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WILLIAM C. CHITTICK

THE AESTHETICS OF ISLAMIC ETHICS

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**Abstract:** Muslim philosophers devoted many books and treatises to ethics as the practical side of their theoretical vision. They never developed clear theories of aesthetics, but they frequently referred to beauty as an underlying rationale for ethical conduct. Their metaphysics was founded on the notion of unity (*tawhīd*), and they saw harmony, equilibrium, balance, and beauty as unity's manifestations. In his treatise on love, Avicenna demonstrates that love drives the Necessary Being to create the universe. Others pointed to the prophetic saying, "God is beautiful, and He loves beauty," and explained that it is precisely God's specific love for beauty that brings the universe into existence with a special view toward human beings, whom he created in his own beautiful image. The human task becomes one of actualizing *ta'alluh*, "deiformity," which is latent in the soul. "Ethics," literally "character traits" (*akhlāq*), is then the practical endeavor of "becoming characterized" (*takhalluq*) by God's own character traits, which are designated by what the tradition calls his "most beautiful names" (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*). Thus, Avicenna explains, the Necessary Being's love for beauty is fully realized in God's love for deiform souls.

In emulating Aristotle the early Muslim philosophers paid a good deal of attention to ethics. The language they employed often resonated with the worldview of the Koran, which helps explain why scholars from other schools of thought also discussed the topic. Neither the philosophers nor anyone else, however, developed a systematic approach to what we would call aesthetics, though beauty was never far from their concerns. In the case of the philosophers, beauty played a prominent role in their explanations of how ethics is rooted in both ontology and cosmology.

Before explaining what I mean, I should remark that I use the word "philosopher" in the expansive, modern sense, not in the narrow, technical sense, in which case it would refer only to those like Avicenna who called themselves *faylasūf* and gave pride of place to Greek wisdom. In particular, I will have occasion to mention Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240), whose name raises a red flag in some circles. He has typically been considered the greatest mystical theologian of the tradition, and until recently this has been sufficient to exclude him

from consideration by historians of philosophy. His status as an outcaste from the ranks of respectable scholars is not unrelated to the idea, common among Orientalists and modernist Muslim intellectuals, that al-Ghazālī and others like him undermined the strict rationality of the philosophers and paved the way for the eventual dominance of anti-rational tendencies in Islamic thought. This is an extraordinarily simplistic reading of Islamic history, no matter how popular it has become among journalists. Among other things, it conveniently ignores the massive reevaluation of the excessive rationalism bequeathed upon the West by the Enlightenment that has occupied so many prominent thinkers for the past half century.<sup>1</sup> Concerning Ibn ‘Arabī specifically, we need to keep in mind that he has been pigeonholed as a “mystic” largely because historians have not wanted to deal with his writings. Not only was he one of the most prolific of Muslim authors, but also one of the most difficult. Moreover, whatever the fuzzy word “mysticism” may mean, it plays only an ancillary role in his unparalleled synthesis of the Islamic intellectual tradition, with all its legal, theological, cosmological, psychological, philosophical, and metaphysical dimensions.<sup>2</sup>

#### 1. UNITY

The various branches of Islamic learning are tied together by the notion of unity, by which I mean *tawhīd*, the foundational axiom of the Islamic worldview. Literally the word means to say one, assert one, or acknowledge one. In the word’s technical sense, the one in question is God, or the Ultimate Reality. Many thousands of books and treatises have been written explaining *tawhīd*’s implications, and it is not difficult to grasp that it undergirds the work of all the philosophers, not least Avicenna and Averroes.

People take it for granted that the religion of Islam is based on the Koran and the teachings of Muhammad. This is true enough, but the Koran insists that the notion of unity goes back to the origin of the human race. In the creation myth as the Koran retells it, Adam did not so much “sin” as slip or stumble, and this was a one-time affair. He ate the forbidden fruit not because of any corruption of his will but because he “forgot” (20:115). Then he quickly remembered, and God appointed him as a prophet to his children, who needed guidance because they were to inherit his forgetfulness. After all, the Koran tells us, “Man was created weak” (4:28). In response to human weakness, God in his mercy sent prophet after prophet, the traditional number being 124,000, ending with Muhammad. The prophets have had two basic functions: to remind people of their innate understanding of unity and to explain how they can put unity into practice and achieve integration in their own souls.

