

The Circle of Spiritual Ascent According to Al-Qūnawī

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The teachings of Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274),¹ the most important disciple of the celebrated Ibn al-ʿArabī, present a thoroughly Islamic version of that universal metaphysics that finds one of its most perfect expressions in Neoplatonism. Al-Qūnawī discourses on the negative theology that provides the best available means to speak about the Godhead, elaborates upon the nature of the One and the various degrees of existence that issue from It, and discusses how the human soul ultimately derives from the One and returns to It. His version of the descent and reascent of the soul provides a perfect example of how the Koranic teaching summarized in such verses as "Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return" (II 156) and "As He originated you, so you will return" (VII 28) was expounded in terms that parallel the Neoplatonic categories.

Al-Qūnawī and Neoplatonism

The question of whether or not al-Qūnawī was directly influenced by such works as the *Theology of Aristotle* cannot easily be resolved. He makes no reference to them in his writings, nor are any of them listed among the works he is known to have owned.² But there is no doubt that his master Ibn al-ʿArabī made use of

Neoplatonic terminology in expounding the metaphysical and cosmological doctrines that al-Qūnawī accepts and develops. Moreover, there is every reason to believe that al-Qūnawī profited from the expositions of the Muslim philosophers. He was certainly well read in *falsafah*, and in fact his chief contribution to Ibn al-ʿArabī's school probably lay in his ability to express his master's ideas in a logically coherent mode and thus bring them into a certain harmony, at least in the style of exposition, with the works of the Muslim Peripatetics. His sympathy with and mastery of philosophy is made abundantly clear in his correspondence with Avicenna's great commentator, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī,³ while ʿAbd al-Rahmān Jāmī remarks that Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings cannot be understood in terms consistent both with Islamic principles and with rational speculation without the aid of al-Qūnawī's writings.⁴

But before any precise conclusions are drawn concerning the extent al-Qūnawī made use of Neoplatonic formulations, it is only fair to ask how he himself, or one of his followers, might have viewed this question: Sufism is first and foremost a spiritual way. Only in a secondary sense does it present itself as an intellectual perspective (even though, from another point of view, the perspective precedes the way). The Sufi's first concern is to turn the whole of his attentiveness (*tawajjuh*), then the whole of his existence, towards God. The spiritual discipline he follows is Islamic, since all its essential elements are based upon the *Koran*, the Sunnah of the Prophet, and the teachings of his companions.⁵ All Sufi practice begins with the observance of the Divine Law, the Sharīʿah; merely to follow it with a certain scrupulousness means that a man performs most of his activities — not the least of which are the five mandatory daily prayers and the various supererogatory prayers recommended by the Sunnah — with God in mind. But the Sufis go to great lengths to intensify their awareness of God, especially through the practice of *dhikr*, "remembrance" or "invocation." This means that many if not most Sufis, whatever their outward occupation, constantly repeat a Name of God in the mind or the heart. What has come down to us concerning the activities of Sufi centers, such as that directed by al-Qūnawī himself,⁶ indicates that most outward activities were also "religious" in nature, e.g., the practice of certain types of vigils and retreats, recitation of the *Koran*, communal sessions of

kliḳ (often sung to the accompaniment of music), and the study of the religious sciences, especially those directly related to the *Koran* and the Hadith. Al-Qūnawī was a master in the latter field, and a number of important divines are known to have studied it with him.

A little reflection upon the "psychological" concomitants of such a way of life should make clear the point I want to make: Sufis such as al-Qūnawī could think only in Islamic terms. When they spoke or wrote, their words were thoroughly imbued with the modes of thought established by the *Koran* and the Sunnah. Moreover, from the point of view of what might be called the "psychology" developed by Sufism itself,⁷ the Islamic nature of the Sufi experience becomes even clearer: the Sufis base the formulation of many of their teachings on "unveiling" (*kashf*) and "mystical perception" (*dhawq*), i.e., the direct, intuitive apprehension of realities that lie beyond the grasp of the senses and the unaided intellect (*ʿaql*).⁸ Through unveiling they observe unseen realities clothed in sensory forms in the World of Image-Exemplars (*ʿālam al-mithāl*), contemplate disengaged (*mujarrad*) intellectual realities in the World of the Spirits, and even witness God's very Knowledge of the created things "before" their creation.⁹ A Sufi who desires to express his visions in human language naturally employs the language of his own religious universe, which colors his mental faculties and perceptions and which directed him to the Unseen worlds in the first place.

When al-Qūnawī speaks of the One, the emanation of all things from It, and their return to It, he is expressing the fruit of his own unveilings, the result of the spiritual travail he has undertaken. He has not "learned" these things from Neoplatonists, but in Neoplatonism he would have found a striking confirmation of his own visions and a powerful and adequate formulation of the knowledge he had reached through unveiling. If asked whether Plotinus had possessed the same vision of the Truth, he would have answered in the affirmative. And if asked how he had attained it, he would have answered, through the spiritual practice issuing from another divine revelation, different from Islam but one with it in essence. From al-Qūnawī's point of view, Plotinus could only have been a "Sufi" or a "spiritual master" (*shaykh*) like himself; this would have been why the Muslims called him al-Shaykh al-Yūnānī, the "Greek shaykh."

Towards the beginning of the *Theology of Aristotle*, the author writes as follows: "It sometimes happens that I become isolated within my soul and leave my body to one side. I become like a disengaged substance without body. I enter into my own essence, turning back into it, and coming out of all other things. Then I am knowledge, the knower, and the known all at once. I see such beauty, splendor, and light in my essence that I remain astonished and stunned. Then I know that I am one part of the Noble, Excellent, Living, Divine World."¹⁰

For al-Qūnawī, such language provides a vivid description of the world he himself has witnessed on innumerable occasions. A single quotation can suffice to show the common ground in mystical experience: "On the night before Tuesday, 17 Shawwāl 665/19 July 1267. . . . I underwent a subtle attraction from the Lord. In it God placed me before Himself and freed me all at once, without any gradual change, to turn toward Him with the face of my heart. He gave me news of the Presence of the Universal Knowledge of His Essence, from which every other knowledge becomes deployed and in accordance with which every description, state, and property becomes entitled (*taʿayyun*) within the levels of existence. . . ."¹¹

The Sufis do not consider the teachings found in the *Theology* merely "philosophical," since *falsafah*, as al-Qūnawī makes clear, deals primarily with topics that are accessible to the intellect in the limited and purely human sense of the word.¹² But mystical unveiling draws its data from a "stage beyond the stage of the intellect" intimately connected with the purification of the soul and sanctity.¹³

Al-Qūnawī states explicitly that among the Greeks, the earlier "wise men" or philosophers (*hukamāʾ*) based their teachings primarily upon the unveilings or "openings" (*fah*) that they received as a result of spiritual practice. But after "Aristotle," al-Qūnawī probably has the *Theology* in mind), philosophy limited itself to those things that can be discerned by the intellect. In the passage quoted below, drawn from al-Qūnawī's commentary on the opening chapter of the *Koran*,¹⁴ he explains his own position as being similar to that of the ancient Greeks.

Those of you who come across this book and other works by the People of the Way should realize that if there were sufficiency and

healing¹⁵ in rational proofs (*al-adillat al-fikriyyah*) and disputational discussions (*al-iqtirāʾi al-jadaliyyah* (i.e., dialectics), neither the prophets and messengers nor their inheritors — the saints, who maintain and convey the arguments of God — would have turned away from these proofs and discussions. Other hindrances have also prevented me from following this path (of philosophical speculation) in my words. One of them is that I could not prefer to follow the way of the People of Disputation and Thought in a work concerned with commenting on the Book of God, all the more so since a prophetic tradition has warned us against such things: "No people has gone astray after guidance without arriving at disputation." Then the Prophet recited the verse, "They do not cite him as an example save for disputation. Nay, they are a contentious people!" (*Koran* XLIII 58). Another hindrance is my desire to maintain brevity. Still another is that my words are addressed primarily to the Verifiers¹⁶ and the Elect among the People of God, and then to those who are beloved to them and who believe in them and their spiritual states. This latter group are those people whose breasts are illuminated and pure, whose primordial nature (*firrah*) is sound, whose intellects are enkindled and adequate, "who call upon their Lord at morning and evening desiring His Face" (*Koran* VI 52), and who "give ear to the Word and follow the best of it" (*Koran* XXXIX 18) with pure intention and fair attentiveness, after having cleansed their Locus (*mahall*) [i.e., the place of spiritual vision, the heart] of the attributes of disputation, quarreling, and the like. Such men are those who "expose themselves to the breaths" of God's generosity¹⁷ and watch Him vigilantly. They wait to see what will come to them from his Mighty Presence, who will bring it to them, from which level of the Divine Names it will come, and whether it will come with a known intermediary or without one. They accept what they receive with good manners, and they weigh it with the scales of their Lord, sometimes the general scales (i.e., the Sharʿah), and sometimes the specific scales (i.e., unveiling). Those who possess such attributes are qualified to benefit from the fruits of correct mystical perception and the sciences of direct unveilings.

