

at the sacred has to be limitless, and could appear any time. As a composer of the Sacred, I will continue the sound of God', but this must necessarily lead to a mystical zero. But, as Guénon reminds us, metaphysical unity unaffirmed, is also something more than that, and so with music and Schuon as my guide, I move to the closing pages of *The Hymn of Dawn*, of Schuon, as a kind of 'prolongation' of him. The twelve singers who represent the 'mystical lovers' are 'buried in the Godhead', as they sing almost the words of the Upanishad; 'Where you no longer see, you no longer hear anything, where you no longer are...'

Ibn 'Arabî and Rûmî

by William C. Chittick

The thirteenth century was a period of many great Sufis, so much so that it might be called the golden age of Sufi teaching and writing. In terms of subsequent radiance, however, Ibn 'Arabî (d. 1240) and Rûmî (d. 1273) tower above their contemporaries. The relation between the two figures has been the topic of much speculation, not only in the West, but also in countries like Iran and Turkey. I am not about to set the record straight, but it might be worthwhile to suggest some of the problems that arise as soon as we mention the two names in the same sentence.

Early modern scholarship was much enamored of "borrowings" and "influence" as explanatory categories. One difficulty with this approach is that it typically tells us little about what was actually at issue for the authors supposed to have been lending and borrowing, and the methodology has now largely lost its luster. Nonetheless, its early popularity led many people, both among Orientalists and Orientals, to suggest or declare that Ibn 'Arabî influenced Rûmî, and this still widely reflected in the secondary literature.

For example, R. A. Nicholson, the greatest Western authority on Rûmî, claimed in his commentary on Rûmî's *Mathnawî* that Ibn 'Arabî was the source for certain of Rûmî's specific teachings. In fact, the textual evidence is simply not there. No doubt, there is a certain amount of circumstantial evidence — Rûmî was a younger contemporary of Ibn 'Arabî, he may have met him in his youth, he was on close terms with his most prolific disciple, Sadr al-Dîn Qûnawî (d. 1274), and many lines of his poetry seem to be obvious assertions of *wahdat al-wujûd*, the

Oneness of Being, which — “as everyone knows” — is the belief system of Ibn 'Arabi.

On an earlier occasion I addressed in some detail the weakness of both the textual and the circumstantial evidence for 'Arabi's influence on Rumi, and I will not repeat myself here.¹

Briefly, I pointed out that influence can be a meaningful category only if we can cite specific, concrete instances in which one author employs the concepts and terminology of another author in a manner that allows us to say with some degree of certainty that the second has taken them from the first, whether directly or indirectly. But as soon as we define influence in these terms, it becomes impossible to find — so far as I have been able to detect — any idea or concept in Rumi's writings characteristic of Ibn 'Arabi's writings (all of which are in Arabic) and not found in Persian works with which Rumi was much more likely to have been acquainted.

Some might object by claiming that the relationship between Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi was much more profound than a simple borrowing of concepts and terminology, because it was a spiritual link. But the “spiritual” is by definition invisible and, in any case, totally inaccessible to scholarship. To speak of it is to appeal to what the Sufis call *dhawq* — “tasting” — but that can only be convincing to people who have it or to their disciples. Unless talk of spiritual links is backed up with concrete, textual evidence, it is simply speculation.

A point of special importance has to do with the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* or Oneness of Being, which, as I just said, “everyone knows” is the belief system of Ibn 'Arabi. In fact, most of those who know this are wrong, unless they can provide a definition that coincides with what Ibn 'Arabi was actually saying. This expression is difficult to deal with, because people who have a passing acquaintance with Islamic intellectual history usually talk as if they know what it means, whereas few specialists can provide an explanation that would do justice to the way

¹ Chittick, “Rumi and *Wahdat al-wujud*,” in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi*, ed. by A. Banani, R. Hovannisian, and G. Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 70-111. For an overview, see Chittick, “*Wahdat al-Shuhud* and *Wahdat al-Wujud*,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 10, 2000, pp. 37-39. For *wahdat al-wujud* as Ibn 'Arabi's teaching, see idem, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), Chapter 1.

in which the term was used in the texts where it was used. The expression became controversial within a few decades of its death, and heated debates about it have continued to this day. Assertions about it typically reflect eighteenth-century opinions uncritically. Most scholars have simply assumed that it was used by Ibn 'Arabi and that it represents his teaching. It has also been assumed that the expression was used in the centuries.

However, as soon as we look at the texts, we find seven different meanings that were given to the term. These are these is what we might immediately expect from the two words. When we look simply at that, we are not surprised about *wahdat al-wujud*. It simply means “being” or “the unity of existence.” It sometimes is used without any suggestion that it has a special meaning. The reason is obvious: As soon as we say that *wahdat* designates the Being and Reality of God — a central concept in Islamic theology, philosophy, and Sufism — the term is understood when it is criticized. It designates the basic position of the Sufis. If that were the case, then every Muslim would accept *wahdat al-wujud*.

