

The Recovery of Human Nature*

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My purpose here is to look at human nature through the lens of the Islamic intellectual tradition. By *intellectual tradition* I mean the more sophisticated expositions of Islamic teachings found in the books of those Muslim scholars known to modern historians as “philosophers” and “mystics”.

By using the word *intellectual*, I have in mind the distinction often drawn in Islamic texts between two sorts of knowledge — *‘aqlī* and *naqlī*, “intellectual” and “transmitted”. By making this distinction, the Muslim scholars want to remind us that people come to know things in two basic ways: either they learn from others, or they recover what they already know. Most knowledge is of the transmitted sort, which is to say that we have it by hearsay. We have learned practically everything we know — language, history, law, scripture, science — from others. In contrast, intellectual knowledge cannot be learned by transmission. What is at issue is not information, facts, or theory, but rather the actuality of knowing that accrues to the self when it awakens to the root of its own awareness and intelligence (*‘aql*).

Some may object to my use of the English word *intellectual* in this discussion, claiming, for example, that I mean “intuitive”. No one, however, has ever translated the Arabic word *‘aql* — the noun from which the adjective *‘aqlī* is derived — as “intuition”. Rather, it is typically rendered as intellect, intelligence, or reason (and, occasionally, mind). Moreover, if we remember the medieval distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio*, we can

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see a perfectly good justification for using *intellectual* here. As S.W. Gaukroger remarks, the general thrust of the distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio* in Aquinas' writings "is to mark out a form of direct intuitive grasp of truth from a limited, piecemeal, and often unreliable cognitive activity... Moreover, when it does lead to understanding, *ratio* annihilates itself: it has served its purpose and disappears in favour of true knowledge".¹ What philosophers and Sufis say when they make the distinction between transmitted and intellectual is that the transmission of knowledge, no matter how "rational" or "authoritative" it may seem, is an "unreliable cognitive activity", based on hearsay; its real purpose is to open up the soul to "true knowledge".²

In trying to express the nature of intellectual knowledge, Muslim scholars commonly cite mathematical understanding as an example, and they consider true mathematical insight as a halfway house on the road to intellectual vision. A real knowledge of mathematics does not derive from rote learning or rational argumentation, but rather from the discovery of the logic and clarity of mathematics in one's own self-awareness. When one perceives the truth of a mathematical statement, one cannot deny it, because it is self-evident to the intelligence.

In short, transmitted knowledge is acquired from society, teachers, books, study, and the media. Intellectual knowledge is found when intelligence awakens to its own nature. Discussion of these two sorts of knowledge is common in pre-modern worldviews, though a great variety of terminology is employed. Buddhist texts, for example, frequently refer to the difference between conventional knowledge and supreme or ultimate knowledge. Few people are unfamiliar with the Zen analogy of the finger pointing at the moon. Transmitted knowledge can at best be the pointing finger. Intellectual knowledge is the moon, and seeing the moon depends upon the transformation and transmutation of one's own selfhood. In the final analysis, intellectual understanding occurs when no distinction can be drawn between the knowing self and the illuminating moon. In Islamic texts, this ultimate stage of knowledge is often called "the unification of the intellecter, the intellected, and the intelligence" (*ittihād al-'āqil wa'l-ma'qūl wa'l-'aql*).

Like other traditional civilizations, Islam has always attributed an honored place to transmitted knowledge. Clearly, specifically "Islamic"

1. *Descartes' Conception of Inference*, in R.S. Woolhouse (ed.), *Metaphysics and Philosophy of Science in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, New York, Springer, 1988, p. 112.

2. For a detailed discussion of the two sorts of knowledge in Islamic sources and the differing methodologies that they entail, see W.C. Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World*, Oxford, Oneworld, 2007.

knowledge — such as the Koran and the sayings of Muhammad — has been received by way of transmission. These two sources provide the foundations for Islamic law and belief, that is, for jurisprudence and dogmatics, the two sciences that attempt to rationalize and codify Islamic practice and thought. Nonetheless, throughout Islamic history, various great teachers have reminded the community that transmitted knowledge is not an end in itself. Its real function is to serve as a framework for self-realization, that is, for the awakening of the intelligence that is innate to the human soul.