We have no need for theoretical discussions and such like with anyone whose state is as we have described it. For either he will share in what we describe, so he will recognize the truth of what he is told because of what he possesses of it within himself, i.e., because his eye of spiritual insight is able to perceive the all-comprehensive principle

through which and of which communication is made; or he is a believer whose faith and primordial nature are sound and whose heart is pure and purified. He perceives the truth of what he hears from behind the thin curtain that is his physical nature and despite the occupations and attachments that hinder his Locus from the perfection of distinct vision, but not from perceiving what is said. Such a person is predisposed for unveiling and qualified for reception; he benefits from what he hears and ascends with the light of faith to the station of direct vision.

Thus I have contented myself with remarks and allusions, preferring them over detailed expositions and clarifications; I have chosen and preferred what God has chosen and preferred in His mighty words addressed to His messenger, by which He commanded him: "Speak the Truth from your Lord; so whosoever will, let him believe; and whosoever will, let him disbelieve" (*Koran* XVIII 30). God did not command him to perform miracles, nor to display arguments for everything he had brought.

What has been related concerning the first philosophers reveals something like this, even if they dealt with thought (*al-aḥkām*). For their custom was to undergo spiritual retreats and ascetic discipline and to occupy themselves with what was required by the religious laws (*sharāʿ*) that they followed. When they were given an "opening" toward a particular thing, they would mention of it whatever was proper to be mentioned to their students and disciples. However, they spoke in the language of rhetoric (*khilābah*), not that of explanatory discourse. So if a situation arose which made them prefer to offer a demonstration (*burhān*) of what they had been given and they were able to do so, they would discuss and demonstrate it. Otherwise they would mention what they wanted to expound to their students, and he who accepted it without quarrel would benefit from it. But when someone found an obstacle within himself, or there appeared to him a contention, these philosophers would not reply to him but would tell him to busy himself with his own soul and to turn his attention toward seeking knowledge about the true state of the problematic affair from God through ascetic practices and inward purification.

Such continued to be the situation among the ancient philosophers down to the time of Aristotle. After him the art of dialectics (*ṣarf al-ijādā*) arose among his followers, those who are called the "Peripatetics"; and the situation has remained the same until today.

In short, al-Qūnawī could easily claim that any resemblance between his own teachings and those of Plotinus derive from a common ground in mystical experience. Similarities should cause no more surprise than the fact that Greek and Muslim astronomers describe the visible heavens in similar terms, while differences point to the varying receptivities of individual human beings towards the perception of spiritual realities, the difference in viewpoint between the ancient Greek religions and Islam, and the inherent weakness of human language to express realities that transcend the realm of thought.¹⁸

The Circle of Being

As is well-known, one of the central teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabī's school is the "Oneness of Being."¹⁹ Despite the numerous parallels between certain aspects of this doctrine and Neoplatonism, al-Qūnawī's primary means of explaining the nature of God and the world is Koranic, i.e., the doctrine of God's Names and Attributes (*al-asmāʾ wa'l-sifāt*, two terms which, for Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers, are largely synonymous).

Although unknowable in His Nondelimited (*muṭlaq*) and Nonentified (*ghayr mutaʿayyan*) Essence, God gives knowledge of Himself to mankind through revelation, a knowledge that is summarized by the Names and Attributes sanctified by the *Koran* and the Hadith. The One Essence is viewed from different points of view, each of which is represented by an Attribute. The plurality of the Attributes then becomes, *in divinis*, the ultimate source of the multiplicity of the creatures. The creative process takes place because of the inherent demands of certain Names, e.g., "Light," "Creator," and, perhaps most important of all, "Lover," for, according to the famous *ḥadīth qudsī*, God said, "I loved to be known, so I created the world."²⁰

The creatures are possibilities of outward manifestation inherent within the Nonentified Essence and known by God in all their particularized details (*tafsīf*) from Eternity-without-beginning (*azal*). His desire to become known outwardly brings these inherent properties of His own Self into manifestation, all the while that He

remains eternally transcendent in relation to His creatures, which become ranged in a scale extending from the uppermost limits of the spiritual world to the lowest levels of the corporeal world. Ultimately, each and every one of them displays the properties of the Names and Attributes. The "emanation" of the levels of existence (*marātib al-wujūd*) from the One Essence is referred to by a number of terms, such as Self-manifestation (*zuhūr*), theophany (*tajallī*), and effusion (*fahd*), each of which has Koranic roots.

The entities (*ʿayān*) or things (*ashyāʾ*), which are the eternal and immutable possibilities of outward manifestation contained in the Nonmanifest Essence of God, become deployed through the exhalation of the Breath of the All-Merciful (*nafas al-Rahmān*) or through the Unseen and the Visible Theophany (*al-tajallī al-ghaybī, al-shahādī*).²¹ Once deployed, they can be divided into different kinds from various points of view. One of the most common classifications is that of the Five Divine Presences,²² the first of which is the uncreated Knowledge of God. The next three are created: the spiritual world, the world of image-exemplars or imagination (*khayāl*), and the corporeal world. The world of imagination acts as an "isthmus" (*barzakka*) between the other two created worlds; since it comprehends the attributes of both, it allows them to become interrelated. The fifth Presence is the Perfect Man, who is both created and uncreated, since he comprehends the other four levels within himself. To the three created levels correspond man's spirit (or rational soul), animal soul, and body. Thus man's spirit is a luminous and unitary reality totally disengaged from his tenebrous and multiple body, while his animal soul is a semi-spiritual entity possessing attributes of both sides. Without the soul's intermediary, the spirit would have no way of governing the body.

Each of the three created Presences derives its being from the Presence beyond itself. Thus the spirits are reflections or shadows of the immutable and uncreated entities, the image-exemplars are reflections or shadows of the spirits, and the bodies are reflections or shadows of the image-exemplars. In a similar manner man's body displays the properties of his animal soul, which in turn displays the properties of his spirit, which in turn displays the properties of his immutable entity.²³ Each of the levels of existence contributes to making up the total human reality, just as each Divine Presence

contributes to making up the total reality of Being in Its deployment — a reality which is named the "Perfect Man."

From one point of view Being becomes deployed among the existent entities because of God's "Command" (*amr*). Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers divide the Divine Command into two kinds, the generating command (*al-amr al-takwīnī*), which creates the engendered universe (*al-kawn*), and the prescriptive command (*al-amr al-taklīfī*), which establishes religions and their laws.²⁴ The first is referred to in the Koranic verse, "His Command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it 'Be!', and it is" (XXXVI 82). It is also mentioned in a number of other suggestive verses; e.g., "It is God who created the seven heavens and of the earth their like, while the Command descends among them, that you may know that God is powerful over everything and that God encompasses everything in Knowledge" (LXV 12); "He governs the Command from the heaven to the earth; then it goes up to Him in one day, whose measure is a thousand years of your counting" (XXXII 5). Not only does God's Command generate the world; it also descends through the heavens and the earth and then returns to Him. Since the Command is in one respect identical with the Divine Word "Be!" its role in generating the universe is not unconnected with the fact that all creatures are words of God, a point that al-Qūnawī develops with great detail and refinement.²⁵