This way of looking at things draws a distinction between truths that are universal and timeless, and others that are particular and historical. *Tawhīd* is a universal, ahistorical truth that has been acknowledged in every community on earth because of our common human nature. Prophecy, although it has exercised its effects everywhere, offers guidance in the form of specific truths that pertain to the unique circumstances of each community. The Koran makes the point in the verse, "We never sent a messenger before you except that We revealed to him, saying, 'There is no god but I, so worship Me'" (21:25). In other words, God revealed the notion of unity ("There is no god but I") to every prophet and also provided specific instructions for proper human activity ("worship"). It is these instructions that differentiate the prophetic messages, a point that is made rather plainly in a verse addressed to all the prophets: "To each of you We have appointed a right way and an open road. If God had willed, He would have made you one nation" (5:48). In the traditional Islamic understanding, the idea that everyone should follow the same path is absurd. God alone is one; everything else is many, including the paths that lead to God.

Generally, Islamic thought is built on these two axioms: *tawhīd*, or the universal, timeless truth of unity; and prophecy, or the acknowledgement that God has sent diverse forms of guidance to human beings. These two axioms are implicit in the first pillar of Islamic practice, the Shahadah or "bearing witness." As is well known, Islam is based on five pillars: the Shahadah, the daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, paying the alms tax, and making the pilgrimage to Mecca. It is often said that the Shahadah is Islamic "belief," but this is not technically the case. It is in fact the primary ritual act performed by Muslims, that of uttering the formula, "I bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His messenger." Performance of a ritual, we need to remember, does not demand understanding.

The issue of how to understand the Shahadah was addressed not by the specialists in practice (the jurists) but rather by theologians, Sufis, and philosophers. It is they who tell us that the first half of the Shahadah, specifically the statement "There is no god but God," should be called "the sentence of *tawhīd*," because it asserts God's unity and refers to the timeless, ahistorical truth that was taught by all prophets. The second statement, "Muhammad is God's Messenger," refers to specific teachings and practices that make the Koran one among many prophetic messages. In short, the meaning of the Shahadah is explained under the headings of two of the three principles of faith, *tawhīd* and prophecy—the third principle being the return (*ma'ād*) to God.

The Muslim philosophers devoted a great deal of attention to all three principles of faith, though they were especially concerned with the implications of *tawhīd*, typically in the language of Being, which was formulated most decisively by Avicenna. They paid much less attention to prophecy, though it

played a significant role in their discussions of the purpose of human life and the nature of the soul. They addressed the third principle in the context of both cosmology and psychology, that is, in their explanations of both the origin and the final end of the cosmos and the soul. It was the last of these issues, the soul's entelechy, that was in fact the real focus of their attention. Philosophy was not a disinterested study of the nature of things, but rather a discipline aimed at guiding lovers of wisdom to intellectual, spiritual, and moral perfection.

One of the many ways in which the philosophers spoke of the soul's becoming was in terms of the Arabic word *'aql*, which is commonly translated as "reason," though "intellect" is better suited to catch the nuances of the word, not least the notion of a hierarchy of intelligence and self-awareness. "Reason" tends to designate the technical application of a philosophical or scientific methodology, and asking someone to be "rational" too often means that he or she should adopt the prevailing worldview, which nowadays is that of scientism and ideology. The word "intellect" is also better suited to render the Plotinian notion of *nous*, the first emanation of the One, which the philosophers called by names such as the First Intellect, the Universal Intellect, or the Active Intellect. They took the position that the human soul, in its deepest reality, is a potential intellect, and the goal of the philosophical quest—and indeed, of human life generally—was for the soul to realize its potential and become a fully realized intellect. This can only happen when the soul reunites with the Universal Intellect from which it arose.