By the fourteenth century, the term had become significant, and different authors understood it in different ways. To say that Ibn 'Arabi believed in *wahdat al-wujud* is not helpful, and it is even less helpful to say that he believed in *wahdat al-wujud*, not least because he followed Ibn 'Arabi in this belief.

I do not deny that Rumi and Ibn 'Arabi may have used *wahdat al-wujud*. Neither employs the expression. One can support such a contention by providing relevant texts. But why would anyone want to do so? People who do so typically have no textual basis for their expression means, but they do think that *wahdat al-wujud* summarizes much of later Sufism and that it is

² See Chittick, “Rumi and *Wahdat al-wujud*.”

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point out that influence can be a meaningful category specific, concrete instances in which one author's and terminology of another author in a manner with some degree of certainty that the second has, first, whether directly or indirectly. But as soon as we use these terms, it becomes impossible to find — so I would like to detect — any idea or concept in Rumi's writings of Ibn 'Arabi's writings (all of which are in Arabic) or Persian works with which Rumi was much more likely to be connected.

But by claiming that the relationship between Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi is more profound than a simple borrowing of concepts, because it was a spiritual link. But the “spiritual link” is invisible and, in any case, totally inaccessible to the ordinary person. To talk of it is to appeal to what the Sufis call *dhawq* — which can only be convincing to people who have it or to those who talk of spiritual links is backed up with concrete, verifiable examples, is simply speculation.

The importance has to do with the concept of *wahdat al-wujud*, or the Oneness of Being, which, as I just said, “everyone knows” of Ibn 'Arabi. In fact, most of those who know this concept can provide a definition that coincides with what Ibn 'Arabi is saying. This expression is difficult to deal with, because we have a passing acquaintance with Islamic intellectual life and talk as if they know what it means, whereas few can provide an explanation that would do justice to the way

¹ *Wahdat al-wujud*, in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Ibn 'Arabi*, ed. A. Banani, R. Hovannisian, and G. Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 70-111. For an overview, see Chittick, “Wahdat al-wujud,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 10, 2000, pp. 37-39. For an overview of Ibn 'Arabi's teaching, see idem, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn 'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), Chapter 1.

in which the term was used in the texts where it was in fact employed. The expression became controversial within a century of Ibn 'Arabi's death, and heated debates about it have continued ever since. Modern assertions about it typically reflect eighteenth and nineteenth century opinions uncritically. Most scholars have simply assumed that the term was used by Ibn 'Arabi and that it represents his perspective, and they have also assumed that the expression was used in the same sense over the centuries.

However, as soon as we look at the texts, we can easily find at least seven different meanings that were given to the expression.² None of these is what we might immediately expect from the literal meaning of the two words. When we look simply at that, there is nothing strange or surprising about *wahdat al-wujud*. It simply means “the oneness of being” or “the unity of existence.” It sometimes occurs in discussions of *wujud* without any suggestion that it has a technical significance. The reason is obvious: As soon as we say that *wujud* in the strict sense designates the Being and Reality of God — a notion that is found in Islamic theology, philosophy, and Sufism — then *wahdat al-wujud* is a truism, because it simply means that God is one. But this is clearly not how the term is understood when it is criticized or when it is used to designate the basic position of the Sufis. If that were all there was to it, then every Muslim would accept *wahdat al-wujud* as self-evident.

By the fourteenth century, the term had come to have a special significance, and different authors understood it in different ways. Therefore, to say that Ibn 'Arabi believed in *wahdat al-wujud* without a clear definition is not helpful, and it is even less helpful to say that Rumi believed in *wahdat al-wujud*, not least because we are implying that he followed Ibn 'Arabi in this belief.

I do not deny that Rumi and Ibn 'Arabi may indeed have believed in *wahdat al-wujud*. Neither employs the expression in his writings, so one can support such a contention by providing a definition and citing relevant texts. But why would anyone want to say that they believed in it? People who do so typically have no textually based idea of what the expression means, but they do think that *wahdat al-wujud* somehow summarizes much of later Sufism and that it is either a good thing or a

² See Chittick, “Rumi and *Wahdat al-wujud*.”

bad thing. What they really want to say is that those who believed in it were great Sufis and pious Muslims, or that they were not really Muslims at all, but some sort of infidel. This loaded usage of this term goes back to some of its earliest instances.

So again I ask, what exactly does *wabdat al-wujûd* mean? Can it be defined in a way that would allow us to say that both Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi believed in *wabdat al-wujûd*? And if so, would we not be forced to conclude that most great Sufis of Islamic history — and indeed, most philosophers and theologians as well — also believed in *wabdat al-wujûd*? If we define the term broadly enough to include both Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi but narrowly enough to exclude non-Sufi Muslims, then are we not really saying that both of them asserted the unity of God while stressing the lived vision of God's presence in all things? In other words, would not *wabdat al-wujûd* then simply be another word for *tawhid*, the assertion of God's unity that lies at the foundation of Islamic thought and practice, but with an emphasis on the Sufi side of things?

