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Spectrums of Islamic Thought: Sa'īd al-Dīn Farghānī on the Implication of Oneness and Manyness

IV

William C. Chittick

INTRODUCTION

If any characteristic is shared by all Islamic ways of thinking, surely this has something to do with *tawhīd*, the assertion that God is one. The classical texts frequently describe *tawhīd* as a kind of spiritual or intellectual dynamic that integrates all dispersion into a coherent vision. The grammatical form of the word itself shows that *tawhīd* involves an active stance taken by a person toward some object. Hence *tawhīd* does not begin with unity, since that needs to be established. Rather, it begins with the recognition of diversity and difference. The integrated vision that *tawhīd* implies must be achieved on the basis of a recognized multiplicity. It is in order to provide the means to see beyond this multiplicity that Islamic thought frequently, or characteristically, sets up a series of dichotomies. Already in the Koran we constantly meet with various sets of opposing or contrasting terms, such as this world and the next, the heavens and the earth, the Garden and the Fire, light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance, well-being and corruption, believers and unbelievers.

As the various perspectives of Islamic life and thought took shape over the course of history, different sets of contrasting terms came to be stressed. Heresiologists and historians often mention these sets as marking the specific positions of the schools. One has only to think of such pairings as predestination and free will, eternal and created, or *ta'īl* and *tashbih*.

When we look at those Muslims who have been called Sufis, we see that their role in Islam has often been understood by placing them on one side of a dichotomy. Thus, for example, we are told that the Sufis take one position, while the jurists and proponents of Kalām take the opposite position. The *Sharī'a* is one thing, while the *Tariqa* is something else. The Sufis look at the inward meaning, while the jurists look at the outward form. The Sufis have an esoteric perspective on things, while the mullas have an exoteric perspective. The Sufis are spiritualizing and non-dogmatic mystics, while the jurists are literal-minded and dogmatic legalists.

But as everyone who has studied the actual texts of the parties in question is well aware, lines are not in fact so clearly drawn. Different authors and schools lay different stresses upon the two sides. A single author may frequently appear to be a Sufi in some of his works, and a jurist or a theologian in other works. Many figures combine the contrasted perspectives in varying degrees. And when we look at the specific works generally recognized as having a Sufi outlook, it is probably fair to

say that no two authors take exactly the same doctrinal position. For their part, the jurists are famed for their internal disputes, as are the theologians. But the dualities and dichotomies are frequently stressed both by the authors themselves and by the mediæval and modern scholars who have studied them. To add to the confusion, many observers have dealt with the differences simply by calling anything that does not fit into the preferred side of the dichotomy by such names as 'heresy,' 'unbelief,' or—to mention one of the favorite contemporary versions of the same attitude—'foreign borrowing.'

Setting up sharp dichotomies between Sufism and *Shari'a*-minded Islam has certainly made life easier for many historians. But as long as scholars persist in taking one side or the other as 'orthodox' Islam, they will not necessarily provide us with helpful models for understanding what actually has been going on in Islamic history. Of course, dichotomies and divergences do exist and are constantly stressed in many of the original texts. We have to be aware of these dichotomies and take them seriously, but we also have to keep in mind the rhetorical usefulness of stressing differences. When we get down to the task of describing what actually was being said, it may be much more helpful to picture the differing positions in terms of spectrums of differing shades and hues, instead of sharply defined dualities. When one is faced with an issue in Islamic thought, one could then suggest what the two extremes of the spectrum might be, and analyze the various positions in terms of the relative stress placed upon particular points. In any given issue, some authors will fall on the red side of things, some on the violet side, and the vast majority will take up positions in between. On the next issue, the various authors might well take up different colors of the spectrum, not corresponding to their relative place in the previous issue.

This sort of analysis would mean that we can no longer make the sweeping generalizations that many of us have long indulged in without adding numerous qualifications. But by taking this approach, we can help dispel the still current myths about Islam as a sort of monolithic system with little historical and regional variation. Not that it is necessary to go as far as some anthropologists, claiming, in effect, that there has been nothing but a series of local Islams with practically no unifying factors. But we may be able to provide a more accurate picture of the unity *and* diversity of Islamic civilization.

One of the more interesting sets of dichotomies discussed in both the original texts and the secondary literature has to do precisely with those factors that differentiate the Sufis from the jurists and theologians.¹ This is clearly a good example

1. Mark Woodward has shown that the diverse positions of traditional Muslims in Java can be classified on the basis of the respective emphasis that they place on the outward (*zāhir*) and inward (*bāṭin*) dimensions of the religion. Only in modern times have certain people considered one dimension valid to the exclusion of the other. Thus we have reformists who see the inward dimension as alien to Islam, and modern, universalizing mystics who see all the specifically Islamic dimensions as outward and extraneous. In both cases, the equilibrium between the two dimensions has been broken. As Woodward puts it, "The balance struck in traditional Javanese Islam is absent, as the complementary axioms are not subordinated but purged from the system." *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press 1989), p. 250.

of a spectrum of positions. Before modern times, a certain balance between the outward and inward, or the 'exoteric' and the 'esoteric' was the general rule, though this would not necessarily be obvious if we were to limit ourselves to reading those authors who are critical of positions supposedly taken by their opponents. But in fact Islam has witnessed a constant creative tension between those who stress one side of an issue and those who stress the other. Certainly the discussions frequently degenerate into polemics, but the upshot has been to make available to Muslims a vast range of approaches to the basic teachings of the Koran and the Prophet. The Sufis sometimes cite *hadīths* that seem to be alluding to the positive results of this diversity of opinion: "The paths to God are as numerous as human souls." Or again, "The divergence of the *'ulamā* is a mercy."