In short, my first point is that all Islamic thinking—philosophical, theological, mystical, even juridical—is rooted in the notion of the unity of the Ultimate Reality. This Reality is called "God" in the more mythic or theological language, and "the Necessary Being" in the more philosophical language. Theologians and philosophers also named it by a great variety of other names and explained why each name is appropriate to it. A whole theological genre investigated the significance of God's "ninety-nine" or "most beautiful" names. Although Avicenna does not employ the theological language, he does talk about the principal attributes of the Necessary Being, such as unity, eternity, consciousness, desire, power, wisdom, and generosity. He employs all the logical and philosophical tools at his disposal to prove that these are necessary attributes of the Necessary Being. The theologians had no real quarrel with him on the identity of these attributes, but they went about proving their point by having recourse to the Koran.

## 2. LOVE FOR BEAUTY

Aesthetics and ethics intersect in the notion of *tawhīd*. This can be seen if we take time to analyze the significance of a well-known saying of the Prophet:

“God is beautiful, and He loves beauty.” To understand how this saying was understood, we need first to review the basic manner of discussing *tawhīd* in Islamic thought. The formula “(There is) no god but God” was taken as its most succinct expression. The Koran, and following in its wake Muslim thought generally, brings out the meaning of *tawhīd* by substituting other divine names for the word “god” in the formula or in various paraphrases. For example, if God can properly be called “one,” then “There is nothing one but God.” This is to say that true and real oneness belongs to God alone, and everything other than God participates in manyness and multiplicity. In the same way, if God is merciful, then none is truly merciful but God; human mercy is a pale reflection of the real thing.

With this formula in mind, we can see that by saying that God is beautiful and that he loves beauty, the Prophet was saying that God is properly designated by the two names Beautiful and Loving. Hence, there is nothing beautiful but God and nothing loving but God. Real love and real beauty pertain exclusively to the Ultimate Reality; love and beauty as we experience them can at best be metaphorical, like light borrowed from the sun. In his “Treatise on Love,” Avicenna makes these points by demonstrating that the Necessary Being is the true lover, and that its love is directed at the true beauty, which is itself. He sums up the discussion with the words,

The First Good perceives Itself in act always and forever, so Its love for Itself is the most perfect and most ample love. There is no essential distinction among the divine attributes in the Essence, so love is identical with the Essence and with Being, by which I mean the Sheer Good.<sup>3</sup>

Just as the notion that “God loves beauty” throws light on the nature of the First Good, it also provides insight into cosmogeny. The universe was typically understood as everything other than the Necessary Being, that is, the entire realm of contingency, or “creation” as distinct from “the Creator.” Philosophers looked at this contingent realm as having no beginning and no end, not least because beginning and end would imply that time exists outside the universe, whereas it is one of the constituent factors of contingency. They often described the cosmos in terms of “origin and return” (*mabda' wa ma 'ād*). They held that the unity of the Supreme Reality demands that all things come forth from the One and return back where they came from, so the universe is an on-going process of emergence and submergence. All beings participate in never-ending change, the result of their essential possibility or contingency. Everything other than the One dwells in the realm of “generation and corruption” (*al-kawn wa'l-fasād*), so at every moment each is generated, and at every moment each is also undergoing corruption. In Ibn 'Arabī's terms, God renews creation at each instant, so everything disappears constantly only to be replaced by its similars.