Lest I be accused of not defining my own terms, let me say that I use the word *Sufi* in a broad sense, in keeping with the usage of many authorities over Islamic history. The basic reality of Sufism as they understood it — over and above the fact that it includes practice of the Shariah and adherence to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah — is the recognition of the presence of God in all things. Sufism is an intensity of faith and practice that highlights and inserts into the midst of daily life the Prophet's definition of *ibsan* (doing the beautiful, virtue, perfection): "It is that you worship God as if you see Him, for, if you do not see Him, He sees you." Among the advanced adepts of Sufism, the "as if" disappears, and the vision of God promised to the faithful in the afterworld is given already in this world. The greatest of the Sufis worship God while seeing Him, and this includes both Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi, by their own repeated testimony. The prototypical expression of this fully realized *ibsan* is found in the well-known saying of the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law 'Ali: "I would not worship a Lord whom I do not see."

The vast majority of authors who have mentioned the term *wabdat al-wujûd* have not in fact used it to mean *tawhid* with a stress on *ibsan*. Most have employed it as an emblem to specify Ibn 'Arabi specifically or the Sufi approach to Islamic theology generally. Throughout the

Islamic world for a couple of centuries now, *wujûd* is practically the same as mentioning Ibn 'Arabi. It is certainly a connection to be made, identifying much confusion to be of any real value, especially to know what Ibn 'Arabi was talking about. The original and critical discussion of his ideas is first in *wabdat al-wujûd*, or at least from most of the time it is understood from it over the centuries. Once we have that, then we may want to say that *wabdat al-wujûd* is his position.



In short, there is no special reason to say that this view can best be summarized by *wabdat al-wujûd*. It is to say that he believed in *wabdat al-wujûd* and this could mean anything without a thorough explanation of what the expression signifies, or as if the expression is used for a vastly prolific author of non-repetitive books. If Ibn 'Arabi's writings express the idea, then we need to explain it and make clear that they express many other ideas.

The earliest author to suggest how Ibn 'Arabi's notion of *wabdat al-wujûd* per se seems to be in Farghânî (d. ca. 1295), a disciple of Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi. He uses the expression many times, though he never associates it with Ibn 'Arabi. He does not suggest that in itself it is a term with two components). Its significance appears when he uses the expression *katbrat al-'ilm*, "the manyness of knowledge." *wujûd* — the very Being of God — is not one through God's knowledge of Himself and all things.

As Farghânî explains, God's *wujûd* — the root of all oneness, and God's knowledge — is the root of all multiplicity. Knowing His *wujûd* along with the infinite possibilities of His *wujûd* demands. God is, as Ibn 'Arabi likes to say, *(al-wâhid al-katîr)*. He is one through His *wujûd*, and He is many through His knowledge and attributes.

really want to say is that those who believed in it were not really Muslims, or that they were not really Muslims of infidel. This loaded usage of this term goes back to the earliest instances.

Exactly what does *wahdat al-wujūd* mean? Can it be used to allow us to say that both Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi are *at al-wujūd*? And if so, would we not be forced to include the great Sufis of Islamic history — and indeed, most Sufis as well — also believed in *wahdat al-wujūd* — a term broadly enough to include both Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi, or enough to exclude non-Sufi Muslims, then are we not at both of them asserted the unity of God while denying the presence of God in all things? In other words, *wujūd* then simply be another word for *taḥwīd*, the unity that lies at the foundation of Islamic thought, with an emphasis on the Sufi side of things?

Without defining my own terms, let me say that I use the word in the broad sense, in keeping with the usage of many in Islamic history. The basic reality of Sufism as they understood it is above the fact that it includes practice of the Sharia and the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and the presence of God in all things. Sufism is an inner practice that highlights and inserts into the midst of the Sharia the definition of *ihāsān* (doing the beautiful, virtuous) that you worship God as if you see Him, for, if

He sees you." Among the advanced adepts of Sufism, it appears, and the vision of God promised to the adept in the world is given already in this world. The greatest of adepts is the one who sees Him while seeing Him, and this includes both Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi in their own repeated testimony. The prototypical Sufi who has fully realized *ihāsān* is found in the well-known saying of the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law 'Alī: "I would not worship a man if he were to see."

Many of the authors who have mentioned the term *wahdat al-wujūd* have used it to mean *taḥwīd* with a stress on *ihāsān*. It is used as an emblem to specify Ibn 'Arabi specifically or Sufism in general, or to Islamic theology generally. Throughout the

Islamic world for a couple of centuries now, to mention *wahdat al-wujūd* is practically the same as mentioning Ibn 'Arabi. Although there is certainly a connection to be made, identifying the two causes too much confusion to be of any real value, especially if one would like to know what Ibn 'Arabi was talking about. The only way to have an intelligent and critical discussion of his ideas is first to disassociate him from *wahdat al-wujūd*, or at least from most of the meanings that have been understood from it over the centuries. Once we have defined our terms, then we may want to say that *wahdat al-wujūd* does indeed express his position.