Two traditions of Islamic learning have considered intellectual understanding the goal of human life. One of these is philosophy, which took inspiration from the Greek legacy and is typified by figures such as Avicenna (d. 1037) and Mulla Sadra (d. 1640). The other is Sufism, which was based on the Koran and the model of Muhammad and is typified by people like Ibn Arabi (d. 1240).

It is not difficult to see why philosophy should be called an “intellectual” approach, but most scholars would probably object to my placing Sufism in the same category. This is because they understand “Sufism” to mean Islamic mysticism and, for various reasons, mysticism is commonly considered irrational. Denying that Sufism offers an intellectual approach to knowledge, however, rests largely on current meanings of the word. The point I want to make is that Sufi teachers, like the Muslim philosophers, have never considered transmitted learning as anything other than a finger pointing at the moon.

As one brief example of a Sufi whose teachings are focused on the achievement of intellectual understanding, let me quote from someone who would not be considered an “intellectual” in any modern sense. This is Shams-i Tabrizi, whose name is associated with the famous Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273). Those familiar with Rumi’s teachings know that, far from being a mere poet, he was an outstanding seer, sage, and guide on the path to awakening and enlightenment. They will have heard that Shams-i Tabrizi’s intervention transformed Rumi from a conventional scholar of the religious (that is, transmitted) sciences into an enlightened sage. Here are some of Shams’s remarks about the scholarship of his age:

“The reason these people study in the universities is, they think, ‘We will become teachers, we will get employment in the schools’. They say: ‘One should do good deeds and act properly!’ They talk of these things in assemblies in order to get jobs”;

“Why do you study knowledge for the sake of worldly mouthfuls? This rope is for coming *out* of the well, not so that you can go from *this* well into *that* well”;

“You must exert yourself in knowing this: ‘Who am I? What substance am I? Why have I come? Where am I going? From whence is my root? At this time what am I doing? What have I turned my face to?’”³

It would hardly be possible to summarize the issues addressed by the intellectual tradition more succinctly than Shams does here. Those who have seriously engaged in this tradition have always focused on solving the mystery of their own selfhood. The goal has been to answer the perennial question of the meaning of human life and human embodiment. Seekers in this path have been striving to emerge from the “well” of ignorance, forgetfulness, self-centeredness, hatred, and narrowness that is the common lot of mankind. In their view, any knowledge that does not aid in the quest to escape from the well is a hindrance on the path of achieving the full potential of human nature. This understanding of the human situation is famously captured in the Western tradition by Plato’s myth of the cave, but it has parallels in most religious traditions.

In attempting to answer the questions highlighted by Shams-i Tabrizi, philosophers and Sufis have addressed a wide variety of issues, not least notions of subject, self, soul, and personhood. Indeed, it is not difficult to argue that the whole point of the theoretical expositions of both philosophy and Sufism is to provide a “spiritual psychology” whereby one may come to discern the nature of one’s own self in the global context of reality.⁴ The goal of these authors, however, has not simply been to provide psychological theories, and certainly not to tell people who they really are. Rather, the goal has been to point seekers on the path of achieving self-awareness. The authors knew perfectly well that no one can achieve self-understanding by listening to the explanations of others. Teachers can provide the finger, but seekers must find the moon for themselves.

Orientation

The overall perspective of Islamic civilization is summarized in the double testimony of faith: “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is God’s messenger”. As traditionally understood, this formula distinguishes between intellectual knowledge and transmitted knowledge, though why this should be so needs some explanation.

3. For the source of the passage and a slightly different translation, see W.C. Chittick, *Me & Rumi: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi*, Louisville, Fons Vitae, 2004, pp. 50-51.

4. I provide this argument in the introduction to my book on a neglected 12th-13th century philosopher: *The Heart of Islamic Philosophy: The Quest for Self-Knowledge in the Teachings of Afdal al-Dīn Kāshānī* (chapter two), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.

In Arabic, the statement “There is no god but God” is called *kalimat al-tawhīd*, “the sentence asserting unity” — that is, the unity of God. The Koran presents *tawhīd* as a self-evident truth lying at the heart of every prophetic message. The first of the 124,000 prophets God sent was Adam, and the last was Muhammad. The Koran tells us that the function of all prophets is to “remind” (*dhikr, tadhkira*) people of *tawhīd*. To speak of a “reminder” is to say that there is nothing new or innovative about *tawhīd*. People already know that God is one, which is to say that they have an innate intuition that reality is coherent, integrated, and whole. In Koranic terms, this knowledge pertains to the original human nature (*fitra*), that is, to the intelligence and self-awareness that distinguish human beings from other creatures. Hence, the first function of the prophets is to help people recognize — that is, to *re-cognize* — what they already know. Here again, Plato provides a parallel with his notion of reminiscence.