God's Command descends and reascends in an order that can be described roughly as follows: It begins with the Reality of Realities (*haqīqat al-haqāʾiq*), which is also called the First Entification (*al-taʿayyun al-awwal*), the Presence of All-Comprehensiveness and Being (*ḥadrat al-jamʿ wa'l-wujūd*), and the Nondelimited Effusion of the Essence (*mujlaq al-fayḍ al-dhātī*); this is God as the One. It is followed by the One Emanation from the One, since "None issues from the One but One" (*lā yasdūr min al-wāhid illa'l-wāhid*); known as the All-Pervasive Being that is effused upon the entities of the engendered existents (*al-wujūd al-ʿāmm al-mujāḍ ʿalā ʿayān al-mukawwanāt*), the One Emanation is often referred to as the Breath of the All-Merciful or the Mist (*al-ʿamā*). It in turn creates the universe, beginning with the First Intellect (= the Supreme Pen, *al-qalam al-ʿalī*) and the Universal Soul (= the Guarded Tablet, *al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*); the two of these demarcate the boundaries of the spiritual

world. Between the Guarded Tablet and the Throne of the All-Merciful (*'arsh al-rahmān* = the ninth heaven), which is the outer limit of the corporeal world, stands the world of image-exemplars. Within the world of corporeal-bodies, the Command continues to descend through each of the heavens (beginning with the Footstool, *al-kursi al-karīm*, the eighth heaven), the spheres of the elements, and the three kingdoms. It reaches the utmost limit of its descent with man, after which it ascends to the world of the isthmus (*al-barzakh*, the "interval" between death and the Resurrection), the Resurrection, the worlds of hell, paradise, and the vision of God (*kathīb al-ru'yah*, "the Dune of Vision"), and finally rejoins its origin, the Reality of Realities (see the diagram).²⁶

The Point at the Center

All of al-Qūnawī's teachings revolve around the concept of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), which I can only summarize very briefly here.²⁷ The uncreated reality of mankind is God Himself, or God as described by the all-comprehensive Name (*al-ism al-jāmi'*) "Allah." Hence, according to the Prophet, "Allah created Adam (= man) upon His own Form"; man is the outward form (*ṣūrah*) of God, while God is man's inward meaning (*ma'nā*). The Name Allah comprehends all other Names, each of which demands the existence of various loci of manifestation (*mazāhir majā'ih*) within the created world. In al-Qūnawī's words,

The Universal States (*al-shū'ūn al-kullīyah*) comprehended by the Name Allah . . . are called the First Names. . . . The ontological forms that become manifest through the properties of these States are called "angels, prophets, messengers, saints" and the like. As it descends, the Command gradually divides into a hierarchy of related species and genera, until it reaches its limit at individuals and their states. . . . Every Universal State comprises numerous other States subordinate to it in ontological manifestation, property, and level. The subordinated realities may sometimes be viewed only from the point of view of their entification within God's Knowledge for all eternity; then they are called "realities," "entities," etc.²⁸ From the point of view of the

outward manifestation of the Nondelimited Real within some particular subordinating reality, the latter assumes a name in respect of its becoming clothed in existence, e.g., Throne, Footstool, sun, moon, animal, plant, mineral. Then as it continues to descend it is called, e.g., this person, this horse, this apple, this ruby.²⁹

All the above realities are subordinated to the Name Allah, which comprehends all things and which is the "reality" or "archetypal entity" of mankind. That is why al-Qūnawī often refers to it as the Human-Divine Reality (*al-haqīqat al-insāniyyat al-ilāhiyyah*); it is identical with the Reality of Realities referred to above. Every single existing thing displays certain of that Reality's inherent perfections, while each individual human being reflects it as a whole. "Animal men (*al-unāsī al-hayawāniyyūn*) are the forms of the properties of the whole (*Jumlah*) of that Human-Divine Reality in respect of outward manifestation."³⁰ But it is only the Perfect Men who actualize with full consciousness the Human-Divine Reality itself and every state that manifests it in all the ontological levels. In fact,

No Attribute is ascribed to God . . . except in respect of the Perfect, Human, Essence-derived Reality, one of whose levels is the Divinity (*al-ulūhiyyah*). The existents are the loci of manifestation for its qualities.³¹

If most men are not Perfect Men, this is because, even though their human form manifests the Human-Divine Reality, they are dominated by the properties of one of the particular Names that their own reality embraces. All creatures manifest certain Names — ultimately, as Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers state explicitly, each creature may itself be considered a Name of God.³² But when man takes on the color of a particular Name, he moves away from the centrality (*wasaiyyah*, *markazīyah*) and equilibrium (*i'tidāl*) peculiar to the all-comprehensive human condition.

Man is an isthmus between the Presence of Divinity and the Presence of Engendered Existence, a transcription (*mushtah*) comprehending both Presences. So every single thing is delineated within his level, which consists of his all-comprehensiveness. From the myriad realities embraced by his transcription of being, certain things become entified

in each time, state, condition, location, and abode; these are determined by his particular affinity with that time, state, condition, etc.

As long as man is not delivered from the limiting nooses of particular (non-universal) Attributes and engendered properties, his perception will be delimited by the given particular Attribute that rules over him. Hence he will only perceive things that correspond to that Attribute and are encompassed by its scope. But if he becomes disengaged from the properties of disequilibrium, one-sided, and particular limitations, inclinations, and attractions, and if he attains to the Central, All-Comprehensive Station, which is the Point of Universal Contraposition (*muqat al-musāmāt al-kalīyyah*) and the Center of the Circle that comprehends all the levels of Equilibrium — i.e., the supraformal [= at the level of the immutable entities], the spiritual, the imaginal, and the sensory — . . . then he will stand up before the two Presences [of the Divinity and Engendered Existence] in the station of his supraformal, isthmus-like Opposite (*muhādāt*). He will face the two of them in his essence, just as the central point of a circle faces each point on the circumference. He will stand opposite each of the Divine and engendered realities through that which he possesses of each of them, since he is a transcription of them all.³³

In his outward form every human being displays the Human-Divine Reality as a whole; all other existents display parts or aspects of it. To stop short before traversing the Circle of Being and actualizing the fullness of that Reality is to remain below the human potential.

The attractors, my brother, are attracting you from every side; the callers invite you in the language of love, since man is the beloved of all, and all things have come under the sway of his lordship. In keeping with what attracts you and with your affinities, the callers invite you to accept their call and be attracted. And you are the servant of that which you love and to which you become attracted.

In every station, state, and so forth, Equilibrium is the center. He who deviates from it enters into disequilibrium (*inhirāf*). But no one loses his equilibrium except he who is attracted with his whole self, or with most of it, to that which is less than he. However, if the sides of the circle of every station at which a person alights or through which he passes are equal, so that he becomes fixed at its center in total

nondifferentiation, free of the limitations of properties and delineations, and so that he gives each attractor and caller only its just due and portion . . . then he is the Man who follows his Lord in His States, since "He gave everything its creation, then guided" (*Koran XX 50*).³⁴

The outward manifestation of man's form depends upon God's total Attentiveness toward him at the time of bringing him into existence; it also depends upon both of His hands, as He has given news (*Koran XXXVIII 75*). To one of these two hands pertains the Unseen, to the other the Visible. From the one the Holy Spirits become manifest, from the other Nature, corporeal bodies, and forms. That is why man comprehends all the Names in knowledge. . . . So once the True Man has been freed from the bondage of the stations, risen spiritually, and been delivered, by the Central Perfection's Equilibrium, from the attracting properties of the sides and from disequilibrium, then his attentiveness will turn toward the Presence of the Ipsely (*al-huwiyyah*), i.e., the Unity of All-Comprehensive All-Comprehensiveness (*ahādīyat jam' al-jam'*), which is described by Outward Manifestation, Inward Nonmanifestation, Priority, Posteriority, Summated Unity, and Particularized Deployment. . . . But if man veers away from the Center to one side because of an attracting and overpowering affinity, and if the property of certain Names and levels predominates so that he leaves equilibrium, then he will become established within the circle of that predominating Name and be related and ascribed to it; he will worship God from the standpoint of the Name's level and depend upon the Name. It will become the utmost limit of his hopes, the goal of his desires, and his aim in respect of his states and stations, unless he passes beyond it.³⁵

The ultimate station of human perfection is actualized by the Perfect Men, who follow the ascending arc of the Command from the human state to the Reality of Realities. Having actualized the Circle of Being, they take up residence at the Central Point. Between the Perfect Men and those human individuals who are entrapped by the lowest of the "callers" and "attractors," i.e., Satan and his hosts, stands the whole range of possible human types.