In short, there is no special reason to say that Ibn 'Arabi's point of view can best be summarized by *wahdat al-wujūd*. It is especially wrong to say that he believed in *wahdat al-wujūd* and to leave it at that, as if this could mean anything without a thorough explanation of what the expression signifies, or as if the expression is a sufficient designation for a vastly prolific author of non-repetitive books. If we do say that Ibn 'Arabi's writings express the idea, then we need to show how they do so and make clear that they express many other ideas as well.

The earliest author to suggest how Ibn 'Arabi's works support the notion of *wahdat al-wujūd* per se seems to have been Sa'īd al-Dīn Farghānī (d. ca. 1295), a disciple of Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī. Farghānī uses the expression many times, though he never ascribes it explicitly to Ibn 'Arabi. He does not suggest that in itself it is a technical term (unlike its two components). Its significance appears when it is contrasted with *katibat al-'ilm*, "the manyness of knowledge." His basic point is that *wujūd* — the very Being of God — is not only one, it is also many through God's knowledge of Himself and all things.

As Farghānī explains, God's *wujūd* — the only true *wujūd* — is the root of all oneness, and God's knowledge — the only true knowledge — is the root of all multiplicity. Knowing Himself, God knows His one *wujūd* along with the infinite possibilities of manifestation that His one *wujūd* demands. God is, as Ibn 'Arabi likes to say, "the One/the Many" (*al-wāhid al-kathīr*). He is one through His own Essence, which is *wujūd*, and He is many through His knowledge, or through His names and attributes.

No one has yet been able to find the actual expression *wabdat al-wujûd* in Ibn 'Arabi's writings. Nor apparently did anyone say explicitly that he believed in it before Ibn Taymiyya, who died ninety years after him. None of Ibn 'Arabi's early followers thought that the expression was especially important. It was only after Ibn Taymiyya attacked Ibn 'Arabi and accused him of believing in *wabdat al-wujûd* that various Sufis began to assert that Ibn 'Arabi did indeed believe in it. They seem to have concluded that if Ibn Taymiyya — a notoriously narrow-minded theologian — had attacked it, it must be a good thing. Naturally they found appropriate definitions for it, and they rejected Ibn Taymiyya's opinion that it was synonymous with *kufr*, *zindliqa*, and *ilhâd* — unbelief, heresy, and atheism.

Ibn Taymiyya's explanation of *wabdat al-wujûd*, let it be said, has a strong basis in Ibn 'Arabi's writings. He, for one, explained the significance of the term as he understood it and supplied supporting texts to prove his contentions. According to him, it means something like what is nowadays called "pantheism." He saw it as denying any distinction between God and creation. His understanding is similar to that of those supporters and detractors of *wabdat al-wujûd* who felt that it was expressed in Persian by the famous exclamation of the poets, *bama ûst* ("All is He") — which can be traced back at least to the *Munâjât* of Khwâja 'Abd Allâh Ansârî of Herat (d. 1089). In the Indian debates about *wabdat al-wujûd* exemplified by Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindî in the seventeenth century, this Persian expression was often used to give it a nutshell definition.

It is worth remembering that a number of the early Orientalists claimed that Ibn 'Arabi was a pantheist. Pantheism is a philosophical position that maintains that "everything is God." It is a relatively modern idea, and when it is ascribed to various philosophers and mystics, it is typically done so as a critique. In the hands of an historian, the word may sound like objective scholarship, but it is simply a roundabout way of saying that the person to whom it is being ascribed was not very astute. Moreover, once "pantheism" is correctly translated back into Arabic or some other Islamic language (into Persian, for example, as *bama-kbudâ'î*), it is obvious that it flies in the face of the most basic of Islamic tenets.

Nowadays, many of those who support or criticize do in fact have something like "All is He" in mind expression. But if we are to say, on the basis of that he believed that all is God, we must also say that he believed that nothing is God. Ibn 'Arabi on the reality of the creatures most succinctly was *buwa lâ buwa*, "He/not He." He understands the thing discloses God, because all things gain their essence from God's Being and attributes, and that every because nothing is truly He but He, and each created by God precisely to be itself and nothing.



Any meaningful comparison of Ibn 'Arabi and Rûmi must discuss specific ideas, images, symbols, expressions, and motifs that are found in their writings, and then relate them, historically or conceptually. To do so we must, however, first need detailed and thorough study of both authors. Rûmi has been studied relatively extensively, but come close to a careful study of all of Ibn 'Arabi's teachings much less the teachings of those of his disciples whom Rûmi knew or could have known. And we will not know Ibn 'Arabi any time soon, since he was enormously more difficult, incomparably more difficult, and no less so.