Tawhīd is utterly basic to the Islamic worldview and is the constant point of reference for the intellectual tradition. Philosophers take it for granted, even if they devote many volumes to explaining why it must be so and why it underlies all true knowledge. For their part, the Sufis also take *tawhīd* for granted and, in their theoretical works, speak incessantly of the manner in which God’s unity determines the nature of things.

When we look at the traditional understanding of the formula of *tawhīd*: “There is no god but God”, we realize that there is nothing specifically “Islamic” about it. It is an unremarkable statement about the universe, much as if we were to say: “The sky is up, the earth is down”. Any rational person knows that reality is coherent, ordered, and somehow unified, and this knowledge lies behind every attempt to make sense of the world and the human situation. This is to say that the truth of *tawhīd* is universal. It has nothing to do with the historical or cosmic situation. Reality is at it is; the “universe” is in fact unified, as the word itself reminds us.

As for the second half of the Muslim testimony of faith — “Muhammad is God’s messenger” — this is by no means self-evident. Knowledge of Muhammad is not innate to human intelligence. No one can believe that Muhammad is God’s messenger without having received knowledge about Muhammad from others. And, likewise, no one can know anything about the message that Muhammad brought — the Koran — without hearing about it. Once someone believes that Muhammad was in fact God’s messenger, then that person will most likely take his message seriously. This is the beginning of Islam as a *religion* — in the sense that most people understand the word. As for knowledge of *tawhīd*, that pertains to human nature, irrespective of religion, history, and transmission.

The Metaphysical Background

We can summarize the role that these two sorts of knowledge have played in Islamic civilization in these terms: The goal of transmitted learning has been to provide people with guidance in thinking correctly and acting rightly on the basis of what has been received from the past, namely the Koran, the reports about Muhammad, and the teachings of the pious ancestors. In contrast, the goal of intellectual learning has been to lead people on the path of awakening and self-realization. As the Islamic tradition developed over time, theologians and jurists, who are the guardians of transmitted knowledge, took the position that people must submit to the teachings of the Koran and Muhammad in order to reach salvation after death. Sufis and philosophers, who are the guides to intellectual knowledge, took the position that the very nature of human intelligence calls upon people to strive for self-realization in this world, and not wait for salvation in the afterworld.

With these two approaches to knowledge in view, we can look at the basic question raised by my title: How can we conceptualize “human nature”? Typically, the intellectual tradition begins any discussion about human beings with a discussion of their entrance into existence from the Ultimate Reality, which is understood in terms of *tawhīd*. The tradition acknowledges, however, that human beings are abysmally ignorant in face of that Reality. How, indeed, can they even begin to think about it? The basic answer is: “in terms of names and qualities”. We observe names and qualities in nature and in ourselves, not to mention scripture. We constantly use these names in everyday language — words like life, knowledge, power, desire, speech, hearing, and seeing. These seven in particular are sometimes called “the seven pillars” of the Divine Reality.

Tawhīd provides a meditative formula with which to grasp the significance of these qualities. When applied to “life”, it means: “There is nothing living but the Alive”, which is to say that there is no true life but the divine source of all life. When applied to knowledge, *tawhīd* teaches that: “Nothing knows but the true Knower”, which is to say that real knowledge, awareness, and consciousness belong only to the source of all knowledge, awareness, and consciousness. When applied to power, it means: “There is no power but in God, the All-powerful” and, in face of God’s infinite power, the power of created things is trivial.

Traditionally, Muslim theologians have said that God has “ninety and nine names” and they have analyzed each of these names in much the same way. Philosophers like Avicenna have often curtailed the discussion by looking at a limited number of fundamental characteristics of the

Ultimate Reality, in his case unity, eternity, knowledge, desire, power, wisdom, and generosity.