One of best known cases of divergent interpretations among Muslim thinkers arose in the wake of Ibn 'Arabī's grand synthesis of Islamic teachings. He was criticized not only by jurists and theologians, but also by a good number of outstanding Sufis, including 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī and Gīsū Darāz.¹ The most famous of these Sufis was Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, who attacked Ibn 'Arabī's supposed position by juxtaposing *waḥdat al-shuhūd* with *waḥdat al-wujūd*.²

But if anything characterizes the great masters of Sufism, and especially Ibn 'Arabī, it is certainly not that they consider their own position to mark one of the extremes. Quite the contrary, they usually view themselves as taking up an intermediate stance among the conflicting perspectives of Islamic thought and practice. Typically, they recognize the existence and even the validity of deep dichotomies in the way that various issues are approached. Then they attempt to overcome not the dichotomies themselves, but the absoluteness of the dichotomies. They affirm the reality of difference and distinction, but they maintain that a view of things

1. Some of the most virulent early attacks on Ibn 'Arabī were carried out by the Hanbali Sufi Ibn Taymiyya, who claimed that the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* denotes a heretical position equivalent to incarnationism (*hulūl*) or unificationism (*ittiḥād*). Elsewhere I have alluded to the way in which Ibn Taymiyya distorts Ibn 'Arabī's position ('Rumi and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*,' forthcoming in *The Heritage of Rumi*, ed. Amin Banani and Georges Sabagh [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press]). One should keep in mind the fact that, as James Morris has pointed out, Ibn Taymiyya was considered a 'fanatical crackpot' by his contemporaries and has only been taken seriously in relatively recent times. Cf. Morris, 'Situating Islamic Mysticism: Between Written Tradition and Popular Spirituality,' in *Typologies of Mysticism*, ed. R. Herrera, forthcoming, n. 13.

2. Cf. Chittick, 'Rumi and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*.' One can put the Indian debate into a nutshell by saying that the proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* were held to maintain that 'All is He' (*hama ūst*), while the proponents of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* claimed that the correct position is 'All is from Him' (*hama az ūst*) or 'All is through Him' (*hama bidūst*). In fact, of course, Ibn 'Arabī takes both positions. 'All is He' corresponds more to the side of God's similarity to the cosmos (*tashbih*), while 'All is from Him' relates more to the side of His incomparability (*tanzīh*). And, according to Ibn 'Arabī, both of these sides have to be maintained. But in the later tradition, many Muslim authorities tended in one direction or the other, and hence they criticized those who preferred the opposing tendency. The seventeenth [?] century Indian Sufi 'Abd al-Jalīl Ilāhābādī had a clear view of the unbalanced nature of Sirhindī's criticisms. In a treatise in which he recounts a visionary encounter with Ibn 'Arabī, he says to him, 'O honored Shaykh, some of the recent folk have objected to your persuasion, saying that oneness is in witnessing (*shuhūd*), not in Being (*wujūd*).' As part of his response, Ibn 'Arabī says, "Everything that they say I have also said in the *Futuhāt*. All of it are viewpoints that are affirmed in relation to the existence of the cosmos." *Su'āl wa jawāb* (Institute of Islamic Studies, New Delhi, MS. no. 2139), last two pages.

that sees interrelationship, complementarity, and polarity corresponds more closely to the Islamic ideal. Through *tawhīd*, or asserting the underlying unity of the Real, they establish a framework within which all diversity can be situated.

Among the many Sufi authors who provide theoretical frameworks for overcoming dichotomies and integrating dispersed realities is Sa'īd al-Dīn Farghānī (d. 699/1299), an important third-generation member of the school of Ibn 'Arabī. Though at first sight Farghānī's discussion may seem to pertain exclusively to an abstract philosophical level, one soon sees that he provides many helpful correlations among the divergent positions in Islamic thought.

THE SCHOOL OF QŪNAWĪ

As everyone knows, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed a remarkable flowering of the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of Islam. The fact that both Rumi and Ibn 'Arabī lived during this era is sufficient to establish it as a watershed in Islamic history. Most later expressions of inwardly oriented Islamic teachings can be seen as commentaries on formulations that were made most clearly and explicitly at this time. But because of the towering stature of these two figures, relatively little attention has been paid to some of their outstanding contemporaries and disciples, figures who, if they had lived at any other time and place, would have been looked upon as landmarks in the spiritual and intellectual geography of Islam. Farghānī is a striking example.

Here we need to recall the central importance of the circle of Ibn 'Arabī's stepson, Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), for the development of Sufism in the Persianate world from the thirteenth century onward. In Anatolia, Persia, India, and wherever the theoretical expression of Sufi teachings has had any role to play, Qūnawī and his followers were key intermediaries for the interpretation and diffusion of Ibn 'Arabī's positions. It is highly symbolic that Qūnawī lived and taught not far from Rumi in the city of Konya. Though these two authorities express Sufi teachings in profoundly different ways, they were close friends. In their own works the two provide numerous examples of positions that need to be situated within different colors of the spectrum, but not at the extremes.

Rumi's deep impact on every level of Islamic teaching and practice is well known. But if we look at the intellectual expression of Sufi teachings, Qūnawī has certainly been more influential. Thus, for example, to the extent that Muslim intellectuals have explained the meaning of Rumi's poetry, they have usually been guided by the theoretical framework whose germs are found in the writings of Ibn 'Arabī and whose systematic elaboration goes back to Qūnawī. In effect, Qūnawī played a major role in determining the way in which not only Ibn 'Arabī but also Rumi and the rest of the Persian Sufi poets were read in the eastern Islamic lands.