The difficulty and significance of Ibn 'Arabi's writings is partly by the fact that over one hundred commentaries on the *Fusûs al-bikam*, one of his relatively early works, teaching the *Fusûs* became a major mission and discussion of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas, and scholars wanted to join the conversation by writing their own. But no one should imagine that it is enough to understand Ibn 'Arabi on his own terms. First of all, the *Fusûs* is not easy; it was never read without a good commentary. Second, the *Fusûs* clarifies only a tiny part of the themes and concepts. Although certain major themes are from it, this is not to say that the reader has now

been able to find the actual expression *wahdat al-wujûd* in Ibn 'Arabi's writings. Nor apparently did anyone say it before Ibn Taymiyya, who died ninety years before Ibn 'Arabi's early followers thought that the expression was socially important. It was only after Ibn Taymiyya died and accused him of believing in *wahdat al-wujûd* that scholars began to assert that Ibn 'Arabi did indeed believe in it. Ibn 'Arabi concluded that if Ibn Taymiyya — a notoriously conservative theologian — had attacked it, it must be a good thing. He provided appropriate definitions for it, and they rejected the notion that it was synonymous with *kuf'r*, *zindiq*, and *kufr*, and heresy, and atheism.

Any explanation of *wahdat al-wujûd*, let it be said, has to be found in Ibn 'Arabi's writings. He, for one, explained the significance of it and supplied supporting texts to show that he understood it and supplied supporting texts to show that he understood it. According to him, it means something like what we call "pantheism." He saw it as denying any distinction between the Creator and creation. His understanding is similar to that of those early actors of *wahdat al-wujûd* who felt that it was expressed in the famous exclamation of the poets, *hama ûst* — "All is He" — which can be traced back at least to the *Munâjât* of 'Alî 'Arabi of Herat (d. 1089). In the Indian debates about *wahdat al-wujûd* exemplified by Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindî in the sixteenth century, this Persian expression was often used to give it a

meaning. Remembering that a number of the early Orientalists thought that Ibn 'Arabi was a pantheist. Pantheism is a philosophical position that "everything is God." It is a relatively modern term that is ascribed to various philosophers and mystics, and it is often used as a critique. In the hands of an historian, the word "pantheism" is a roundabout way of saying "pantheism" is correctly translated back into Arabic or Islamic language (into Persian, for example, as *hama ûst*), and it is obvious that it flies in the face of the most basic of

Nowadays, many of those who support or criticize *wahdat al-wujûd* do in fact have something like "All is He" in mind as the meaning of the expression. But if we are to say, on the basis of Ibn 'Arabi's writings, that he believed that all is God, we must also say in the same breath that he believed that nothing is God. Ibn 'Arabi expresses his position on the reality of the creatures most succinctly with the Arabic phrase *buwa lâ buwa*, "He/not He." He understands this to mean that everything discloses God, because all things gain their existence and attributes from God's Being and attributes, and that everything also veils God, because nothing is truly He but He, and each thing is truly itself, created by God precisely to be itself and nothing else.



Any meaningful comparison of Ibn 'Arabi and Rûmî will need to discuss specific ideas, images, symbols, expressions, themes, and perspectives that are found in their writings, and then show how these are related, historically or conceptually. To do so with any finality, however, we first need detailed and thorough studies of the writings of both authors. Rûmî has been studied relatively well, but no one has come close to a careful study of all of Ibn 'Arabi's specific teachings, much less the teachings of those of his disciples, like Qûnawî, whom Rûmî knew or could have known. And we will not have such a study of Ibn 'Arabi any time soon, since he was enormously more prolific than Rûmî, incomparably more difficult, and no less original.

The difficulty and significance of Ibn 'Arabi's writings may be gauged partly by the fact that over one hundred commentaries have been written on the *Fusûs al-bikam*, one of his relatively short books. From early on, teaching the *Fusûs* became a major means for the transmission and discussion of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas, and scholars of every generation wanted to join the conversation by writing their own commentaries. But no one should imagine that it is enough to read the *Fusûs* to understand Ibn 'Arabi on his own terms. First of all, understanding the *Fusûs* is not easy; it was never read without a good teacher, or at least a commentary. Second, the *Fusûs* clarifies only a tiny portion of Ibn 'Arabi's themes and concepts. Although certain major notions can be gleaned from it, this is not to say that the reader has now become familiar with

Ibn 'Arabi and can judge with finality how his teachings might be related to those of Rumi.



Despite the various difficulties connected with discussing the relationship between Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi, it is not necessary to keep silent. A great deal can be said, at least tentatively and in general terms, so I turn to positive suggestions. I have said that it is historically inaccurate and certainly misleading to characterize Ibn 'Arabi's perspective by the term *wahdat al-wujud*. Let me offer an alternative characterization, one that is firmly grounded in Ibn 'Arabi's own writings. I will do this by trying to answer the question, "What did Ibn 'Arabi think he was doing?" If we can gain a clear answer, we can then ask the same thing about Rumi, and finally suggest how the goals and methodologies of the two authors were similar or different.

