secret" (or, "I am His shadow," a theophany) for that of *anā'l-Ḥaqq* and refuted "their pretension of identification with God" (*Wisdom of the Prophets*, p. 54).

The amendment of Ḥallādī's formula caused certain researchers to disbelieve the monistic nature of *waḥdat al-wudjūd*. The doubts seem unfounded since those who upheld the concept of the Unity of Being, though they specified difference between the Absolute and His phenomenal form, between God and the world, did insist on their substantial unity.

The monism of *wahdat al-wudjūd* consists in admitting the principle of subject/object identity, according to which the subject is not secondary to the object (substance) but *a mode of its existence*. It is for the self-revelation of the One that the development of an identical principle takes place; God, the self-conscious reason, may be manifested only in Man's perception of nature and of the world: "the ephemeral being manifests the 'form' of the eternal." God, wishing to see Himself, manifests Himself in the ephemeral world. "In contemplating Him we contemplate ourselves, and in contemplating ourselves He contemplates Himself" (ibid., p. 16).

Within the medieval spiritual culture of Islam the religious philosophy of Sufism stood in a certain contraposition to both traditional Islamic doctrine and the worldview of the adherents of *falsafa*—Muslim Peripatetics. In the ontological sphere this contrast was expressed in the opposition of Sufi monistical pantheism to theism, on the one hand, and to the naturalistic pantheism, on the other.

Theism presupposes the transcendence of God, the Creator of the world and its perpetual Ruler. Within Islam theism was realized either in sharp dual division (the substance, God, and the nonsubstantial, the world; or God, the High Substance, and the world, a created, lower substance) or in the pluralism of *kalām* atomistics.

Until recently it was generally accepted in Islamology that it was *mutakallimūn's* atomistics that formed the ontological basis of Muslim scholastic theology.¹¹ Lately an attempt to refute that point of view has been undertaken by a number of Arabian scholars, including Kh. Muruiwe, T. Tizini, and T. Kh. Ibrahim. Whatever variations occur in the interpretation of *kalām*, the atomistic principle of its ontological system has not been called into question on the whole. The question remains, however, whether the atomism of *kalām* had a theistic orientation (as historians of philosophy traditionally believe) or a pantheistic tinge (as T. Kh. Ibrahim, for one, has tried to prove).

Mutakallimūn's atomistics might be called pantheistic if the thesis of T. Kh. Ibrahim is accepted, namely, that "in philosophical

pantheism God is not only immanent to the universe but also necessarily transcendent to it” (*Philosophia Kalama*, p. 19). Yet objections must be raised against this very thesis. First, the generally accepted view is incomparably better grounded: the main distinction of pantheism from theism consists in the latter’s acceptance of God’s transcendence (S. S. Averintsev, *Filosofskaya entsiklopedia*, 189). This acceptance appearing alongside pantheistic views merely testifies to the perfunctory and confutable nature of such views.¹²

Second, Sufis in fact recognized God’s immanence and transcendence at the same time. But adepts of *wahdat al-wudjūd* confined this view mainly to the sphere of cognition while their position in ontology was consequential and they maintained the pantheistic thesis of God’s immanence as regards nature.

In Ash’arīyya’s atomistics, the main and dominating feature was the idea of God’s transcendence over nature (even though this idea might coexist sometimes with the idea of God’s immanence). According to mutakallimūn “The Universe, that is, everything contained in it, is composed of very small parts which are indivisible.” Unlike atomists of ancient Greece, Ash’arīyya believed that “these atoms are not . . . numerically constant, but are created anew whenever it pleases the Creator” (Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, pp. 120–21).

Objects have no inherent attributes; attributes are accidental and created anew by God. “God creates a substance and simultaneously its accidents. . . . He can of His will create in the same substance an accident of a different kind” (*ibid.*, p. 124). When a man is writing it is not he who really moves a pen; the motion produced in the pen and in the hand is an accident God has created. The conclusion of mutakallimūn is as follows: “There does not exist anything to which an action can be ascribed, the real *agent* is God” (*ibid.*, p. 125). One cannot doubt the theistic nature of the formulas just quoted.¹³

Muslim philosophers were well aware of this and adverted to it. Referring to Abū Nasr al-Fārābī, whose views he shared, Ibn Rushd wrote that mutakallimūn asserted the existence of potentiality in the only Maker, in the Absolute Demiurge, whose

creative act was in no need of primordial matter; they believed that they had proved the creatio ex nihilo (see *Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 178). Thus it was that Sufism (*waḥdat al-wudjūd*) with its pantheistic monism came into conflict not only with the unreserved theism of Islamic traditionalists (Ḥanbalīs, Zāhiriyya, Salafīyya, etc.) but with the theism of *kalām* as well. Of special interest here is the example of al-Ghazālī in whose doctrine the ideas of Ash‘ariyya were joined to those of Sufism and who, nonetheless, refuted mystical pantheism and ranked its adepts (it was Maṣnūr al-Ḥallādī he had in mind) among extreme fanatics who spread the bounds of conformity up to unity (*Voskresenie*, p. 250).