Qūnawī had a deep impact on Sufis and Muslim thinkers not only through his own writings, but also through the writings of his students and their followers. The most influential commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* was composed by Qūnawī's disciple Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Jandī. Jandī in turn was the teacher of 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, the author of what is probably the best known *Fuṣūṣ* commentary in the Arabic-speaking world. And Kāshānī was the teacher of Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, whose commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* is better known than his master's in the Persian-speaking

world, though it too is in Arabic.¹

According to a number of sources, Qūnawī's mother married Ibn 'Arabī after the death of her husband, who had become Ibn 'Arabī's close friend when they met in Mecca in the year 600/1203. Ṣadr al-Dīn was probably born in the year 605/1208-09, so his mother's remarriage would have taken place sometime after that. His native tongue seems to have been Persian. He wrote all his major works in Arabic, but several examples of his Persian prose have also survived. His prose presents striking contrasts with that of Ibn 'Arabī. Qūnawī's writings demonstrate a smoothness, fluency, and coherence that are not usually found in the works of his Shaykh, whose ideas and expression tend to be choppy and broken.

Qūnawī's disciple Jandī is the author of both Arabic and Persian works, though the latter have not been widely read.² Probably the best known Persian work to come out of Qūnawī's school was the *Lama'āt* of 'Irāqī, inspired by Qūnawī's lectures on the *Fuṣūṣ*.³ But in terms of the intellectual development of Ibn 'Arabī's teachings, the most influential Persian work of this circle was certainly Sa'id al-Dīn Farghānī's commentary on the *Naẓm al-sulūk* or '*Poem of the Way*' of the great Egyptian poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ. And this commentary was itself based squarely on Qūnawī's teachings. Qūnawī tells us that he began reading Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem with a group of students in the year 643/1245-46 in Egypt and continued to do so in Syria and Anatolia. Many of his listeners took notes, and afterwards some of them wrote up the results, but the most successful of these recensions was by Farghānī.⁴

Farghānī was not satisfied with this Persian recension of Qūnawī's lectures, at least partly because it could not reach the wide audience that would be interested in the subject matter. He translated it into Arabic and in the process refined and amplified it, such that the Arabic version is about a third again as long as the Persian. Part of the added material is a much longer introduction that sets down the basic principles of Qūnawī's teachings. Jāmī praises this introduction by telling us that "No one else has ever been able to explain the problems of the Science of Reality in such a systematic and orderly manner."⁵ The Arabic version of Farghānī's work is in fact as much a new composition as a translation.⁶ Both com-

1. Many of the Persian commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ* are deeply indebted to Qayṣari. The first of these, *Nuṣūṣ al-khuṣūṣ fī tarjamat al-fuṣūṣ* (partly edited by R. Mazlūmī [Tehran: McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies 1980]), was written by a student of both Kāshānī and Qayṣari, Ruḳn al-Dīn Shirāzī, who died in 769/1367. A second, that by Tāj al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī (d. ca 840/1436) is simply a translation of Qayṣari's work (*Sharḥ-i fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, edited by N. Māyil Hirawī, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā 1364/1985). Many of the passages in Shāh Ni'matullāhī's writings are little more than translations of the works of Qayṣari and Kāshānī. Jāmī is more original, and also much more widely read, than most. He makes active and conscious use of all the major figures of the school back to Qūnawī, as is clear not only in his *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ* (ed. W. Chittick [Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy 1977]), but also in his other prose works on Sufism and in some of his *mathnawīs*.

2. Jandī's only Persian work to have been published is *Nafḥat al-riḥ* (Tehran: Mawlā 1362/1983), edited by N. Māyil Hirawī on the basis of a single MS. from Tehran University, which the editor mistakenly supposes to be unique. Two more, with significant textual differences, are found in Istanbul: Ḥacī Mahmud Ef. 2447 and Şehid Ali Paşa 1439.

3. Cf. Chittick and P.L. Wilson, *Fakhrudīn 'Iraqī: Divine Flashes* (New York: Paulist 1981), pp. 45-46.

4. Notes 4, 5, and 6 continued on page 208.

mentaries are of first importance for the development of metaphysical and philosophical thought among Sufis in the Persianate world, and neither has been studied seriously in modern times.

THE ONE AND THE MANY

In order to suggest something of Farghānī's significance and the approach he takes to Sufi thought, I want to investigate his formulation of two contrasting approaches to reality, approaches that might tentatively be called the way of love and the way of knowledge, or the way of affirming oneness and the way of discerning manyness.

Like Ibn 'Arabī and most Sufis, Farghānī's theoretical teachings center on the names and attributes of God.¹ Perhaps the major theme of his commentary is the question of how the divine names mediate between God and the world. At the same time, he is concerned with many of the other issues related to Ibn 'Arabī's positions. He is one of the first authors to use the expression *waḥdat al-wujūd* or 'Oneness of Being' as a technical term, since this expression is hardly mentioned by Qūnawī, and never employed by Ibn 'Arabī himself.² But in Farghānī's formulations, *waḥdat al-wujūd* has a specific meaning that is rarely found among those who support it in later texts, though it is similar to the meaning given to the term by Ibn 'Arabī's opponents. Farghānī sees *waḥdat al-wujūd* as the polar opposite of *kathrat al-*