Nowadays, when people talk about “reality”, they commonly take the position of naïve realism and reduce everything to the physical realm and its epiphenomena. In contrast, when Muslim intellectuals talk about reality (*haqq, haqīqa*), what they have in mind, in the first place, is Absolute Reality, which is called “God” in theological language. Philosophers, however, prefer to use abstract terms like *wujūd* — a word that is usually translated as “being”, or “existence”, but could also mean “consciousness” and “awareness”.

The idea that “reality” designates first and foremost the Infinite Reality of Being is rooted in *tawhīd*: “There is nothing real but the truly Real”. The first corollary of this statement is that everything other than Ultimate Reality must be relatively unreal. The cosmos, which is defined as “everything other than God” (*mā siwa’llāh*), can only have a conditional reality. It is this conditional reality that allows us to perceive ourselves and to think about our situation.

It is important to note that the definition of cosmos as “everything other than God” includes not only physical things, but also spiritual things, such as angels and souls, which are understood to be more real than physical things, but less real than God. To speak of more and less real is to say that reality has degrees. The great issue among the philosophers is not to prove that there is an Absolute Reality called *Wujūd*, or Existence, because that is self-evident, but rather to clarify the distinction between Reality *per se* and reality as it appears conditionally in things. Avicenna and others distinguish between the Ultimate “Existence” (*wujūd*) and the “existing things” (*mawjūdāt*, past participle of *wujūd*), by saying that the Real *Wujūd* is Necessary (*wājib*), which means that it cannot not be, and existing things are contingent (*mumkin*), which means that they partake of existence in a manner determined by the Necessary Existence.

The World Map

In the intellectual tradition, nothing can be understood correctly outside the context of *tawhīd*. In other words, the basic question is this: How does the contingent and relative existence of this specific thing, whatever it may be, tie it back to the Real Being? The cosmos as a whole is contingent upon its Origin, and each being in the cosmos has a unique situation, defined by its own thingness. The thingness of each is the specific collection of attributes, qualities, and characteristics that make it *this* thing rather than *that* thing. Only the Real Being itself has no thingness. Its Infinite

Reality allows for no specificities that can separate it out and make it distinct, so it is utterly different from all beings and, simultaneously, it displays its own qualities and characteristics in each of them. This is what Muslim theologians mean when they say that God is both transcendent and immanent, both utterly absent and omnipresent.

In the world map offered by the intellectual tradition, the cosmos is understood to have come into existence through a process of exteriorization, or sedimentation, or reification. Through its own infinite Being and Consciousness, the Ultimate Reality embraces every finite possibility and brings each into actualization in its appropriate context. But the contingent existence of the universe does not simply *appear from* the Necessary Being, it also *disappears into* the Necessary Being. Any primer of Islamic theology tells us that *tawhīd* has three basic implications: Everything comes from God, everything is sustained by God, and everything returns to God. In other words, the Absolute Reality alone determines the unfolding of things and their ultimate reintegration into the One from which they arose. Among the many implications of this way of looking at things is that “evolution”, however defined, must be the complement of a previous “devolution”. In other words, all efficient causality is determined by a First Cause, and all possibilities of thingness are prefigured in the Infinite Being of that First Cause.

In short, two grand movements can be observed in the cosmos as a whole: One is that of exteriorization, the other that of interiorization; one is that of creation or cosmogenesis, the other that of dissolution or destruction; one is that of manifestation, the other that of disappearance. These two movements are given a variety of names. Among the most common are “Origin and Return”, a phrase used as a book title by both Avicenna and Mulla Sadra. The Origin is pictured as centrifugal, dispersing, and devolutionary, and the Return as centripetal, integrating, and evolutionary. The two movements together are depicted as the circumference of the single circle of existence. Beginning at the top, all things come into manifestation through a gradual process of descent and differentiation, and they appear in a multiplicity of modes. Having reached the bottom — the realm of visible reality — they continue to follow the circumference and ascend toward the top. The two movements are thus called the “Arc of Descent” and the “Arc of Ascent”.

The Arc of Descent passes from the invisibility of Oneness and Indistinction, which characterize the Infinite Being and Consciousness of the Real, into the visibility of manyness and thingness. The unfolding of possibilities is directed and governed by the very nature of *Wujūd* itself. In terms of the seven attributes discussed by Avicenna, the Necessary Being is one, eternal, knowing, desiring, powerful, wise, and generous.