Whoever leaves the Equilibrium of the Central Point — which is the Point of Perfection at the Presence of All-Comprehensive Unity [= the Reality of Realities] — will be judged for or against in keeping with

his level's proximity to or distance from the Center. Some are near, some nearer; some far, some farther. Between the total disequilibrium that pertains to satanism (*shayṭanah*) and this Divine, Name-derived, Perfect Equilibrium, all the levels of the people of felicity and wretchedness [i.e., of heaven and hell] become entified.³⁶

The Circular Ascent

On the one hand the Generating Command descends from the Reality of Realities, brings the created worlds and all creatures into existence, and then returns to its origin by way of the worlds that follow death; on the other hand the Perfect Man traverses the Circle of Being. Obviously, these two processes are related; in fact, they are basically the same process viewed from two different points of view.³⁷ For nothing stands outside the Human-Divine Reality. The concept of the Command is only one way of expressing — in Koranic terms — how this Reality becomes actualized in outward manifestation.

In a long passage in *Miftāḥ al-ghayb*, al-Qūnawī refers to a "mystery" (*sirr*) that was revealed to him in the year 630/1233 or 631/1234, i.e., when he was still in his twenties, seven or eight years before Ibn al-ʿArabī's death. "On that day I had a mystical perception of this mystery's universal principles and general outline, with a certain amount of detailed exposition. But the explanation I give now follows my present mystical state."³⁸ Al-Qūnawī's vision unveiled for him the answers to the following questions:

What is man's reality? From what does he come into existence (*minma wujud*)? In what does he come into existence? How does he come into existence? Who brings him into existence? Why is he brought into existence? What is his ultimate end in coming? Is his return to the very thing from which he issued (*sadar*), or to its like, if it is correct to speak of likeness? What is wanted from him in an absolute sense, in regard only to the Universal Divine Will? What is wanted from him at each particular moment . . . ?³⁹

The answer to the fourth question, "How does he come into existence?" has already been provided in summary fashion. In what

follows, a few points relevant to the present discussion will be gleaned from al-Qūnawī's answer.

In brief, al-Qūnawī describes how the Human-Divine Reality becomes clothed successively in all the possibilities of outward manifestation contained within itself. Since this Reality embraces the whole range of existents, each of which becomes outwardly manifest in an ontological level appropriate to its own reality, the realities encompassed by the Human Reality are displayed successively (though not necessarily in a temporal order)⁴⁰ in keeping with the Circle of Being. And since each successive manifestation of an ontological reality represents the actualization of a perfection latent in the Human Reality, this Reality's apparent "descent" — which from one point of view manifests itself as the descent of the soul into the body — is in fact an ascent toward the realization of the full perfection of the True Man (*al-insān al-ḥaqīqī*).

Al-Qūnawī draws certain conclusions from these considerations which at first sight might seem to be at odds with his emphasis upon the practical discipline and ascetic devotions that Sufi adepts must undergo. But in keeping with the Islamic perspective in general, Sufism has always acknowledged the positive good manifested by the world. Al-Qūnawī even criticizes those latter-day philosophers (*muta'akkhherī al-ḥukamā'*) who

blame the world of Nature (*al-tabiʿat*), describing it as darkness and turbidity, and seeking to escape from its properties and cast off its attributes. They do not know that it is impossible to succeed in such a course, that every perfection that man attains after departing from this natural plane is a result and fruit of the spirit's companionship with the natural body, and that after departure man is transferred from the forms of Nature to the worlds that manifest Nature's subtle essences (*ṭaiʿat*); there the generality of the felicitous will attain to the vision of God promised by the Divine Law and called the greatest of God's blessings upon the people of Paradise. So how can it be permissible for a reality upon which the contemplation of God depends to be looked upon with contempt?⁴¹

In answering the fourth question referred to above, al-Qūnawī first recalls that man's origin lies at the level of the Beginningless

Divine Knowledge, where he is entified as one possibility of outward manifestation. But,

from the moment that man becomes a receptacle for his first ontological form . . . by undergoing supraformal transferal (*al-tanaqqul al-maʿnawī*) from existence within Knowledge to existence within the entified universe, he experiences transmutations (*taqallubāt*) within the forms of the existents stage after stage, and he is transferred from form to form. For man these transferals and transformations are an ascent (*ʿurūj*) and a wayfaring (*sulūk*), starting from the Presence of the Divine Unseen — i.e., . . . the Station of the Divine Knowledge. Through them man achieves the perfection for which he was made worthy and which is required by his immutable entity's universal preparedness (*al-istirāʿād al-kullīyyah*).⁴²

After discussing the role of the Divine Names in causing the descent of the Generating Command, al-Qūnawī describes how "that thing whose existence is desired [by the Divine Will] (*al-shayʿ al-murād wujūdih*)" appears first at the level of the Pen, and then at that of the Tablet. "That thing" is referred to, not "man," since what becomes outwardly manifest is not man himself but a particular reality embraced by his universal reality.

Then [that thing] continues to descend, passing over each Presence, borrowing the descriptions of each and becoming colored by its property; all the while it maintains its own essential (*dhātī*), Unseen, archetypally-entified attributes which it actualized through its first existence [in Knowledge]. Thus it continues to ascend by means of descent until the form of its materia becomes entified within the womb. Here its production (*intishāʿ*) and differentiation (*tamayyuz*) achieve totality. But it never ceases to undergo transferal in various states in this manner until its plane is perfected and its full stature is achieved.⁴³

Through this descent into the ontological levels, the reality that is becoming outwardly manifest gradually leaves the world of luminosity (*nūrāniyyah*) and noncompositeness (*basāṭih*) pertaining to spiritual existence and enters into the darkness (*zohmah*) and composition (*tarkīb*) that pertains to things of the sensory world. The world of image-exemplars is still luminous and subtle (*latīf*) in

relation to the grossness (*kathāfah*) of what lies below, but in order to act as an intermediary between the spirits and the corporeal-bodies it must possess a certain degree of composition like the latter. Then the celestial spheres are still more composite, while the four elements and the minerals, plants, and animals represent succeeding stages of greater composition and complexity. Hence the journey through these levels is called the "ascent of composition" (*ʿurūj al-tarkīb*).

Then, through the process of casting off (*insitāk*) [i.e., discarding the accidents, states, and attributes it had acquired through formal composition]), the thing [whose existence is desired] turns back in its ascent toward the supraformal composition that the gnostics (*al-ʿarjūn*) attain in their spiritual wayfaring. . . . This is called the "spiritual ascent of decomposition" (*mīʾrāj al-tahīl*). For the gnostic travels toward the Upper World, and from the time he separates himself from the earth he never passes by any element, Presence, or celestial sphere without discarding within it the corresponding part, i.e., the part that he had acquired when he first came. Thus he obeys God's words: "God commands you to deliver trusts back to their owners" (*Koran* IV 58).

He discards these parts as follows: his spirit turns away from the part and from loving attachment to governing it;⁴⁴ the property of the affinity (*munāsabah*) between him and that thing is weakened because the essential relationship between him and God predominates — for he is ascending toward Him and in the process he turns the face of his heart in His direction.

Then, when he attains to union with the Presence of the Divine Essence without having travelled any distance,⁴⁵ . . . nothing remains with him but the Divine Mystery (*al-sirr al-ilahī* [i.e., his archetypal entity]), which became actualized and established when God first turned His Attentiveness toward him [i.e., when God "manifested Himself to Himself in theophany" through the First Entification].⁴⁶

Al-Qūnawī sometimes refers to the "Divine Mystery" as the "Specific Face" (*al-wajh al-khāṣṣ*), i.e., the specific Face of God turned toward a given existent. Thus one meaning of the Koranic verse, "Everything is perishing except His Face" (XXVIII 88) is that all the outward manifestations of man's immutable entity, everything

"other than God (*ghayr*)," will ultimately pass away, while man's reality with God remains eternally. Man's Specific Face represents a direct ontological nexus with God that never changes, while the "orderly chain of intermediaries" (*silsilat al-tarīq wa'l-wasā'iq*) signifies his indirect connection to Him by means of the Circle of Being.