4. Cf. Qūnawī's introduction to Farghānī's *Mashāriḥ al-darāri*, ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshṭiyānī (Mashhad: Anjuman-i 'Irḥān wa Falsafa-yi Islāmī 1398/1978). Jāmī quotes one Shams al-Dīn Īkī, another student of Qūnawī, concerning the circumstances of Farghānī's works: "In the sessions of our Shaykh the possessors and seekers of knowledge used to attend. The Shaykh would speak about different sciences. Then he would end the session with one verse from the 'Poem of the Way,' upon which he would comment in Persian. He expounded marvelous words and God-given meanings, but only the possessors of tasting (*dhawq*) could understand him. Sometimes on another day he would say that a different meaning of the verse had become manifest for him, and he would explain a meaning more wonderful and subtle than before. He often used to say, "One must be a Sufi to learn this poem and to be able to clarify its meanings for others."... Shaykh Sa'īd Farghānī would devote all his attention to understand what our Shaykh said, and then he would record it. He wrote an explanation of the poem first in Persian and then in Arabic. This was all because of the blessing of our Shaykh, Ṣadr al-Dīn." *Nafahāt al-uns*, ed. M. Tawḥīdīpūr (Tehran: Sa'dī 1336/1957), p. 542. Farghānī's treatise was to be read widely in the Persian-speaking world. One of the major avenues through which parts of it became disseminated was Shams al-Dīn Maghribī's (d. 810/1408) little treatise, *Jām-i jahān-namā*, which consists mostly of unacknowledged quotations from it. Maghribī's work in turn was the object of several commentaries, especially in India.

5. *Nafahāt al-uns*, p. 559.

6. It is interesting to note that even in the Persian-speaking world, the Arabic version of the commentary was extremely influential among those who studied the theoretical dimensions of Sufi teachings. I suspect that in Iran itself, where Arabic was the major language of philosophical and theological speculation, the Arabic version was more widely read than the Persian. In contrast, in India the Persian recension was probably more widely known, especially through the influence of Maghribī's *Jām-i jahān-namā*. Note that the first commentary written in India on Maghribī's work, by Mahā'īmī, was in Arabic, not Persian. Later this commentary was translated into Persia.

1. Ibn 'Arabī sets down the principle in axiomatic form with his words, "A knowledge of God that is divested of the divine names cannot be relied upon, since it is not knowledge" (*Risāla Lā yu'awwal 'alayh*, in *Rasā'il Ibn al-'Arabī* [Hyderabad-Deccan: The Dāīratu'l-Ma'arifi'l-Osmāniya 1948], p. 3). Cf. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: SUNY Press 1989), Chapter 2 and *passim*.

2. Cf. Chittick, 'Rumi and *waḥdat al-wujūd*.'

'ilm, the manyness of knowledge. Though God is one in Being (*wujūd*), He is also many in knowledge ('ilm). This corresponds to the most basic dichotomy in reality. However, at this point I will stop using the term 'dichotomy,' with its suggestion that there is something deep and irremediable about difference, and use the term 'polarity,' since Farghānī's position demands, as we shall see shortly, that there be no absolute distinctions in God or the cosmos. Being and knowledge should not be looked upon as distinct and separate, but as polar and complementary.

At the highest level of Reality, Being and knowledge are identical and no distinction can be drawn between the two. At this level one might speak of an absolute oneness prior to any manyness. This is the level of the unknown Essence (*dhāt*) which cannot be discussed in positive terms. As soon as we conceive of a Reality about which positive statements can be made, we are faced with the distinction between the divine Being and the divine Knowledge.¹ Knowledge—which is identical with consciousness and awareness—belongs to the very Essence of God. The divine Reality, or Being, knows Itself with a knowledge that is identical with Itself, so there is no difference between the knowing subject ('*ālim*) and the known object (*ma'lūm*). However, when we speak of knowing, we necessarily set up a subject/object relationship, even if we cannot draw an ontological distinction between the two sides. This perceived relationship in turn makes it possible to distinguish among the divine names. For example, one can say that since God knows His own Reality, He knows all the concomitants and characteristics of His own Reality. Hence He knows Himself as Alive, Knowing, Desiring, Powerful, Speaking, Generous, and Just—these seven names being the 'seven leaders' or the seven fundamental names of God. For Farghānī, one of the most important statements we can make about the Real at this point is that His Being is one while His Knowledge has many objects, even if those objects possess no ontological plurality of any sort.² The multiplicity of the objects of knowledge has no effect on the oneness of God's Being. In an analogous way, a human mind is not split up into many minds by the fact that it is aware of many things.

It is extremely important to grasp the nature of the polarity that Farghānī sets up when he speaks of oneness and manyness at this primary level of Reality, since he finds corresponding polarities throughout the created world. Oneness and manyness

1. Why these two terms are singled out rather than any others is clear in the context of Islamic thought, especially as developed by Ibn 'Arabi and his followers. First, *wujūd* (Being, existence) was the central concern of Islamic philosophy and one of Ibn 'Arabi's key terms. Knowledge is central because it is the necessary prerequisite for all activity. In Ibn 'Arabi's approach, the discussion has to do with the fact that certain of the divine attributes are broader in scope (*a'amm*) than others, with Being (or mercy, *rahma*; or life, *hayāt*) being the broadest. The argument runs something like this: The cosmos depends upon the Creator (*khāliq*) or the Speaker (*qā'il*) for its existence, while creativity and speech depend upon the divine power (*qudra*). Power in turn is effected through desire (*irāda*) while desire depends upon a knowledge ('ilm) of possibilities. Knowledge in turn presupposes *wujūd*, or the fact that there be a knower. Hence Being and knowledge are the two primary attributes of Reality.