Still the ontological views of Sufis (adepts of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in particular), with all their digressions from the orthodox Islamic doctrine, remained within the bounds of a religious worldview. The philosophical potentials of pantheism were not and could not be fully realized since Sufi pantheism was mystical. It did attempt, however, to give a philosophic interpretation of Islamic monotheism. The very fact that Sufis endeavored proves they made a step toward a philosophic worldview and, consequently away from religious dogmatism. It is not by chance that Ibn Sīnā, the prominent representative of *falsafa*, called Sufis “his brothers in search of the Truth.”¹⁴

The relation between Sufism and *falsafa* is very complicated and contradictory. In particular, the role of Sufism in the evolution of philosophic thinking in Islamic countries deserves a more adequate evaluation. It is well known that ancient Greek philosophy, primarily Aristotelian philosophy, had great influence on the development of philosophy in the Near and Middle East. The impact of Aristotelians was so great as to induce the creation of the oriental Peripatetic school represented by such prominent thinkers as al-Kindī (ca. 800–ca. 870), al-Fārābī (870–950), Ibn Sīnā (980–1037), and Ibn Rushd (1126–98). The fact that Peripatetic doctrines carried the name of “*falsafa*” does not mean, to be sure, that other schools (Mu‘tazila, Ismā‘īliyya, Sufism) were exempt from participation in the development of philosophy in the Muslim world throughout the Middle Ages. It shows only that oriental

Peripatetics who continued and extended the traditions of ancient Greek spiritual culture on their soil, naturally, were apprehended by their compatriots as representatives of that kind of thinking for which there was no name in Arabic until it was coined from the Greek word “philosophy” (deformed into *falsafa*). Besides, Aristotelianism was clearly distinguished from the dominate religious worldview due to its elements of materialism and pronounced rationalism.

Researchers have not been able to agree about the problems of the genesis and the peculiar nature of the oriental Peripateticism. For a long time there prevailed in European scholarship the opinion that philosophy in Arabic was completely epigonic, devoid of originality altogether. Hegel asserted that Arab philosophy had not formed a particular stage of its own in the general course of the development of philosophy, nor had it furthered in any way the principle of philosophy (“Ihre Philosophie macht nicht eine eigentümliche Stufe in der Philosophie; sie haben das Prinzip der Philosophie nicht weiter gebraucht” [*History of Philosophy*, Bd. 19, S. 125]). According to Ernest Renan, “Arabs did nothing but adopt the whole of Greek encyclopaedic thought just as all the world had accepted it by the seventh and eighth centuries” (“Les Arabes ne firent qu’adopter l’ensemble de l’encyclopedie grecque, telle que le monde entier l’avait acceptee vers le VII^e et le VIII^e siecle” [*Averroès*, p. ii. Avertissement pour le 4^e edition]). A sharper qualification was offered by Ignaz Goldziher, a famous orientalist: “From the outset the Arabic philosophy was marked—due to absolute deficiency of critical ability—with the stamp of eclecticism evident in all the directions of its development” (Der vollige Mangel kritischer Fahigkeit druckte von allem Anfang der Arabischer Philosophie den Stempel des Eklektizismus auf der sich in jede der Richtungen in denen sie sich entfaltet hat, in unverkennbarer Weise bekundet” [*Die Islamische Philosophie*, S. 52]).

Research in the history of philosophy in recent decades has introduced vital correctives into the understanding of oriental Peripateticism and prompted certain novel conclusions. In fact, the doctrines developed by the Muslim Peripatetics were founded

on “Neo-Platonic” Aristotelianism. The formal reason for that is easy to find in the circumstances of Aristotle’s ideas penetrating into that region. Arabs first learned of them from two books translated into Arabic on the initiative of al-Kindī ‘the philosopher of Arabs.’ The first treatise was the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, which contained certain fragments from the *Enneads* (the fourth to the sixth) of Plotinus as well as several texts by Aristotle; the second, called “The Book of Causes,” contained the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus.