Having returned to his Origin through the spiritual path, man may now be sent back into the world as a guide for other men through a "supraformal composition corresponding to the decomposition" that he underwent in his ascent. In any case, his earthly plane will be dissolved at the death of his body so that the next world may come into being from it.⁴⁷

In a passage surprising for the length to which he takes the analysis, al-Qūnawī contrasts the journey of the Perfect Men through the Circle of Being with that of those human beings who do not actualize the full range of potentialities embraced by the Divine-Human Reality. It must be remembered here that al-Qūnawī is discussing the manifestation of the Divine Mystery, or the particular archetypal entity of a given human being, which displays each ontological perfection that it contains within the particular level appropriate to that perfection. Thus, for example, the Divine Mystery becomes manifest at the level of each of the descending heavens and even at the level of the elements: its journey "courses through the elements in a manner that has an affinity to them."⁴⁸

If he is a Perfect Man, when he enters the world of the three kingdoms, his journey will be unitary (*ahad*). In other words, the first plant, for example, within which he becomes manifest, will be free of all corrupting impediments until it reaches its full growth at its own level. Or rather, he would normally become manifest in the most perfect species of plant that exists in the place appropriate to his spiritual reality and his station, or in the place which is the residence of his parents. Then God will send to the plant whomsoever He will. This person will pick it, for example, and cause it to reach the parents or one of them. Or else the parents themselves will pick it from the first. Then they will eat that plant's form in the time appropriate to his level and to the level of the Command within which he is included. . . . Then that plant will be transformed into digested food, then blood, then sperm. It will become connected to the bodies of the parents in a manner that causes it to rise from the level of the plant kingdom and

the mineral kingdom to the level of the animal kingdom. Finally the material of his form will become entified and transferred from the loins to the womb. This is the first all-comprehensive entification which he undergoes, the first instance in which the All-Comprehensive Name manifests its properties within him by dominating over him. In the speed of his transferal from the mineral to the plant kingdom, you can behold the speed of his transferal from the mineral to the plant kingdom. The levels are interrelated; no barriers separate them except isthmuses conceived by the mind.

The Holy Book refers to these stages with its words, "Then a lodging-place, and a temporary deposit" (*Koran* VI 99). The beginning of the lodging-place is the womb, while what precedes it pertains to the station of the temporary deposit. In a similar manner God said, "And We lodge within the wombs what We will, till a stated term" (*Koran* XXII 5).

Then he will grow in the womb and be transferred in the manner well-known and described in the physical sciences, until he appears within the World of the Visible. Then he rises until he reaches the Station of Perfection in the manner that was mentioned.

But if destiny places obstacles in his path, after entering the plant kingdom afflictions will overcome him and the plant will be ruined before it reaches completion or is eaten. So he will be separated from the plant kingdom. Then he will return to it at another time, sooner or later. Or he may be afflicted because he becomes joined to a base plant, far from equilibrium, which would never be eaten by any animal. Or, if an animal eats it, then perhaps the animal will perish, so he can also be separated from the plant kingdom in this way. Or he could be overcome by some affliction after becoming connected to the world of plants in the sense that an animal eat the plant, but then the animal perishes before it is eaten by a man. Or he will be prevented from transferring from that animal to the human stage by some obstacle. Or the human who eats it may die before a material becomes entified within him, so it will be dissolved and lost. Then it will return to the animal level.

Such will be his case for a second time, or for many times. If his entering and leaving is repeated a great deal and he continues to clash with the faculties and characteristics deposited within the levels through which he passes and the materials in which he becomes

clothed — that is, as a result of the corruption of the various forms he assumes and the repetition of his coming and going — then he acquires the supraternal qualities deposited within these things [i.e., he will be dominated by the particular Names that determine these things]. If the characteristic that predominates is the most praiseworthy and appropriate, he will profit from this, but in what follows he will meet hardship and difficult struggle. But if the predominating property is not praiseworthy or appropriate, his knowledge and remembrance (*zahrakur*) of the levels of his existence and his transformations will be less. Or rather, often these things will be completely hidden from him. But to the extent that repetition and opposing qualities are less, remembrance will be returned to him more quickly, and Opening and the Way will be made easy for him. The divine mystery referred to as the "Sure Foot" (*Koran* X 2), "Beginningless Grace," the "Coming of Theophany" and the like is fundamental in all this.

If the properties of the levels have not colored him to the extent that they conceal the Mystery of Unity and the property of the aforementioned Coming, then that Mystery will dominate over him. This is referred to in God's words, "God dominates over His Command" (*Koran* XII 21). But if the coloring of the levels and Presences veil the Divine Mystery and its property, then his situation will be ruled by the property that dominates in this state. For, as you have already come to know, man is composed of different and disparate parts and from harmonious realities and faculties. But the most excellent thing within him is the Divine Mystery, which is the theophany of the Specific Face. . . .⁴⁹

When the Divine Mystery becomes colored by the properties it passes through, it divides in one respect into three kinds:

(1) In the first kind, the qualities and garments [i.e., the properties of the levels] are related to it in the same way that accidental attributes are related to the object to which they are ascribed. This is because the Mystery possesses an excellent and strong priority in God's Presence, a priority called the "sure foot," "grace," etc. If this grace prepares the Mystery to gain a balanced relationship with the states of what it passes through, and if the states of the spiritual Presences and the celestial stations are also balanced [in relation to it] — so that the Spirits and the celestial faculties will turn their attentiveness toward the Mystery in a manner that is equilibrating and harmonious, free from the properties of both sides — then the

person who is the form and locus of manifestation for the Mystery will become one of the Attracted (*al-majdhubn*), or someone not in need of many works and difficult ascetic practices, like the Prophet and whomsoever God wants of his family and the saints.

(2) In the second kind the qualities [and properties of the levels which the Divine Mystery passes through] are related to their possessor like established accidents and intrinsic attributes. This is because, during its journey, the Command comes to be dominated by the property of the Name "Lord" (*rabb*) [which nourishes — *tarbiyah* — whatever it touches], in contrast to the first case [where the All-Comprehensive Name dominates]. The second kind's priority in God's Presence possesses a high excellence and strong power, while it has a certain balance in the states and properties referred to. If a person of the second kind is helped by the Divine Grace and predestination, he may become one of the Perfect Men; otherwise he will become a person of intermediate spiritual attainment (*mutawassit*). But he can attain these ranks only after great effort and painful asceticism, if God wills.

(3) In the third kind the properties of the garments and qualities become firmly rooted, while at the beginning of entification in the Presence of God there will be no coloring by the property of Grace. He will meet and become colored by the properties of the Presences he passes through in an incomplete manner. The properties that accrue to him from the Spirits and the celestial spheres will be unbalanced, for the moment will not help him to travel the Path, and he will exert little effort in purifying himself from veiling attributes and nonharmonious accidents. So he will become one of the veiled and the wretched, outside of the circle of the People of Grace.

When a person of either of the first two kinds reaches maturity and full stature, his ascent will reverse itself to begin the casting off [of properties and attributes] in the spiritual ascent of decomposition, so that he can undertake the Second Composition, which the gnostics attain here after Opening. When man passes beyond the first ascent — which seems outwardly to be a decline and debasement in relation to what is understood by the words "the fairest stature" (*Koran* XCIV 4) — he is transferred to the second [that of composition].

So through his Lord man produces for himself other planes, the first universal one of which is the Plane of the Isthmus. That is followed by the two planes of the Mustering and the Endless Garden. Each of these four planes [i.e., these three and the elemental human plane] is

in a certain respect the result of that which preceded it. This fact is alluded to by the words, "You shall surely ride stage after stage" (*Koran* LXXXIV 19), i.e., each state is born from the one preceding it. I said "in a certain respect" because in all the planes there is a permanent and unchanging Command within which these changes take place; it is the reality of man, the substance and leaven of his planes, the locus of manifestation for God's Immutably Being, and the Divine Mystery.

The journey and ascent that people undergo — sometimes from stage to stage and plane to plane, and sometimes within a certain plane in keeping with their interrelationship with it . . . is of several kinds:

Some people do not complete the ontological circle, because of the insufficiency of their preparedness. Such a person is referred to by the words, "We restored them to the lowest of the low" (*Koran* XCV 5), because he traveled half the circle, or only part of it.

The first group of those who complete the circle "shall have a wage unfailing" (*Koran* XCV 7), because the end of their supraformal ascent — which appears outwardly to be a decline — becomes joined with the second, decompositional ascent, in order that their second plane may become compounded from and within this world. For the Plane of the Isthmus is the result of the state of this world, as we have already indicated; it makes no difference whether the person who produces this plane through his states understands this fact or not.

But the contemplative gnostic who achieves verification is provided with complete and correct presence (*muẓīr*) [i.e., with God!]; he is totally alive to and aware of the abodes to which he is transferred and within which he moves from stage to stage. He truly knows their properties and all the planes that God produces for him and through him in the worlds.