As Avicenna also says, it is the Absolute Good (*al-khayr al-mahd*) and it brings into existence a good and beautiful universe, ordered in a wise, compassionate, and generous way. If we fail to see wisdom and generosity suffusing the universe, that is our failing, not that of the Absolute Good.

In the world we find ourselves in, the Ascending Arc of Existence — the evolutionary thrust — is more obvious than the descending one, though both are always present. The ascent is observed in what used to be called “the three kingdoms” — the mineral, plant, and animal realms — which designate some of the lower links of the Great Chain of Being. In each successive ascending realm, the attributes of Real Being come further into manifestation. In minerals, few divine attributes are apparent. In plants, intimations of qualities like knowledge, desire, and power begin to show themselves. In animals, these qualities are more pronounced and integrated, allowing for greater understanding and control of the environment.

The highest observable link on the Arc of Ascent is the human being. In the human case, however, there is a radical break with the lower levels, in which the diversity of qualities and attributes is indefinitely dispersed; moreover, the specific qualities of each thing become manifest largely through its visible form. The cosmos as a whole is the externalization and differentiation of an infinite variety of attributes and qualities. In contrast, human beings are externally similar, but internally diverse. The outstanding characteristics of human beings are found not in the external appearance of their doings, makings, and accomplishments, but in the invisible realms of awareness and consciousness. It is their subjective access to an infinite realm of possibility that allows them to assimilate all ontological qualities and to make these manifest in the world and society through activity, artifacts, cultural productions, and technology.

Human Uniqueness

In the Koran, human beings are given a number of characteristics that separate them out from other creatures. Most salient, perhaps, is the statement that God “taught Adam the names, all of them” (2, 30). In the Koranic language, the word *Adam* designates both the progenitor of the human race and the human being *per se* (*insān*), that is, man as one sort of creature among others. One of the most basic interpretations of this verse is that God created man by investing him with all the divine names and qualities. In other words, “God created Adam in His own image”, a saying that was repeated by Muhammad.

Each thing in the cosmos displays some of the characteristics of the Infinite Reality of Being through its own thingness; this can be observed and deduced by studying and investigating the things. In contrast, the essential characteristic of human beings is that they do *not* have a specific thingness. In other words, the essential thingness of a human being is to be *no* thing, because each person is made in the image of the Imageless — the Real Being that transcends all beings and is simultaneously present in everything. When God instilled the human beings with the divine image, he made their essential nature to be without a specific description and without a designated attribute.

In short, the human nature is indefinable. The evidence for this is before our eyes, in the bewildering complexity and diversity of human cultures, languages, religions, and artifacts; in the ever-increasing proliferation of the sciences and academic disciplines; and in the ever louder cacophony of voices claiming that human beings are simply this or that. Human indefinability goes back to the fact that the Infinite Being has no specific image — or, to put it otherwise, God's human image is the image that embraces all possible images. For their part, human beings know instinctively, as a corollary of their intuition of *tawhīd*, that nothing limits them. All the attempts by modern scientists and academicians to answer the great and the small questions about the universe, the natural realm, history, society, art, literature, and human nature simply illustrate the unlimited possibilities of the human substance, made in the image of the Imageless.

The important point here is that the whole realm of human phenomena pertains essentially to the realm of consciousness and awareness, and only accidentally to external appearances. This inner realm has no intrinsic limits, because it is the unfolding of the Arc of Ascent which leads inexorably back to the Infinite Origin of all things. What makes the unlimitedness of the human substance especially hard to see in modern times is the *de facto* assumption of scientism — the reductionist ideology of the predominant forms of contemporary thought — that human life ends with death. On the contrary, as traditional religions have always stated and as the Islamic intellectual tradition has demonstrated convincingly, death is simply the first major transition in the unfolding of the limitless human nature.

Certainly, the physical embodiment is a necessary human stage in bringing the divine attributes into manifestation, but the full potentialities of manifestation are held back by the limitations of physicality. This is obvious to all of us as soon as we recognize, for example, that the realm of imagination is infinitely more vast than that of physical existence. On the outside, we are limited; on the inside, we are not. This helps explain

why Ibn Arabi describes death as a process whereby our perception of reality is turned inside out: the limited realm of physicality is interiorized, and the infinite realm of imagination is externalized, thereby becoming the new landscape of our unfolding selves.⁵ Mulla Sadra demonstrates philosophically that after death, every human individual, whether of the saved or the damned, will come to possess an entire world, greater than the present world and not congruent with any other world.⁶

Free Choice

The world as we know it unfolds in a direction that we experience as time. In the intellectual tradition, time is understood as the human perception of the process of manifestation and disappearance that is designated by the words “Origin and Return”. The cosmos — everything other than God — becomes manifest in an orderly manner that is rooted in the nature of things. The Necessary Being is good, wise, generous, and just, and these qualities demand that the realm of existence be directed toward the exigencies of goodness and wisdom.