When we apply this ontological and cosmological discussion to the human realm, we observe the obvious fact—obvious to much of pre-modern thought, at least—that everything in the realm of contingency is striving for the Absolutely Good and the Absolutely Beautiful, which is not generated and does not become corrupt. In other words, we and all things are driven by love for the One. The oneness of the Beautiful is expressed in the formula of *tawhīd* by saying, “There is none beautiful but God,” or “There is none good but God.” Given that “God loves the beautiful,” to say that there is none beautiful but God is also to say that there is none beloved but God, a favorite theme of Sufi poets like Rūmī. What usually does not come through in the translations that have made him so famous, however, is that he was thoroughly versed in metaphysics, cosmology, spiritual psychology, and ethics. He constantly reminds his readers that all lovers are in fact aiming at a single point, and that they will never reach fulfillment until they understand what it is that they truly love and put their understanding into practice. In one of his prose works, he makes the point as follows:

In man there is a love, a pain, an itch, and an urgency such that, if a hundred thousand worlds were to become his property, he would still gain no rest and no ease. These people occupy themselves totally with every kind of craft, artistry, and position; they learn astronomy, medicine, and other things, but they find no ease, for their goal has not been attained. . . . All these pleasures and goals are like a ladder. The rungs of a ladder are no place to take up residence and stay—they're for passing on. Happy is he who wakes up quickly and becomes aware! Then the long road becomes short, and he does not waste his life on the ladder's rungs.<sup>4</sup>

Coming back to cosmology, we see that the Muslim philosophers held not only that the universe is driven by love for the beautiful, but also that the Creator of the universe—the Necessary Being understood vis-à-vis contingency—brought the cosmos into existence because of its own love for beauty. This is another common theme in Sufi literature, typically made by referring to a famous saying of the Prophet, according to which David the Psalmist asked God why he created the universe. God replied, “I was a Hidden Treasure, and I loved to be recognized. Hence I created the creatures so that they might recognize Me.”<sup>5</sup> In a typical interpretation of this saying, the Hidden Treasure refers to the names and attributes of the Real Being, which are the latent possibilities of manifestation. Love designates the fact that God wanted his beauty to be spread infinitely wide so that it would be recognized and loved by all things good and beautiful.

### 3. ETHICS

The Arabic word that was used to render the Greek notion of ethics is *akhlāq*, which I prefer to translate as “character traits.” The word is the plural of *khuluq*, “character,” which in Arabic script has no vowels and is written exactly the

same way as *khalq*, "creation." Only the context allows us to discern whether creation or character is at issue. In fact, the two words are parallel expressions of a single notion, which is that things come into being having specific characteristics that distinguish them from other things. If we look at the ontological side of things, we talk about creation. If we look at the moral and spiritual side, we talk about character, which is the sum total of the soul's invisible qualities that motivate its external activity.

In English, when we say "ethical", we mean moral, proper, and good. But the discussion of character traits among Muslim philosophers was tightly bound up with differentiating the good from the bad, the praiseworthy from the blame-worthy. If, as the philosophers claimed, the goal of human life is to transmute the potential intellect into an actual intellect, then the soul needs to assimilate the qualities of the Necessary Being in order to bring about this transformation. The theoretical side of the soul strives to contemplate the Good and the Beautiful, and the practical side strives to act in conformity with the object of contemplation. In order to achieve conformity, the soul itself must become good and beautiful. Only then will it be the object of God's love and fulfill his purpose in creating the world, for He loves the beautiful, not the ugly.

Ethics, then, is the study of character traits with the practical goal of beautifying the soul. To use a common expression, the aim of the seeker was "to become characterized by the character traits of God" (*al-takhalluq bi-akhlāq Allāh*). This was a favorite theme among theologians like al-Ghazālī, who uses the expression, for example, to explain the importance of learning about God's names and attributes in the introduction to his book on the divine names.

This understanding of the divine roots of ethics goes back to the Koranic notion that God taught Adam all the names and appointed him as his representative in the earth. The factor that distinguishes human beings from other creatures is not simply that they are *ḥayawān nātiq*, "rational" or "speaking" animals, but rather that they have the capacity to speak about anything that can be named, including God himself. Speaking about something presupposes knowing how to refer to what you are talking about. In Adam's case, he was taught not only the names of everything that exists, but also the meaning of all the names. In our case, most of us talk about things which we do not in fact know but which have been transmitted to us in the process of enculturation.