As for him whose soul is interrelated with his body in such a way that he is prevented from actualizing the perfection for the sake of which man was given a human preparedness . . . he will remain in the "lowest of the low." His transferal and journey will take place in the abodes through which he was destined to pass. He will become clothed in attributes and states in keeping with the characteristics that God deposited in those abodes and worlds and in keeping with the characteristics of his own plane and its effects upon him. In all of this he will not know the transformation he is undergoing, nor that to which his Command will return. The perfection specific to him within this worldly abode will be that at which he arrives with his last breath before he dies. . . .

So the Command is a circle, and the journey is circular, not linear. Whoever is predestined to complete it will complete and perfect his wayfaring. Then he will begin to travel a second, Divine Cycle, which begins from the time he views things in God and truly knows the One Being of God after direct vision. This is the first degree of sanctity⁵⁰

Next al-Qūnawī discusses in detail the various kinds of saints in keeping with the level of perfection that they realize. Finally he returns to those who remain imperfect:

The incomplete journeying which we mentioned is of two kinds: the first is an imperfection before the completion and perfection of the journey in the first circle; such a person is an "animal man." The second is an imperfection specific to the intermediaries, those who have been given a certain measure of perfection but have not yet attained to its completion. Between these two are diverse degrees⁵¹

The Human Soul

Al-Qūnawī devotes relatively little attention to exposing the nature of the human or rational soul as such (*al-nafs al-insāniyyah*, *al-nāfiqah*), which in one work he alludes to as the "divine spirit" (*rūh-e ilāhī*) and the "Lord-like subtle reality" (*latīfa-ye rabbānī*).⁵² One of the few passages where he discusses the soul in some detail is found in *al-Hādīyah*, his reply to Nasīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī,⁵³ where he states that the inability of the Peripatetic philosophers to grasp the soul's true nature derives from the limitations of rational speculation. When he does express his views on the soul, he usually refers to it in terms of the various levels of man's spiritual perfection. The following passage from *al-Nafahāt* provides the gist of his remarks to al-Tūsī:

The first perfection of the animal spirit is for it to become colored by the attributes of the rational soul. The first perfection of the particular rational soul is to actualize the description (*wasf*) of the guardian of the first heaven, who is called "Ismā'īl" in religious language and the "agent intellect" in philosophy. The particular soul's intermediate

perfection is to actualize the description and gain the properties of the Universal Soul in a manner that will allow it to pass beyond it to the level of the First Intellect or Universal Spirit; finally it reaches union (*itihad*) with and absorption (*istihlak*) by the Presence of God. This occurs when the property of uncreatedness (*haqqiyah* [i.e., the Specific Face]) dominates over createdness (*khalqiyah*), and the characteristic of possible existence (*imkan*) and delimitation are overcome by the properties of Necessary Existence (*wujūd*).⁵⁴

Al-Qūnawī describes the soul's descent in terms thoroughly reminiscent of Neoplatonic teachings only in one passage in his works, where he explains the symbolism of Jonah and the "fish" (the soul and the body) in connection with his commentary on chapter 18 of Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. The key to understanding the connection between this passage and man's circular ascent lies perhaps in the concept of "preparedness" (*istirādā*), a term that denotes the extent to which an entity is able to act as a receptacle for the ontological perfections represented by the Divine Names. In chapter 15 of the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn al-ʿArabī discusses the preparedness in the context of the manifestation of the spirit, whose outstanding ontological attribute is life (here it should be recalled that Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers consider the Name the "Living" [*al-ḥayy*] as the first of the "Seven Leaders" [*al-ʿimmat al-sabʿah*], i.e., the primary Names of the Divinity). Spirit — or Life — can only display its perfections within existence when a receptacle has acquired a sufficient preparedness. "Do you not see that God's breathing [of the spirit] into bodies made ready (*muṣawwā* [to receive it]) . . . is to the measure of that which is breathed into?"⁵⁵

Once the scattered reflections of the Divine Mystery have been gathered together into a certain equilibrium through the ascent of composition, they act as a receptacle for the spirit, first in its vegetative and then in its animal mode. Finally, when the outward human form becomes actualized, the spirit is able to manifest itself in a relatively complete sense. All the varying degrees of human perfection represent ascending degrees of its manifestation and realization. Ultimately man may even pass beyond the spirit's ontological level.

But from the point of view of the soul considered as a spiritual entity possessing self-awareness before its attachment to the body, the

situation appears in another light; this is one of the points that al-Qūnawī wants to explain below. It should be noted that the soul is necessarily limited in its knowledge because of its not yet having actualized the all-comprehensiveness of the human state. In this respect its situation is similar to that of the angels, whose curtailed vision caused them to object to God's creation of man. He replied to them, "Assuredly I know what you know not" (*Koran* II 30).⁵⁶

In origin human souls arose from the universal supernal spirits that the philosophers call "intellects," which the souls strongly resemble in diverse respects, including non-composition and everlasting subsistence. Hence the souls think that once they become connected (*taʿalluq*) to the corporeal bodies in respect of governance (*taḍbīr*) and control (*taḥakkam*), they will not become delimited (*taqyīd*) or lovingly attached (*taʿshshuq*), and whenever they desire, they can turn away from governing and be dependent like the spirits from which they arose. But they neglect the decline (*muzīl*) of their own degree in this matter from that of those spirits and also their lack of independence from having a connection and governing. So they grow accustomed to their bodies and become colored by the properties of their constitutions to the extent the latter effect them, just as they have had an effect upon the latter. They develop a loving attachment to their bodies, and their companionship with them increases their delimitation. Then God shows them their incapacity and inadequacy to reach the degree of the Spirits by means of whom He had brought them into existence. They see their own poverty and loving attachment, so they turn back, balking themselves to God in humility and inherent need from the direction in which there is no intermediary between Him and them. God answers their call and gives them succor from Himself with a strength and a light by which they raise their view to that which God wants to disclose to them of His sacred Presences and the subtleties of His sublime mysteries. Their loving attachment is reflected back upon that Most Sacred Presence, and they become united to it. By means of this union, which removes the properties of intermediaries, they actualize something that allows them to be ranked among the Possessors of Strength and Vision. A closed door is opened to them, and their governance becomes absolute, nondelimited by any specific form exclusive of another. On the contrary, they actualize a power and perfection enabling them to govern diverse forms at one time without loving attachment or delimitation.⁵⁷ Grace may even bestow upon them such mighty rank that they disdain

stopping within the levels of the sublime spirits to be like them; for they observe a beauty manifesting itself to them from behind the gate of the Specific Face, the gate that has been opened for them between themselves and their Creator, and they gain certain things from their Lord in this respect. From the blessing of what they attain there courses through their outward forms — by whose governance they had been delimited — powers and lights that pervade and extend into all existents of the Lower and the Upper worlds. Through their all-comprehensive unity they begin to maintain — in respect of that outward form through whose governance they had been delimited — the formal disparity actualized and established among all the existents, at the level of form and meaning and of spirits and imagination.⁵⁸

Notes

1. See W. Chittick, "The Last Will and Testament of Ibn al-ʿArabi's Foremost Disciple and Some Notes on its Author," *Sophia Perennis* 41, 1978, 43-58; also Chittick and P. L. Wilson, *Fakhriddin 'Iraqi: Divine Flashes*, New York, 1982, passim.
2. In spite of his sympathy for philosophy, al-Qunawi considered it defective and perhaps even dangerous; this is undoubtedly why he willed that his own books on philosophy should be sold, while the rest, mainly on religious subjects, literature, and medicine, should be made into an endowment (Chittick, "Last Will," 53). Nevertheless, at least one of his manuscripts on *falsafah* is preserved in his own handwriting: Suhrawardi's *Hikmat al-ishraq* along with Muhammad al-Razi's *Lubab al-isharāt wa'l-tahbīhāt* (copied in 640/1242-3; Yusuf Aga Library, Konya, no. 5544). A. Atesç describes some 25 works from al-Qunawi's personal library ("Konya kütüphanelerind bulunan bazı mühim yazınalar," *Belleter* 16, 1952, 49-130), while I. H. Konyali lists 162 works that existed in his *waqf* in the year 881/1476 (*Konya tarih*), Konya, 1964, 501-3).
3. See W. Chittick, "Mysticism versus Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History: The al-Tūsī, al-Qunawī Correspondence," *Religious Studies* 17, 1981, 87-104.
4. *Nafahāt al-ums*, ed. M. Tawhidipūr, Tehran, 1336/1957, 556.
5. I repeat that my purpose here is only to present the Sufis' own point of view, not to defend it. Especially because of a certain claim to "privileged" knowledge, the Sufis have been looked upon at least with suspicion by most legalists or exotericists (*ahl al-zāhir*) since early

times. Hence almost any Sufi text aimed at a wider audience than only practicing adepts has emphasized the fundamentally Islamic nature of Sufism.