In trying to answer this question, we can look for a word or an expression that Ibn 'Arabi himself employs to summarize his point of view. At this stage in my research, I can say with some confidence that there is one word by which he would be especially happy to be characterized — even though there may be other words that would also satisfy him. The word is *tabqiq*, and the person who accomplishes it is called by the active participle of the same word, *mubaiqqiq*. These terms are well-known to Arabic and Persian speakers. Nowadays in Persian the word *tabqiq* means "research" in the modern sense — which is quite a decline from what it meant for Ibn 'Arabi and his followers. At least in Persian the word has preserved some of its honorable aura; in Egyptian Arabic it is likely to mean "interrogation." In the context of Ibn 'Arabi's writings, I translate it as "realization" and "verification."

The word *tabqiq* derives from the same root as *baqq*, which is a noun and an adjective that means truth and true, reality and real, propriety and proper, rightness and right. As a Qur'anic divine name, it is usually translated as "the Truth," though I prefer "the Real." From very early times, the word was used as a synonym for the name God (Allah in Arabic and *kbudâ* in Persian). Its specific connotation as a divine name is that there is nothing real, true, right, proper, and appropriate in the full senses of these words save God Himself. God alone is truly *baqq* in every sense of the word.

The word *baqq* is commonly juxtaposed with "creatures." The juxtaposition suggests an opposition is ambiguous. In fact the status of *kbaliq* in to be investigated. We cannot say that creature proper, and appropriate in the full senses, nor not have a certain truth and appropriateness. *Kbaqq*, but it is not totally different either.

In discussing *baqq* and *kbaliq*, Ibn 'Arabi likewise, "He has given each thing its creation" (2) absolute *Haqq*, who has given everything its *kb*. Hence each created thing, even the worst of ev — a certain rightness, appropriateness, truth, and important practical consequences. To bring these to the Prophet's saying, "Your soul has a *baqq* against a *baqq* against you, your guest has a *baqq* against has a *baqq* against you; so give to each that has Ibn 'Arabi reads the last clause of this saying — a *baqq* its *baqq*" — as a general commandment cases simply as among the most important instances. He understands the saying to mean that everything an appropriateness, and everything with which has a *baqq* against us. It is our duty and responsibility by the fact that God has put it there.

Ibn 'Arabi sees this *badith* as providing the path to understand *tabqiq*. By giving all things their has placed on us the obligation of recognizing and responds to these *baqq*s in the right and proper recognized that people were created in the image names by God, and appointed God's vicegerents, then it becomes clear that accomplishing in the fullest sense would demand knowing the whole being appropriately to its every creature.

The fundamental problem that people face in stand the *baqq* of things: How do we go about *baqq* and then acting in the appropriate manner? Ibn 'Arabi's books are about. In other words, his books are about the human state, or Perfect Man (*al-insân*

judge with finality how his teachings might be re-
mí.



ous difficulties connected with discussing the rela-
Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi, it is not necessary to keep silent.
said, at least tentatively and in general terms, so I
uggestions. I have said that it is historically inaccurate
adding to characterize Ibn 'Arabi's perspective by the
ujûd. Let me offer an alternative characterization,
ounded in Ibn 'Arabi's own writings. I will do this
r the question, "What did Ibn 'Arabi think he was
gain a clear answer, we can then ask the same thing
inally suggest how the goals and methodologies of
ere similar or different.

ver this question, we can look for a word or an ex-
Ibn 'Arabi himself employs to summarize his point of view.
research, I can say with some confidence that there
ch he would be especially happy to be characterized
ere may be other words that would also satisfy him.
iq, and the person who accomplishes it is called by
le of the same word, *mubaqqiq*. These terms are
ic and Persian speakers. Nowadays in Persian the
is "research" in the modern sense — which is quite a
it meant for Ibn 'Arabi and his followers. At least in
as preserved some of its honorable aura; in Egyptian
mean "interrogation." In the context of Ibn 'Arabi's
e it as "realization" and "verification."

iq derives from the same root as *baqq*, which is a
itive that means truth and true, reality and real, pro-
rightness and right. As a Qur'anic divine name, it is
as "the Truth," though I prefer "the Real." From very
ord was used as a synonym for the name God (Allah
dâ in Persian). Its specific connotation as a divine
is nothing real, true, right, proper, and appropriate
of these words save God Himself. God alone is truly
e of the word.

The word *baqq* is commonly juxtaposed with *kbalq*, "creation" or
"creatures." The juxtaposition suggests an opposition, but the opposi-
tion is ambiguous. In fact the status of *kbalq* in relation to *baqq* needs
to be investigated. We cannot say that creatures are real, true, right,
proper, and appropriate in the full senses, nor can we say that they do
not have a certain truth and appropriateness. *Kbalq* is not the same as
baqq, but it is not totally different either.

In discussing *baqq* and *kbalq*, Ibn 'Arabi likes to cite the Qur'anic
verse, "He has given each thing its creation" (20:50). It is God, the
absolute *Haqq*, who has given everything its *kbalq*, its created nature.
Hence each created thing, even the worst of evils, has a relative *baqq*
— a certain rightness, appropriateness, truth, and reality. This has im-
portant practical consequences. To bring these home, Ibn 'Arabi quotes
the Prophet's saying, "Your soul has a *baqq* against you, your Lord has
a *baqq* against you, your guest has a *baqq* against you, and your wife
has a *baqq* against you; so give to each that has a *baqq* its *baqq*."