2. Ibn 'Arabi had expressed the same idea in many ways. For example, He calls God the 'One Many' (*al-wāhid al-kathīr*) and he speaks of the Unity of the (exclusively) One (*aḥadiyyat al-aḥad*) as opposed to the Unity of Manyness (*aḥadiyyat al-kathra*) or of the (inclusively) One (*aḥadiyyat al-wāhid*). By making these distinctions, he contrasts the One Essence that is beyond nomenclature with the Divinity who is described by all the names.

cannot be distinguished from one another in any absolute way, since both qualities belong to the reality of God. Whether we look at the Real as one or many depends upon our point of view, even if the point of view that considers God's oneness is more fundamental. Hence the universe, inasmuch as it reflects its Origin, can only be understood in terms of relative qualities, and these, since they are relative, change when the point of view changes. There are no absolute dichotomies within the created universe, nor in our formulations and expressions of the nature of things. This means that from the outset, Farghānī gives us a position that not only allows for, but even demands, other, contrasting positions. Every reality demands its polar opposite. Mention of one side implies the other side, much as mention of *yin* implies *yang*.¹

In order to show that no absolute distinction can be drawn being Being and knowledge, Farghānī states that Being possesses a true oneness (*wahda haqiqiyya*) and a relative manyness (*kathra nisbiyya*) while knowledge possesses a true manyness and a relative oneness. Hence, both Being and knowledge are one and many, but the quality of oneness predominates in Being, while the quality of manyness predominates in knowledge.

Farghānī describes the true oneness and relative manyness of Being in the following terms:

Each divine name is nothing but the manifest aspect of Being, which is the Essence Itself, but in respect of Its entification (*ta'ayyun*) and delimitation (*taqayyud*) by a meaning (*ma'nā*) or call it an 'attribute' (*ṣifa*). For example, 'Living' is a name of the entified, manifest Being, but in respect of its entification and delimitation by a meaning, which is life. Hence, in respect of Being Itself and the entification itself, Being is identical with the Essence, and Its oneness is true. But in respect of the delimitation by that meaning and this meaning's distinction from other meanings..., Being is different from what is named. Hence it possesses a relative manyness through those entifications.²

In contrast, the divine knowledge possesses true manyness and relative oneness because God knows the divine names and their concomitants, and these many objects of knowledge demand that knowledge be truly differentiated, or else the manyness could not be known for what it is. At the same time, knowledge is a single reality that pertains to the One Being.³

When Farghānī turns his attention to discussions more familiar to Muslim philosophers, he elucidates one of the many corollaries of the fact that oneness precedes manyness by explaining the relationship between necessity (*wujūb*) and possibility (*imkān*). Being in Its oneness possesses the quality of necessity, since It cannot not be. But Being's knowledge pertains to what is possible, since each object of knowledge (*ma'lūm*) correlates with a possible thing (*mumkin*) something that may or may not exist in the cosmos. The multiplicity of the cosmos externalizes the true manyness of the divine knowledge, while the underlying unity of the cosmos—

1. Sachiko Murata has shown that this *yin/yang* style polarity is normative for much of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Cf. *The Tao of Islam* (Albany: SUNY, forthcoming).

2. *Muntaha'l-madārik* (Cairo: Maktab al-Ṣanāi' 1293/1876), p. 15.

3. *Ibid.*

present most obviously in the fact that each part of it shares in existence—reflects the Oneness of Being. That which is closer to the Oneness of Being possesses a preponderance of properties pertaining to necessity, while that which reflects the Manyness of Knowledge is dominated by possibility.

On the basis of this distinction between necessity and possibility, Farghānī divides the cosmos into three worlds: high, low, and intermediate. Everything that is dominated by the side of oneness and necessity, such as the angels and spirits, pertains to the high world. Everything that is dominated by the side of manyness and possibility, such as inanimate objects, plants, and animals, pertains to the low world. But human beings pertain to the middle realm, where oneness and manyness are balanced.¹ In a parallel way, human beings can be divided into three basic categories depending on the relationship established between the properties of necessity and those of possibility. People in whom necessity predominates are the prophets and friends of God. Those in whom possibility dominates are the unbelievers. And those in whom necessity and possibility are more or less equal are the faithful. So also, each human psyche can be analyzed in terms of three fundamental tendencies: ascending, descending, and in-between. To these is connected the traditional distinction made among the three basic levels of the soul (*nafs*): the soul at peace with God, the soul that commands to evil, and the intermediate, blaming soul.

Other implications of the distinction between oneness and manyness or necessity and possibility become apparent as soon as we look at those divine qualities that have a personal dimension. For example, since the One precedes the many, God's mercy takes precedence over His wrath. The reality of mercy is Being Itself; to exist in the cosmos is to participate in the existentiating mercy known as the 'Breath of the All-merciful'. Wrath is connected in some way to the multiplicity and possibility prefigured in the divine knowledge. When one thing is differentiated from another thing, each of the two things must be lacking in certain qualities that pertain to the unity and all-comprehensiveness of Being. This deficiency in the qualities of Being demands a certain lack of mercy, or a certain domination by properties that pertain not to Being Itself but to nothingness. Hence, any situation that is deficient in existence is related to the divine wrath, though again, there can be nothing absolute about this deficiency.

The relationship between mercy and wrath correlates with that between the two basic categories of divine names that bring the cosmos into existence. These are called the names of mercy and wrath, or beauty (*jamāl*) and majesty (*jalāl*) or bounty (*faḍl*) and justice (*'adl*) or gentleness (*luḥf*) and severity (*qahr*). These pairs of qualities are in turn connected with a large number of polarities or dichotomies. For example, mercy and gentleness are associated with nearness to God and wrath and severity with distance from Him. The people of paradise enter into mercy, while the people of the Fire taste chastisement because, as the Koran puts it, they are distant and 'veiled' from their Lord (83:15).