6. That al-Qunawī directed a spiritual order is well known; see, for example, the works mentioned in the first note. One of his treatises deals explicitly with the method of concentration that his disciples should employ. The two titles by which it is most commonly known indicate its nature: *al-Risālat al-hādīyat al-murshidiyyah* (the treatise giving guidance and spiritual directives); *Tariq al-tawajjuh al-alam* (the way of the most complete attentiveness). This is the only one of al-Qunawī's works that was translated into Persian at an early date, probably during his lifetime, a fact that may indicate that at least some of his followers were concerned only with practice, not theory.
7. On Sufi "psychology" see W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, Albany, forthcoming, part III.
8. See "Mysticism vs. Philosophy."
9. Al-Qunawī discerns five broad categories of unveiling, depending on the ontological level where it takes place (ms. 1633 in the Konya Mevlana Müzesi, folio 118b). Cf. his discussion of the five "faces" (*wajih*) of the heart, *al-Fukūk*, Tehran, 1315/1897-98, 246-47; partly translated in *Fakhriddin 'Iraqi*, 162.
10. A. Badawī, *Aflūn 'ind al-ʿarab*, Cairo, 1966, 22; S. J. Ashūyānī, *Uhlūjiyā*, Tehran, 1976, 35.
11. *Al-Nafahāt al-ilāhiyyah*, Tehran, 1316/1898-99, 21. In this work, whose title means "Breaths of Divine Inspiration," many such visions and unveilings are recounted.
12. This reservation needs to be made, since according to al-Qunawī one type of unveiling involves unification (*iṭihād*) with the First Intellect. In *al-Hādīyah*, his reply to Nasir al-Dīn al-Tūsī (see "Mysticism vs. Philosophy"), al-Qunawī discusses this point and remarks, *inter alia*, "Intellects are bounded to the extent that they are delimited by their own thoughts. Thus they may judge that many things are impossible. But when a person's intellect roams freely without delimitation by such bounds, then he will know that those things are possible or even necessary, for nondelimited intellects are not hemmed in by any boundary that might stop them. On the contrary, they ascend constantly and receive instruction from super aspects and Divine Presences."
13. See "Mysticism vs. Philosophy," 95.
14. *Fijāz al-bayān fi tafsīr umm al-Qur'ān*, Hyderabad-Deccan, 2nd edition, 1368/1949, 12-14; also published as *al-Tafsīr al-sūfī li'l-Qur'ān*, ed. A. A. Akāfī, Cairo, 1389/1969, 110-13.

15. *Shifā'*. It is certainly no accident that in alluding to the limitations of Peripatetic philosophy, al-Qūnawī employs the name of Avicenna's magnum opus.
16. *Al-muhqiqūn*, i.e., those who have realized and actualized the Truth. Al-Qūnawī calls his own teachings the "way of verification" (*madhhab al-tahqīq*).
17. Here al-Qūnawī alludes to a hadith: "Verily your Lord has breaths of His Mercy in the days of your time — so expose yourselves to them!" Al-Qūnawī comments on the significance of this saying in his *Sharh al-hadīth* (no. 29; Istanbul mss. include Sgehid Ali Pasça 138/2, 1369/1, 1371/2, 1394/2; Crh. 2085/7, 2097/6; Hacl Mahmud 574; Ibrahim Ef. 870/1); the same long passage occurs at the beginning of his *al-Nafahāt al-ihlāsiyyah* (3 ff.), whose title is based on the hadith. The inherent weaknesses of human language are discussed by al-Qūnawī in the introduction to *Fjāz al-bayān*, 15/114 ff.; he quotes the same passage in his correspondence with al-Tūsī (see "Mysticism vs. Philosophy").
19. See W. Chittick, "Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī on the Oneness of Being," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 21, 1981, 171-84; also *Fakhraddin 'Iraqi*, 6 ff.
20. See "Oneness of Being," and especially *Fakhruddin 'Iraqi*, 17 ff.
21. See *Fakhruddin 'Iraqi*, 11.
22. See *ibid.*, 12 ff.; also W. Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qūnawī to al-Qaysarī," *Muslim World*, forthcoming.
23. Al-Qūnawī's most detailed discussion of the production of the four succeeding Presences from the first occurs in *Miftāh al-ghayb*, on the margin of al-Fanārī's *Miftāh al-ins*, Tehran, 1323/1905-6, 161 ff., where he describes the four levels of "marriage" (*nikāh*): The four "Keys to the Unseen," divine Names known only to God, interrelate and as a result produce the World of Meanings (= the World of Knowledge). The meanings in turn "marry" and give birth to the World of the Spirits, etc. See also *Fjāz al-bayān*, 78 ff./185 ff. and *Sharh al-hadīth*, no. 22.
24. See *Ibn al-'Arabī: The Bezels of Wisdom*, tr. R. W. J. Austin, New York, 1980, chapter 11; also *Fakhruddin 'Iraqi*, 149-50.
25. See *al-Nafahāt*, 81; *Miftāh al-ghayb*, 271-74; and especially *Fjāz al-bayān*, 85-106/205-13, 136 ff./246 ff.
26. *Miftāh al-ghayb*, 69-70, 225-26; *al-Fuḳūk*, 190; *Fjāz al-bayān*, 197-98/310-11. For certain correspondences between the Presences and the Circle, see al-Qūnawī's short Persian treatise in ms. 1633, Konya Mevlana Müzesi, f. 118b. The diagram is oversimplified and does not take into account other data which would give a conflicting picture of

- the ascending arc, e.g., the fact that from one point of view Paradise is "located" between the Throne and the Footstool (*Sharh al-hadīth*, no. 21; cf. the worlds of al-Qūnawī's disciple al-Farghanī in *Muntahā'l-madārik*, Cairo, 1293/1876, 57).
27. I have provided some details on this teaching in *Fakhruddin 'Iraqi*, especially pp. 11-26.
28. Other important synonymous terms are "things" (*ashyā'*) and "quiddities" (*māhiyyāt*).
29. *Al-Nafahāt*, 80-81.
30. *Ibid.*, 85.
31. *Ibid.*, 84.
32. See, for example, *Ibn al-'Arabī*, 68.
33. *Fjāz al-bayān*, 43-44/145-46.
34. *Ibid.*, 298-99/417.
35. *Fjāz al-bayān*, 270-71/386-87.
36. *Ibid.*, 300-418.
37. One significant point to remember is that the Perfect Man passes beyond this life first through the "voluntary death" (*al-mawt al-ikhīyārī*) of the spiritual path, then through the physical death of the body.
38. P. 287.
39. *Miftāh al-ghayb*, 282-83.
40. *Sharh al-hadīth*, no. 20. Cf. *Tabṣirat al-mubtadī wa tadkīrat al-muntahā*, ed. and transl. by W. Chittick, forthcoming, section III/1, where al-Qūnawī explains in simple religious language that the things of this world are not blameworthy, only man's attachment to them. Al-Qūnawī's disciple al-Farghānī makes a special point of recalling this to the reader in the midst of a similar discussion. *Mashāriq al-darārī*, ed. S. J. Ashīyānī, Mashhad, 1357/1968, 33; cf. his *Muntahā'l-madārik*, 6.
42. *Miftāh*, 294; on the "universal" and "particular" preparednesses, see *Fakhruddin 'Iraqi*, 151.
43. *Miftāh*, 295.
44. On the "loving attachment" (*ta'ashshuq*) of the soul to the body, see below.
45. According to the well-known Sufi saying, "None knows God but God." That which "enters into union" with God had never left God in the first place — it is the Divine Mystery mentioned in the next sentence. Each of the outward manifestations of this Mystery, e.g., man's body, soul, and spirit, remains at the ontological level proper to it.