Muslim philosophers were acutely aware that it was the common lot of mankind to speak on the basis of ignorance. Not only are most people devoid of real knowledge, but they are also ignorant of the fact that they do not know (hence the phrase *jahl murakkab*, "compound ignorance"). In order to explain why most knowledge is in fact ignorance, the philosophers (and many Sufis as well) drew a sharp distinction between two basic sorts of knowing. The first they called "imitation" (*taqlīd*). It is based on transmission and hearsay and is the foundation of all human affairs, given that practically everything we



know or think we know—language, customs, religion, science, philosophy—has been passed on to us from others. Little if any of it is real and certain knowledge.

The second sort is called *tahqīq*, “realization.” The word derives from the same root as *ḥaqq*, a Koranic divine name that means real, true, right, and appropriate (as well as the corresponding substantives). The meaning of the name can be understood from the formula of *tawḥīd*: “There is nothing real, true, right, appropriate, and worthy but God.” Anything else to which these qualities are ascribed can only possess them in a contingent, secondary, or illusory manner. As for the word *tahqīq*, it means literally to actualize the *ḥaqq*, that is, to understand what is true, real, and appropriate and to put it into practice. According to the philosophers, one must achieve realization by recovering the innate human potential to know all things, that is, by transforming one’s soul into an actual intellect.

The quest to achieve realization was a basic impetus of both philosophy and Sufism. It is formulated already by al-Kindī, the first of the Muslim philosophers, at the beginning of his treatise “On the first philosophy”: The goal of philosophers in their quest for knowledge, he says, is “to hit upon the *ḥaqq*”—that is, the true, the real, the right, and the appropriate—and their goal in their practice is “to practice according to the *ḥaqq*.”<sup>6</sup> This means that seekers of wisdom are striving to understand the Real and the True, other than which there is nothing real and true; and they are also striving to put this understanding into practice by bringing their souls into conformity with what they know. This quest was by necessity intensely personal and individual, given that no one can understand for you, and no one can practice for you.

On the theoretical side, realization means recognizing what we already know because God taught Adam all the names, and we are Adam. On the practical side, it means acting in conformity with the divine form in which we were created. The notion of the divine “form” (*sūra*), better known in English as the divine image, is implicit in the Koran, though its clearest formulation comes in a saying of the Prophet that echoes Genesis: “God created Adam in His own form.” It is this form that bestows on human beings the potential to know and realize all the divine attributes, which are precisely “the divine character traits.”

The purpose of the science of ethics, then, was to provide a theoretical framework for the realization and actualization of the form in which God created human beings. This is what al-Ghazālī and many others called “becoming characterized by the character traits of God.” The philosophers carried out the same discussion, but they paid much less attention to the Koran. Nonetheless, Avicenna and others tell us that philosophers strive to achieve “similarity with God” (*al-tashabbuh bi’l-ilāh*), or, in a bolder formulation, “deiformity” (*ta’alluh*), a word coming from the same root as Allah.

## 4. HUMAN BEAUTY

The basic truth about beauty is that nothing is truly beautiful but the Necessary Being. One of the most salient characteristics of the Koran's depiction of God's activity in the universe is its constant reference to him by a variety of names. In four verses it says that these names of God are "the most beautiful names" (7:180, 17:110, 20:8, 59:24). When Adam was taught all the names, these included the most beautiful names of God. The Koran epitomizes the human situation with the verse, "We created man in the most beautiful stature, then We sent him down to the lowest of the low" (95:4). According to Ibn 'Arabī, when the Koran refers to God with first-person pronouns, it uses "I" to designate the absolute unity of the One and "We" to designate the plurality of the divine names. Hence, "We" in this verse can mean the divine reality inasmuch as it created human beings in the form of the most beautiful names.