In this approach to understanding, no clear distinction can be drawn between things as objects and things as value-laden. Given that the Ultimate Reality itself is good and wise, the human concern with the ethical and the moral does not pertain simply to conventions, but follows rather on the nature of things. Investigating the realm of objects without recognizing the moral and spiritual obligations that this realm places on the human soul is to falsify the world. This is why Muslim philosophers and scientists considered ethics an essential part of their quest for self-realization, not simply an ancillary discipline or an afterthought. Reality itself calls upon people to transform their character in conformity with its inherent goodness, wisdom, generosity, and justice. The fact that human beings can recognize the good and the wise, distinguish between right and wrong, and make moral choices goes back to the fact that God created them in his own image. He taught them *all* the names, not just some of the names, and thereby exposed them to *all* possibilities, including the possibility of saying “No” to truth, beauty, goodness, justice, generosity, and their own best interest.

5. For a detailed exposition, see William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Chapter 7), Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994.

6. Mulla Sadra (Sadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī), *The Wisdom of the Throne*, translated by J.W. Morris, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981, p. 165.

Knowing the Unknowable

In order to suggest some of the relevance of this extremely brief review of the outlook of the intellectual tradition, let me come back to the questions posed by Shams-i Tabrizi: “Who am I? What substance am I? Why have I come? Where am I going? From whence is my root? At this time, what am I doing? Toward what have I turned my face?”

Speaking for the intellectual tradition, Shams is saying that the specifically *human* reason to search for knowledge is to solve the riddle of our own existence. The questions all circle around the first, “Who am I?” The intellectual tradition points out that language and hearsay cannot provide an adequate answer. At best, transmitted learning can suggest who we are not: Each of us is the image of the Imageless, the name of the Nameless, the form of the Formless. It follows that clinging to explanations of human nature provided by any sort of transmitted learning — religion, science, philosophy, history, anthropology — is to cling to the finger and forget the moon.

I will not try to run through the typical answers that the intellectual tradition provides for Shams’s questions — in any case, these answers are meant to highlight their own inadequacy and to alert us to the fact that each of us has no way of knowing himself or herself other than by finding that knowledge within the self, not by gathering information from outside. Instead, let me quote a few representative verses of Shams’s student Rumi, whose poetry is characterized, among other things, by the manner in which it catches the urgency of the quest for self-realization:

*Form comes into existence from the Formless,
just as smoke is born from fire.*⁷

*

*You dwell in a place, but your root is No-place —
Close down this shop and open up that shop!*⁸

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*Everyone has turned his face toward a direction —
the great ones have turned toward the Directionless.*⁹

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7. The *Mathnawī of Jalālū’d-dīn Rūmī*, edited and translated by R.A. Nicholson (8 volumes, London, Luzac, 1925-1940), Book VI, verse 3712. The translations are my own.

8. *Ibidem*, II, 612.

9. *Ibidem*, V, 350.

*We and our existences are nonexistent —
 You are Absolute Existence showing Yourself as evanescent.
 All of us are lions, but lions on a banner —
 We attack moment by moment because of the wind.*¹⁰

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*Fear the existence you have now!
 Your imagination is nothing, and you are nothing.
 A nothing has fallen in love with a nothing,
 a nothing-at-all has waylaid a nothing-at-all.
 When these images depart,
 your lack of intelligence will become clear to you.*¹¹

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*The Absolute Being works in nonexistence —
 what but nonexistence is the workshop of the Existence-giver?
 Does anyone write on a written page?
 Does anyone sow in a planted plot?
 No, they search for paper free of writing,
 they sow their seed in a field unsown.
 Be, O friend, a field unsown,
 a blank piece of paper untouched by the pen!*¹²

10. *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī, op.cit., I, 602-603.*

11. *Ibidem, VI, 1447-1449.*

12. *Ibidem, V, 1960-1963.*