Miftāh, 295-96. On the First Entification, see *Fakhriddīn 'Irāqī*, 11. In this whole discussion al-Qūnawī derives a good deal of inspiration from Ibn al-ʿArabī, but as in so many other instances (e.g., the Perfect Man, Oneness of Being, the Five Divine Presences), he clarifies Ibn al-ʿArabī's underlying idea by bringing out its implications and giving it a coherent and logical structure. Although Ibn al-ʿArabī often alludes to the spiritual ascent of decomposition, his clearest explanation seems to be provided by the following passage (cf. the valuable study of his technical terminology by S. al-Ḥakīm, *al-Muʿjam al-sūfī*, Beirut, 1981, 571-79): "When God desires to cause the spiritual ascent of some of the inheritors of His messengers or some of His saints . . .

[He makes them ascend] such that their composition dissolves (*halli tarkibuhum*). Through this ascent He gives them cognizance of everything that corresponds to them in each world; this He does by making them pass over the various kinds of composite and noncomposite worlds. The spirit of such a person discards in each world everything in his essence that corresponds to it. The form of his discarding is as follows: God lets down a veil between him and what he discards of himself in that kind of world so that he no longer sees [what he discarded], while he continues to contemplate what remains with him, until finally he subsists in the Divine Mystery, which is the Specific Face that God had turned toward him . . ." (*al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah*, Beirut, n.d., III, 343.12-22; cf. 344-12 ff.). For other references, see al-Ḥakīm, *al-Muʿjam*, op cit.; also *al-Furūḡhāt al-makkiyyah*, ed. ʿU. Yahyā, Cairo, 1972 ff., III, 92 (with further reference to the Divine Mystery). Ibn al-ʿArabī employs the term *mīrāj al-tahīl* in *al-Anwār*, published in his *Rasāʾil*, Hyderabad-Deccan, 1948, 9; translated by R. Harris as *Journey to the Lord of Power*, New York, 1981, 39 ("ascent of dissolution").

Miftāh, 296. On the "production" (*inhishāʾ*) of the next world from this, see below; also *al-Najfahāt*, 114-17.

Miftāh, 297.

Ibid., 297-98. A clear distinction is drawn here between the Divine Mystery and the Specific Face, even if, in essence, they are identical. The Specific Face is man's reality in divinity; the Divine Mystery is that same reality as it becomes manifest outwardly through "theophany," or God's Self-Manifestation. Hence the Divine Mystery appears in different forms according to the ontological level at which it displays the Specific Face.

Ibid., 300-301.

Ibid., 302.

The Persian *Tabṣīrat al-mubtadi wa tadhkīrat al-muntahā*, section III/2.

53. See n. 12.

54. P. 109.

55. W. Chittick, Ibn al-ʿArabī's own summary of the *Fuṣūṣ*: "The Imprint of the Bezels of Wisdom," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabī Society* 1, 1982, 70; cf. *Ibn al-ʿArabī*, chapter 15.

56. See Ibn al-ʿArabī's comments on this verse, *Ibn al-ʿArabī*, 52, and especially al-Farḡhānī's remarks, *Muntaha'l-madarik*, 67-71, and *Mashāriq al-darārī*, 47-49; cf. al-Qūnawī, *F'jāz al-bayān*, 270-386, and *al-Fukūk*, 197-98.

57. Cf. the fifth question al-Qūnawī poses to al-Ṭūsī, where he implies his own realization of such a station. He also says explicitly that he has experienced the "disengagement" (*tajrīd*) of his soul from his body. Al-Ṭūsī writes in his reply, "Cutting off (*inqiṭāʿ*) the soul's connection to the body before death is impossible, since its governance of it is a connection. But it is possible for the soul to become independent (*istighnāʾ*) of the connection while the connection still exists. This is actualized by the People of Perfection when they turn toward the next world and away from this; you yourself — God extend your days — have experienced this in yourself and witnessed it in others. The reason for it is that human souls reach perfection through intellectual perceptions. . . . So they have no need for the body. For such men death is the great victory and supreme felicity."

58. *Al-Fukūk*, 276-77; quoted by Jāmi in *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ*, ed. W. Chittick, Tehran, 1977, 242-43. The Perfect Man preserves the order of the universe and maintains the separation between the created and the Uncreated. Cf. al-Qūnawī, *F'jāz al-bayān*, 126 ff./234 ff.; also Chittick, "Ibn al-ʿArabī's own Summary," 38-40.

46. *Miftāh*, 295-96. On the First Entification, see *Fakhruddin 'Iraqi*, 11. In this whole discussion al-Qūnawī derives a good deal of inspiration from Ibn al-'Arabī, but as in so many other instances (e.g., the Perfect Man, Oneness of Being, the Five Divine Presences), he clarifies Ibn al-'Arabī's underlying idea by bringing out its implications and giving it a coherent and logical structure. Although Ibn al-'Arabī often alludes to the spiritual ascent of decomposition, his clearest explanation seems to be provided by the following passage (cf. the valuable study of his technical terminology by S. al-Ḥakīm, *al-Ma'jam al-sūfī*, Beirut, 1981, 571-79): "When God desires to cause the spiritual ascent of some of the inheritors of His messengers or some of His saints . . . [He makes them ascend] such that their composition dissolves (*ihāl tarkibūhum*). Through this ascent He gives them cognizance of everything that corresponds to them in each world; this He does by making them pass over the various kinds of composite and noncomposite worlds. The spirit of such a person discards in each world everything in his essence that corresponds to it. The form of his discarding is as follows: God lets down a veil between him and what he discards of himself in that kind of world so that he no longer sees [what he discarded], while he continues to contemplate what remains with him, until finally he subsists in the Divine Mystery, which is the Specific Face that God had turned toward him . . ." (*al-Fuṭūḥāt al-makkiyyah*, Beirut, n.d., III, 343.12-22; cf. 344-12 ff.). For other references, see al-Ḥakīm, *al-Ma'jam*, op cit.; also *al-Fuṭūḥāt al-makkiyyah*, ed. 'U. Yahyā, Cairo, 1972 ff., III, 92 (with further reference to the Divine Mystery). Ibn al-'Arabī employs the term *mi'rāj al-tahīlī* in *al-Anwār*, published in his *Rasā'il*, Hyderabad-Deccan, 1948, 9; translated by R. Harris as *Journey to the Lord of Power*, New York, 1981, 39 ("ascent of dissolution").
47. *Miftāh*, 296. On the "production" (*intishā'*) of the next world from this, see below; also *al-Nafahāt*, 114-17.
48. *Miftāh*, 297.
49. *Ibid*, 297-98. A clear distinction is drawn here between the Divine Mystery and the Specific Face, even if, in essence, they are identical. The Specific Face is man's reality *in divinis*; the Divine Mystery is that same reality as it becomes manifest outwardly through "theophany," or God's Self-Manifestation. Hence the Divine Mystery appears in different forms according to the ontological level at which it displays the Specific Face.
50. *Ibid*, 300-301.
51. *Ibid*, 302.
52. The Persian *Tabṣirat al-mubtadi' wa tadkīrat al-muntahā'*, section III/2.
53. See n. 12.
54. P. 109.
55. W. Chittick, Ibn al-'Arabī's own summary of the *Fuṣūṣ*: "The Impri of the Bezels of Wisdom," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 1, 1982, 70; cf. *Ibn al-'Arabī*, chapter 15.
56. See Ibn al-'Arabī's comments on this verse, *Ibn al-'Arabī*, 52, at especially al-Farghānī's remarks, *Muntaha'l-mudārīk*, 67-71, at *Mashāriq al-darārī*, 47-49; cf. al-Qūnawī, *F'jāz al-bayān*, 270-386, at *al-Fuṭūḥ*, 197-98.
57. Cf. the fifth question al-Qūnawī poses to al-Ṭūsī, where he implies his own realization of such a station. He also says explicitly that he has experienced the "disengagement" (*taṭīr*) of his soul from his body. Al-Ṭūsī writes in his reply, "Cutting off (*inqiṭā'*) the soul's connection to the body before death is impossible, since its governance of it is connection. But it is possible for the soul to become independent (*istiḥnā'*) of the connection while the connection still exists. This actualized by the People of Perfection when they turn toward the world and away from this; you yourself — God extend your days — have experienced this in yourself and witnessed it in others. The reason for it is that human souls reach perfection through intellectual perceptions. . . . So they have no need for the body. For such a death is the great victory and supreme felicity."
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