There are many other Koranic references to the beauty that was instilled into creation generally and mankind specifically. For example, in several verses God is called "the Beautiful-doer" (*al-muḥsin*), and the Koran says, "He made beautiful everything that He created" (32:7). Addressing human beings, it says, "He formed you, and He made your forms beautiful" (40:64). The same word was used by philosophers to discuss Aristotelian hylomorphism—the idea that all things can be analyzed in terms of an obscure receptivity called "matter" and an intelligible activity called "form." Among God's Koranic names is the Form-giver (*al-muṣawwir*). This was understood to mean that nothing bestows forms on matter but God. Every form bestowed by the Form-giver is beautiful, but, in the human case, God bestowed on man the form of the totality of the most beautiful names, not the form of just one name or several names.

The verse about God's creation of man in the most beautiful stature goes on to say that God sent him down to the lowest of the low, which is the realm of generation and corruption known as the cosmos; or, it can be a reference to man's fall from the Garden. In either case, it means that the beautiful divine form was obscured. Adam forgot for a moment, and his children forget all the time. What they forget is *tawḥīd*, the fact that there is no reality but the Supreme Reality and that nothing else is beautiful. They imagine that the beautiful, the desirable, the lovable, is found in the realm of generation and corruption, where the forms are displayed in dust.

The philosophers called the human soul a "potential intellect" not least because it is the beautiful divine form that has not yet actualized itself. As lovers of wisdom, they were striving to transform their potential intellects into actual intellects or into wisdom itself. This meant not only the perfect understanding that belongs to the theoretical side of the intellect, but also the perfect and appropriate activity that belongs to its practical side. In short, the quest for

wisdom and perfection, whether undertaken by philosophers or Sufis, was a quest to become beautiful, or to actualize the most beautiful character traits that are innate to the human soul because it was created in the form of the Beautiful.

#### 5. MUTUAL LOVE

The key Koranic verse about love is this: "He loves them, and they love Him" (5:54). Here we have God as lover of human beings, and human beings as the beloved of God. We also have human beings as lovers of God, and God as the beloved of human beings. If human beings can love God, this is because he created them in his own form, and he is the Lover. If God can love human beings, this is because he loves the form in which he created them, which is the form of the most beautiful names. In other words God loves his own beauty, other than which there is no true beauty, as reflected in the human form.

Everyone knows that the goal of lovers is union—what the early Sufis called "unification" (*ittiḥād*). Both God and human beings are lovers, and each loves the other. Both are striving for the same thing, which is to come together, and both do so as lovers of beauty. God's love for every possible manifestation of beauty drives him to create a beautiful universe displaying the properties and characteristics of the most beautiful names, including the all-comprehensive human form, which is both lover and beloved. God's goal is to share the love and the beauty, and he does so by making man a beautiful lover of beauty.

Love aims for union, so man, in his love for the beautiful and his desire to become one with it, must strive to overcome his forgetfulness. He has forgotten who he is—that is, beautiful and beloved—and what he loves—that is, the truly beautiful and the truly beloved. The only way to eliminate all forgetfulness and ugliness from himself is to become characterized by the true Beloved's most beautiful names. God cannot come down to our level—or rather, he has already come down to our level by creating us in his own form. It is now the human task to rise up to his level by acting beautifully and being beautiful. As the Koran puts it, "Do what is beautiful, as God has done what is beautiful to you" (28:77). In order to actualize their beauty, people must become unified with the Beautiful, and that can only happen if they eliminate from themselves the dominating properties of multiplicity and difference.

In philosophical terms, the human soul, as a potential intellect, is dispersed and inchoate by definition. The only way it can become integrated and achieve oneness is to actualize its potential by becoming an actual intellect. The philosophers called this actualization "conjunction" (*ittiṣāl*) with the Active Intellect. By achieving it, man becomes one with the object of his love. Avicenna explains that all things are in love with the Beautiful and

each is striving to achieve oneness with it, but those who reach the goal are only those who attain to the station of deformity—being characterized by the divine character traits. Notice that his discussion recalls the hadith of the Hidden Treasure—God's love to be recognized, and his creation of the universe to bring about this recognition:

Each of the existent things loves the Absolute Good with an inborn love, and the Absolute Good discloses Itself to Its lovers. Their reception of Its self-disclosure [*tajallī*] and their conjunction with It, however, is disparate. The utmost limit of nearness to It is the true reception of Its self-disclosure, I mean, in the most perfect way possible. This is what the Sufis call "unification." . . . The love of the Most Excellent for Its own excellence is the most excellent love, so Its true beloved is the reception of Its self-disclosure. This is the reality of Its reception by deiform souls, so it can be said that they are Its beloveds. To this refers what has been narrated in the reports that, when God's servant is such and such, "He loves Me, and I love him."<sup>7</sup>

#### 6. THE MYTH OF THE FISH

By way of conclusion, let me quote a little story from one of Rūmī's prose works. It expresses in straightforward language the abstruse discussions of philosophers concerning love's power to bring about the union of lovers and their Beloved.

Like fish we say to the Ocean of Life, "Why did You strike us with waves and throw us up on the dry land of water and clay? You have so much mercy—how could You give us such torment? . . ."

The Ocean replies, "'I was a Hidden Treasure, so I loved to be recognized.' I was a treasure, hidden by the curtain of the Unseen, in the private cell of No-place. From behind the veils of existence I wanted My beauty and majesty to be known. I wanted it to be seen what sort of water of life and alchemy of happiness I am."

The fish say, "We are the fish in this ocean. We were in this Ocean of Life from the first. We knew its magnificence and gentleness. . . From the first we recognized this Treasure, and in the end we will be its recognizers. At whom did You direct this long exile for the sake of 'I loved to be recognized.'"

The answer comes, "O fish! Although fish know the worth of water and love it, and although they cling to union with it, their love is not of the same description—with such burning and heat, with such self-abandonment, with such lamentation and weeping of blood, and with such roasting of the liver—as the love of that fish whom the waves throw up on dry land and who tosses for a long time on the hot earth and burning sand. . . Separation from the ocean allows him no taste of life's sweetness—after all, he is separate from the Ocean of Life. How can someone who has seen that Ocean find joy in this life?" . . .

God says, "Just as I wanted to manifest My Treasure, so I wanted to manifest your ability to recognize that Treasure. Just as I wanted to display the purity and gentleness of this Ocean, so I wanted to display the high aspirations and the nurturing gentleness of the fish and creatures of the Ocean. Thus they may see their own faithfulness and show their own aspirations."<sup>8</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I have addressed some of the shortcomings of this all-too-common reading of Islamic history in *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of his approach to the major intellectual issues that were discussed by philosophers generally, see Chittick, "Ibn Arabi," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-arabi/>

<sup>3</sup> *Risāla fi'l-'ishq*, edited by Husayn al-siddīq and Rāwiyya Jāmūs (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), p. 54. Cf. Emil L. Fackenheim, "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina," *Medieval Studies* 7 (1945), pp. 208–228, specifically p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> *Fīhi mā fīhi*, edited by B. Furūzānfar (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1969), p. 64. See also A. J. Arberry, *Discourses of Rūmī* (London: John Murray, 1961), p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> This saying, in contrast to the saying, "God is beautiful," is not considered authentic by the specialists in hadith, a fact that did not prevent authors from quoting it. Ibn 'Arabī studied with many masters in the science of hadith, so it is not surprising that he acknowledges the weakness of its pedigree; nonetheless, he declares that the correctness of its ascription to the Prophet is affirmed by visionary knowledge. See Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 391, note 14.

<sup>6</sup> al-Kindī, *Fī'l-falsafat al-ūlā*. For the passage, see Alfred Ivry, *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974), p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> *Risāla fi'l-'ishq*, pp. 82, 87–88; Fackenheim, pp. 225, 228.

<sup>8</sup> *Majālis-i sab'a*, edited by Tawfīq Subhānī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Kayhān, 1379/2000), pp. 121–122; see also Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), pp. 70–71.