On the human level, the polarities expressed in the merciful and wrathful names are closely related to the basic distinction that is drawn between spirit and body, or

1. *untaha'l-madārik I*, p. 22.

between the upward and unifying tendency of the soul and its downward and dispersive tendency. The spirit is luminous and relatively close to the oneness of God, while the body is dark and relatively dominated by the properties of manyness and possibility. Hence the spirit correlates with nearness and mercy, while the body correlates with distance and wrath. Again, these are not absolute distinctions, simply a question of predominant attributes.

In short, wherever we can speak of two contrasting names of God—such as Forgiving and Vengeful, Gentle and Severe, Exalting and Abasing—one of the two terms will be more closely connected to the oneness and necessity of Being, and the other to the manyness and possibility of knowledge. At the same time, manyness is found in oneness and oneness in manyness, so the relationships can be reversed in appropriate circumstances. This has all sorts of repercussions on the level of the 'signs' (*āyāt*) of God, or those manifestations of the divine reality that make up the cosmos.¹

DUALITY IN THE WORLD

In Farghānī's formulation, the typical qualities that pertain to the Oneness of Being are unity, all-comprehensiveness (*jam'iyya*), realness (*ḥaqqiyya*), freedom from distinction and otherness, and freedom from contamination by what is unreal. But created things are dominated by the manyness that pertains to the divine knowledge. Hence they are characterized by qualities such as multiplicity, dispersion, diversity, strife, otherness, and contamination by the unreal. The true manyness of the things conceals their relative oneness.

Any creature in the universe has two fundamental faces (*wajh*) or aspects (*jihat*), one of which manifests the Oneness of Being and the other the Manyness of Knowledge.² The reality of each thing is in fact defined by the relationship set up between these two faces. Without both faces, the thing could not possibly exist. Pure oneness without manyness is an attribute of the Real alone, while pure manyness without oneness could provide no basis for an existent thing.

The first face of each created thing is turned toward the Real Being. This face demands that the thing will manifest properties of oneness such as balance (*'adāla*), all-comprehensiveness, luminosity, and realness. On the human level, this face is turned toward and receptive to God's mercy and compassion, the names of gentleness and beauty, which are manifest in the form of truth and guidance.

The second face of each created thing is turned toward the thing itself and everything that is demanded by the thing's own, separate, individual reality. Since this face is veiled from the oneness of the Real, it manifests the opposite qualities: manyness, distance from the Real, darkness, unreality, deviation, and the domination of the veil. On the human level, this second face is connected to rejection of the divine compassion, misguidance, wrath, and the names of severity and majesty.

1. I have in mind the significance that is given in Sufi theoretical discussions and Islamic poetry and art in general to such things as night and day, black and white, the veil, and so on. Cf. Annemarie Schimmel's forthcoming book based on her Bampton Lectures delivered in 1990 at Columbia University: *Yūsuf's Fragrant Shirt: Studies in Islamic Symbolism*.

2. *Muntaha'l-madārik II*, p. 214; *Mashāriq al-darāri*, p. 629.

Psychologically speaking, each face has specific effects within the human being. The effect of the face turned toward oneness is submission to God's will (*islām*) and faith in Him, His prophets, and the Last Day. In short, domination by this face becomes manifest as harmony with the names of mercy and the divine guidance. Domination by the second face brings about the opposite qualities, such as immersion in misguidance, which is incarnate in the individual soul and satanic deviation.

On this first level of analysis, the Oneness of Being and the Manyness of Knowledge give rise to a world of tremendous diversity within which two tendencies can be observed among the creatures: The tendency toward oneness, harmony, wholeness, and nearness to God, manifesting the names of gentleness and mercy; and the tendency toward manyness, disequilibrium, dispersion, and distance from God, manifesting the names of severity and wrath.

This analysis may suggest that oneness is good and manyness bad. But of course this is not the implication. On the contrary, both oneness and manyness are present in the Real, since they are polar attributes. Hence both have positive roles to play. The key is always balance and equilibrium between the two.

THE TWO EXTREMES

Farghānī frequently discusses various human dangers inherent in allowing oneself to be dominated either by the face that manifests the Oneness of Being or the face that reflects the Manyness of Knowledge. Each human being has to strive to keep the two faces in equilibrium. If a person fails to do so, certain distortions will prevent the full development of the soul, which is defined by its infinite capacity as an image of the divine Reality. In the process of describing these dangers, Farghānī mentions a number of key concepts that allow us to tie his discussion into the issues mentioned at the beginning of this article.

When the face turned toward the One Being dominates, a person will be attracted toward oneness and move away from manyness. Distinctions and differentiations will play less and less of a role in that person's personality. This movement can become so overwhelming that all manyness will be obliterated from the person's view. And this movement is intimately connected with love. Like all positive qualities, love is first a divine attribute. As such, it is closely allied with the names of beauty and gentleness. The basic characteristic of love is a tendency toward union and the erasing of distinctions. As Farghānī remarks, the reality of love bridges the gap between lover and beloved, seeker and sought. By its very nature, it is unitary (*wahdānī*) and establishes unity (*muwahhid*). Through love, those qualities that are shared by the two sides come to dominate. The ultimate result of love is the elimination of everything that keeps lover and beloved apart. Since the Beloved is the One Being, the single Reality of God, love tends toward the lifting of manyness and difference.¹

1. *Muntaha'l-madārik II*, p. 197; *Mashāriq al-darāri*, p. 606.