Ibn 'Arabi reads the last clause of this saying — "give to each that has
a *baqq* its *baqq*" — as a general commandment and the mentioned
cases simply as among the most important instances of its application.
He understands the saying to mean that everything has a rightness and
an appropriateness, and everything with which we come into contact
has a *baqq* against us. It is our duty and responsibility to what is de-
manded by the fact that God has put it there.

Ibn 'Arabi sees this *hadith* as providing the proper context in which
to understand *tabqiq*. By giving all things their creation, God Himself
has placed on us the obligation of recognizing the *baqq*s of things and
responds to these *baqq*s in the right and proper manner. Once it is
recognized that people were created in the image of God, taught all the
names by God, and appointed God's vicegerents (*khalifa*) over all crea-
tion, then it becomes clear that accomplishing the task of *tabqiq* in its
fullest sense would demand knowing the whole universe and respond-
ing appropriately to its every creature.

The fundamental problem that people face in their lives is to under-
stand the *baqq* of things: How do we go about recognizing things'
baqq and then acting in the appropriate manner? This is what Ibn
'Arabi's books are about. In other words, his books investigate the full-
ness of the human state, or Perfect Man (*al-insân al-kâmil*), and, at the

same time, they attempt to clarify the *baqq*s that pertain to human beings inasmuch as they are the divinely chosen intermediaries between God, who is the Absolute *Haqq*, and creation, which is the relative *baqq*. Naturally, Ibn 'Arabi cannot deal with all the *baqq*s, since they have no end, so most of his books present various ways of conceptualizing and organizing the relative *baqq*s in terms of the Absolute *Haqq*. To a certain degree he adopts the methodologies of earlier Sufis, theologians, and philosophers, but in each case he puts these to his own use in the project of *tabqîq*.

For example, Ibn 'Arabi often discusses the "stations" (*maqâmât*) on the Sufi path, but he does not organize them as other authors do. His basic point is to show that people who have reached full human perfection have realized all the stations, that is, all the possibilities of human existence, all the perspectives of knowledge, all the *baqq*s in the universe. To stand in one station rather than another station, to have one set of virtues rather than another set, to have one perspective rather than another perspective, to know in one way rather than in another way, is to be less than fully human. On the path toward perfection, the travelers to God adopt each station and each perspective as their own. Then they pass on, never, however, rejecting the legitimacy, the rightfulness, and the *baqq* of each station and perspective. The ultimate goal is to pass beyond every station and every standpoint and to attain to what Ibn 'Arabi calls "the Station of No Station" (*maqâm lâ maqâm*). Once the traveler has achieved this station, he has achieved the true and perfect understanding and realization of "He/not He." He sees God present in and absent from every individual thing, and he knows the exact manner of both presence and absence. He responds to God's *baqq* in each thing as it rightfully demands.



To come back to Rûmî, he may indeed have stood in the Station of No Station and given each thing that has a *baqq* its *baqq*. However, his goal in his writings and teachings was not to elucidate all and everything, as *tabqîq* demands, but rather to focus on what is absolutely essential in the path to God — what he calls "the roots of the roots of the roots of religion" (*usûl-i usûl-i usûl-i dîn*). These roots can be

summarized in one word — "love" — and Rûmî's manner that is unparalleled in Islamic if not human. Rûmî takes what Ibn 'Arabi would consider an extremely exalted station on the path to God, the Station of No Station, or at least into the highest of all stations. Rûmî invites every human heart to which in his writing is the *baqq* of all *baqq*s. Rûmî's project may be, Ibn 'Arabi must step back and, with dispassionate passion, explain the experiences not only in the station of love, but in the station of perfection.

Ibn 'Arabi and Rûmî had very different goals in mind. It does not mean that each of them set out with a plan of action in mind. Concerning Ibn 'Arabi it is a jump to the conclusion that he was busy with a protomodern sense (reading the term to mean a modern one) and therefore that he was a *mubaqqiq* more of the rare Iranian sense of the word — a researcher — and therefore that he was a *mubaqqiq* more of the rare Iranian sense of the word — a researcher — and therefore that he was a *mubaqqiq* more of the rare Iranian sense of the word — a researcher. We could then conclude that, like any researcher, he decided to set out to accomplish it. We could then conclude that he was not a scholar, but a lover; not a sober thinker, but an intoxicated celebrant of divinity. We were to reach this conclusion (as some respect one would have done so without proper consideration of the texts).