Further development was not an outgrowth of false reasoning, credulity, ignorance, or ‘lack of critical ability.’ The adoption of Neo-Platonic (not of ‘pure’) Aristotelianism was conscious and premeditated, dictated by the needs and circumstances of the Muslim world. Still, it would be incorrect to insist that it was the commixture of Aristotelianism and Neo-Platonism that specified the oriental Peripateticism (A. V. Sagadeev, *Ibn-Sina*, pp. 62ff.). It is in Plotinus’ writings and in those of Proclus and other Neo-Platonists that one can distinguish integration of Plato’s and Aristotle’s ideas. The sythesis was adopted by Muslim philosophers, who mastered it and managed to realize its further transformation. The creative elaboration of the material embraced proceeded not (as some investigators prefer to think) by way of expurgating Aristotelianism from Neo-Platonic depositions but in the course of modifying both Plato’s and Aristotle’s ideas. Medieval Islam thinkers who tended to prove the independence of philosophical and scientific knowledge were especially drawn to Aristotle’s logic, his theoretical discrimination of the Essence, the empirical trend of his gnoseology, and his natural philosophy. Their veneration of the “first master’s” prominence did not portend, however, any blind imitation. Al-Fārābī, who gained the appellation of “the second master,” declared that following the example of Aristotle should be such that love for him would never surpass the adherence to truth (*Filosofskie tractaty*, p. 13).

Arabic-speaking Peripatetics gave preference to the Truth and reconsidered the heritage of Aristotle using Neo-Platonic ideas, primarily the principle of emanation. Adverting to this principle was necessary and expedient in view of the position of its direct

ideological adversary, theological creationism. It was by using the principle of emanation that Aristotle's doctrine of the Thinking Mind, the main link in the system of his philosophy, could be transformed and thus the premises formed for treating Being as unified and dynamic, laying the foundation for a truly philosophic worldview that might be opposed to the theological treatment of existence with its separation of the universe into two parts, the "Creator" and the "creation."

In Arabic Peripateticism the Greek *to prōton kinoyon* is supplanted by the Primary Cause. Al-Fārābī wrote that the Being of the Primary Essence is a sort of emanation of Being into being of other things, while the being of everything else emanates from His own Being. The principle of emanation is not a fortuitous Neo-Platonic accretion in Arabic systems but their organic component. To be sure beforehand it had to be reconsidered and modified on the basis of the ample experience of natural philosophers of the East. The development of this principle in the spirit of philosophical or natural pantheism was manifest from al-Fārābī until Ibn Rushd.

Ibn Rushd, like other Peripatetics, called the Supreme permanent Principle "Reason divorced from matter." For Averroes Reason was the harmony and order present in all things, the order and the harmony apprehended by active powers that are in possession of order and harmony since they exist in all beings called 'natures' by philosophers.

The Great Cordovan thinker's consistent monism found expression in naturalistic pantheism, in asserting the Unity of Being and the immanence of the form to matter. Thus the principle of emanation, common with all Eastern Peripatetics and Sufis and forming the premises for the foundation of the idea of God's and the universe's unity, further bifurcated in the direction of naturalistic pantheism (in Peripatetics) and of mystical pantheism (in Sufis).

Peripatetics' attitude to Sufis may be characterized by two impressive examples from the life-stories of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn-Rushd. Tradition holds that after conversing with Abū Sa'īd Mayhāna, an eminent Persian Sufi, the philosopher said, "All that I know he sees," while the mystic described their encounter with the words, "All that I see he knows." Tradition seems quite

trustworthy, especially when compared with the facts from Ibn Rushd's life told by Ibn 'Arabī in his treatise *Futūḥāt*.

The Great Sheikh asserts that Averroes, having heard of his mystical experience, expressed the desire to meet him, then a young man of twenty, personally and Ibn 'Arabī's father arranged the interview. At this meeting the beardless Sufi, the famous philosopher, looked at him with consideration and said, "Yes." The answer was "Yes" and Ibn Rushd was satisfied seeing that the young man had understood what was in his mind. But then the Sufi added, "No." Immediately Averroes winced; the color went out of his cheeks; he seemed to doubt his own thought and asked, "What manner of solution have you found through divine illumination and inspiration? Is it identical with that which we obtain from speculative reflection?" And Ibn 'Arabī replied, "Yes and no" (quoted in H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, pp. 41-42).

These encounters deserve mention for they show that both philosophers and Sufis were conscious of similarity and difference in their views. They maintained, in common, the monistic unity of being, notwithstanding the difference mentioned above, for Peripatetics comprehended the Unity of Being in the spirit of naturalistic pantheism ("God is the sum of existence") while Sufis were inclined to consider everything as derived from God. The heterogeneity of their ontological views was mainly due to the difference of methods through which they came to comprehend the Unity of Being. The monistic deduction of philosophers resulted from their scientific experience and rationalistic speculation, while the *wahdat al-wudjūd* was prompted by intuition, by exalted feelings of men perceiving in mystical experience their integral unity with nature and its creator.