As a unifying movement, love can be contrasted with knowledge, which separates, discerns, distinguishes, differentiates, and classifies.¹ Knowledge perceives differences between good and evil, true and false, right and wrong. It provides the basis for all the injunctions of the *Shari'a*, which are founded on strict definitions and placing things in different categories. Thus human knowledge, like divine knowledge, affirms manyness and establishes its reality. It maintains the difference between God and the servant. To say this, however, is not to deny that there is a mode of visionary knowledge that unveils the underlying Oneness of Being. But in the first evaluation, knowledge differentiates.

Farghānī tells us that every sane person is bound by the laws established by discernment through knowledge. As he puts it, so long as people remain in the present world, they are "captive to the property of the world of wisdom, the manyness of its requirements, and the requirements of the two faces of created realities."²

The world of everyday experience pertains to wisdom because the divine wisdom itself has set up the distinctions. Each of the two faces of created reality is determined by the very nature of Uncreated Reality, or by the true Oneness of Being and the true Manyness of Knowledge.³ As long as people are present in this world, they have to observe the requirements of both faces and maintain the distinction between the tendencies that each face manifests. These distinctions, set up by the divine wisdom itself, demand that there be two basic movements in existence: one toward mercy and union and the other toward wrath and separation. These distinctions are unavoidable, since they define the nature of reality itself. As a result, says Farghānī, people "will be subject to the properties of reward, punishment, calling to account, responsibility, and reckoning in both this world and the next."⁴

The Manyness of Knowledge establishes all the distinctions and differences found in the 'world of wisdom.' It determines the difference between guidance and misguidance and establishes the distinction between mercy and wrath, gentleness and severity. This is all positive and good. But the upshot is that the travelers on the path to God find themselves far from their Beloved, since manyness gives rise to distance and separation.

The Oneness of Being also gives rise to specific effects within the cosmos. It manifests itself in the face that marks the direction of the ascending path, the path back to mercy and gentleness. It brings about the movement of love that erases the distinction between the two sides. Nevertheless, the Oneness of Being cannot be allowed to erase the Manyness of Knowledge completely, any more than the Manyness of Knowledge can be allowed to obliterate the Oneness of Being. Exclusive attention to one side or the other can lead to deviation and disequilibrium. Both need

1. These correlations are of course basic to Islamic thought. It is sufficient merely to look at the 850 instances in which the Koran employs the word *'ilm* and its derivatives to see how these verses stress separation and distinction. In contrast, the word *hubb* and its derivatives is employed only about 80 times, but the idea of bringing together and nearness is always present.

2. *Muntaha'l-madārik II*, p. 215.

3. As Ibn 'Arabi tells us, "the divine name 'Wise' arranges affairs within their levels and places the things within their measures" (*Futūḥāt II* 435.15, quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 174).

4. *Muntaha'l-madārik II*, p. 215.

to be kept in balance, just as they are balanced in the Real Himself, who is One in His Being and many through His names.

In discussing the dangers of too much emphasis on the Oneness of Being,¹ Farghānī turns to certain types of mystical awareness that erase distinctions. In his own words, travelers on the path

may become joined with the vast expanse of the World of Oneness such that they live in that Presence and gaze upon it, having realized it. They remain forgetful and negligent of created existence, its levels, and all the realities that it contains. They may have no awareness of themselves, their existence, and all the attributes, accidents, and concomitants that are seen to pertain to themselves. They witness and see the One Real Being through the Real Himself, not through themselves or through their own vision.¹

But this is not necessarily good. For example, this sort of perception is found in *majdhūbs*, those spiritual madmen who have been overcome by the divine attraction. As long as this state remains, it represents imperfection. Such mystical awareness of the Oneness of Being is usually limited in duration. The travelers return to normal consciousness and once again follow the prophetic Sunna and the *Sharī'a*. They put into practice the requirements of knowledge and wisdom. They observe the necessities of the manyness of God's knowledge, which distinguishes between the names of guidance and misguidance. However, some people, having experienced the world of the Oneness of Being, may now consider themselves exempt from the concomitants of the Manyness of Knowledge. They reject the requirements of the 'world of wisdom' and have no concern for good and evil, right and wrong, command and prohibition, or the rulings of the *Sharī'a*. Once the discernment connected with knowledge disappears, so do all the *Sharī'a*'s rulings. In Farghānī's words, such people say,

In the World of Oneness I saw all things as a single thing. Hence for me there is no more command and prohibition, no more lawful and unlawful, no more distinction among things. For me everything is one, with no difference between lawful and unlawful.²

1. *Muntaha'l-madārik* II, p. 215-216.

2. *Muntaha'l-madārik* II, p. 216.

Farghānī then adds that such people are heretics, and their blood can be shed. By saying so he places himself squarely in the mainstream of Sufism, which strives to maintain the balance between the norms of the *Shari'a* and the *Tariqa*.¹

In this particular passage Farghānī does not enter into the dangers of placing too much stress upon knowledge. But he does deal with it elsewhere in his works, and in any case it is a well-known theme in Sufi writings. In short, exclusive emphasis upon a knowledge that differentiates and separates leads to a rationalism that is unable to see beyond surface appearances.² It results in excessive stress upon the differentiations set up by legalistic and literalistic interpretations of the Koran and the Sunna. Rational thought becomes a veil that maintains difference and prevents the realization of the face turned toward oneness. In speaking of the dangers of this extreme, Farghānī writes,

The greatest factor bringing about the dispersion that prevents your realization of the reality of all-comprehensiveness is your inclination toward the sciences of philosophy and Kalām.... The veils brought about by these sciences are thicker and denser than all other veils.³

CONCLUSION

Finally, let me suggest some of the light that this sort of discussion can throw on current issues in the study of Sufism. First, as implied above, if love and knowledge can be set up as mutually exclusive opposites, this surely has to do with extreme forms in each case. The extreme or exclusive stress upon love overpowers the discernment and distance demanded by God's knowledge of the realities of all things. Correspondingly, extreme or exclusive stress upon the differentiations of knowledge veils the union and nearness demanded by the Oneness of God's Being.

One can find examples of extreme expressions of love in some of the more ecstatic verses of Sufi poetry. If such expressions of unification between God and the creature are taken simply as the vision of one of the two faces of each thing, no objections can be raised. But at different times and places we meet instances where there seems to be an exclusive reliance on the face of oneness, as evidenced by the

1. Farghānī's discussion parallels many of Ibn 'Arabi's formulations. As I have shown elsewhere, Ibn 'Arabi frequently talks about the perfected gnostic as one who sees clearly with both eyes. In contrast, other people see with difficulty and usually only with one eye. These two eyes correlate almost exactly with Farghānī's two faces. According to Ibn 'Arabi, one eye sees God's distance and incomparability, the other His nearness and similarity, one light and the other darkness, one permanence and the other transmutation, one manifestation and the other hiddenness, one Unity and the other multiplicity (cf. Chittick, *Sufi Path*, pp. 361-363). These two eyes point to the vision that accompanies Farghānī's two faces: the face turned toward oneness and that turned toward manyness. A parallel discussion is found in the *Istīlāhāt al-sūfiyya* of 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, where he differentiates between the Possessor of Intellect (who sees multiplicity), the Possessor of the Eye (who sees oneness), and the Possessor of the Intellect and the Eye, the perfect man who sees both multiplicity and oneness at the same time. Cf. *Istīlāhāt al-sūfiyya* (On the margin of Kāshānī, *Sharḥ manāzil al-sā'irīn* [Tehran: Ibrāhīm Lārījānī, 1315/1897-98], under *dhu'l-'aql*, pp. 179-180).
2. Rumi's works are full of criticisms of the unstable 'wooden legs' of the rational thinkers. Usually he contrasts cold rationality with the fire of love, but he speaks often enough about the 'intellect of intellect' for us to realize that he is perfectly at ease with another type of knowledge.
3. *Muntaha'l-madārik II*, p. 159.

harsh criticisms of certain types of Sufism found in the writings of the Sufis themselves. If the Oneness of Being is affirmed and the Manyness of Knowledge denied, then we have an extreme that threatens the balance set up by *tawhīd*.

Another example of an extreme expression of the Oneness of Being is found in the *shāḥiyyāt* or 'ecstatic utterances' attributed to many Sufis. In contrast, the various interpretations offered for these utterances by later authors attempt to re-establish a balance by discerning the right relationships through knowledge. In this same arena one finds the reason for the numerous attacks that were made on *wahdat al-wujūd*, by Sufis and non-Sufis. When this concept was criticized, it was invariably interpreted as negating the effects of the world of wisdom or the Manyness of Knowledge.

It must always be kept in mind that exclusive attention paid to the manyness of God's knowledge or the plurality of the divine names has a parallel negative outcome. Those who continue to stress manyness and difference end up by establishing absolute distinctions between God and the world (*ta'īl*). They value a knowledge that differentiates and separates above everything that unifies and unites. The result is a cold literalism that kills the spirit of love and compassion. God's wrath and severity take center stage.

One can reformulate this discussion in terms of 'exoteric' and 'esoteric' approaches to Islam. But here the terminology is problematic, since it is difficult to find corresponding terms in the texts.¹ What we see happening is that expressions of Islam tended in two directions, toward expressing oneness and sameness or affirming manyness and difference. In both cases we find extreme examples that delimit the range of a spectrum of positions. Excessive emphasis on unity and oneness led to an antinomian approach to Islam, and, in its extreme forms, to those movements in Sufism known as *bīshar'* in the eastern lands of Islam. Excessive emphasis on the face that manifests the manyness of knowledge led to a literalistic and rationalistic approach to Islam and a denial that 'oneness' of any sort could be established between Lord and servant. The vast majority of Sufis who wrote theoretical works attempted to establish a balance between the two sides—between love and knowledge, Oneness and manyness, mercy and wrath, 'esoteric' and 'exoteric,' or, on another level, between what J. C. Bürgel in this volume calls ecstasy and control.

Among the advantages of Farghānī's approach is the fact that it allows for a description of the actual situation that does not fall into the typical dualities that result when we start employing dichotomous categories like 'exoteric' and 'esoteric,' especially when we impose these categories from the outside. Although at first sight Farghānī's discussion presents itself in the rhetoric of two extremes, the extremes are set up as the two poles of a relationship with the explicit awareness that neither pole can ever be empty of the other side. As a result, the actual situation is presented as a range of positions over a broad spectrum. And it is not difficult to see that the extreme positions hardly ever exist in reality, but rather in the minds of those who set up the ideal situations.

1. This set of terms does not seem to help much in clarifying the issue, given the subtlety of the interrelationships between different levels of explanation in the Islamic context. Moreover, one frequently sees these two terms employed as if the Sufis themselves made the same distinctions in exactly the same way and with the same frequency and purpose, which is far from being true. The Sufis employ many sets of terms that allude to a similar or parallel relationship, but each set has its own nuances and needs to be investigated in context.