Rûmî tells us repeatedly that he is not speaking simply the flute, and his intoxicating music came from the first line of the *Mathnawî* makes precisely this reed as it complains / telling the tale of separation to understand that Ibn 'Arabi was also not a scholar. He tells us that he never speaks for himself of his own volition. Always, he says, it is the divine being through him and forcing him to put down what is disclosed within his heart. It is the divine *Haqq* process of *tabqîq* through him. The very *baqq* knowledge to be given by God, since no human knowledge can equate to any situation whatsoever in the creation.

tempt to clarify the *baqq*s that pertain to human beings are the divinely chosen intermediaries between the divine *Haqq*, and creation, which is the relative *baqq*. We cannot deal with all the *baqq*s, since they have no names; they present various ways of conceptualizing and describing the *baqq*s in terms of the Absolute *Haqq*. To a certain extent, the methodologies of earlier Sufis, theologians, and poets, in each case he puts these to his own use in the

Ibn 'Arabi often discusses the "stations" (*maqâmât*) and does not organize them as other authors do. His point is that people who have reached full human perfection are at the stations, that is, all the possibilities of human perspectives of knowledge, all the *baqq*s in the universe, rather than another station, to have one perspective rather than another set, to have one perspective rather than another set, to know in one way rather than in another way, to be fully human. On the path toward perfection, the person is at each station and each perspective as their own. However, however, rejecting the legitimacy, the rightness of each station and perspective. The ultimate goal is to attain every station and every standpoint and to attain the "Station of No Station" (*maqâm lâ maqâm*). When one has achieved this station, he has achieved the true meaning and realization of "He/not He." He sees God in everything from every individual thing, and he knows the divine presence and absence. He responds to God's will as it rightfully demands.



Rûmî, he may indeed have stood in the Station of No Station. Each thing that has a *baqq* has its *baqq*. However, his point and teachings was not to elucidate all and everything, but rather to focus on what is absolutely true to God — what he calls "the roots of the roots of knowledge" (*usûl-i usûl-i usûl-i dîn*). These roots can be

summarized in one word — "love" — and Rûmî gives love its *baqq* in a manner that is unparalleled in Islamic if not human history. In a sense, Rûmî takes what Ibn 'Arabi would consider one specific, though extremely exalted, station on the path to God, and turns it into the Station of No Station, or at least into the highest and most desirable of all stations. Rûmî invites every human heart to realize perfect love, which in his writing is the *baqq* of all *baqq*s. But no matter how exalted Rûmî's project may be, Ibn 'Arabi must still be allowed to stand back and, with dispassionate passion, explain what Perfect Man experiences not only in the station of love, but also in every other station of perfection.

Ibn 'Arabi and Rûmî had very different goals in their writings, but this does not mean that each of them set out with a specific project and plan of action in mind. Concerning Ibn 'Arabi in particular, it is easy to jump to the conclusion that he was busy with *tabqîq* in a sort of protomodern sense (reading the term to mean "spiritual research"), and therefore that he was a *mubaqqîq* more or less in the contemporary Iranian sense of the word — a researcher, a scholar. We could conclude that, like any researcher, he decided on a scholarly goal and set out to accomplish it. We could then contrast him with Rûmî, who was not a scholar, but a lover; not a sober thinker, but an ecstatic; not a philosopher, but an intoxicated celebrant of divine love. But, if one were to reach this conclusion (as some respected Orientalists have), one would have done so without proper consideration of the testimony of the texts.

Rûmî tells us repeatedly that he is not speaking for himself. He was simply the flute, and his intoxicating music came from the divine breath. The first line of the *Mathnawî* makes precisely this point: "Listen to this reed as it complains / telling the tale of separation." But we need to understand that Ibn 'Arabi was also not a scholar who set his own goals. He tells us that he never speaks for himself, that he never writes of his own volition. Always, he says, it is the divine *Haqq* who is speaking through him and forcing him to put down on paper what is being disclosed within his heart. It is the divine *Haqq* that is carrying out the process of *tabqîq* through him. The very *baqq* of knowledge is for knowledge to be given by God, since no human knowledge can be adequate to any situation whatsoever in the created world — not to men-

tion the divine world — because the created world is also God's world, God's *baqq*, the self-disclosure of the Absolute *Haqq*. The only possible way to know things as they truly are — that is, to recognize the *baqq*s of things — is to be given knowledge of them by God.

The title of Ibn 'Arabi's greatest work, *al-Futūbāt al-makkiyya*, indicates the nature of the knowledge that he was given. *Futūbāt* is the plural of *futūb*, which means "opening." Ibn 'Arabi often explains that seekers can reach the door to divinely inspired knowledge by their own efforts, but then they have to stand at the door and knock. Knocking consists in giving everything its *baqq* to the extent that is humanly possible, and this begins with giving God His *baqq*. God's first *baqq* upon human beings is for them to remember Him constantly — this is the practice of *dhikr*. One knocks at God's door by remembering Him in all one's words, thoughts, and deeds; if He chooses, He opens the door. There is no possible way to get past the door unless God opens it.

Of course it is rather clear that Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi display a certain complementarity of function and thereby answer to the vast diversity of human types. They mark out, as it were, the two major modalities in terms of which the inner meanings of Islam may be expressed, modalities that might be designated as "sobriety" (*sukr*) and "intoxication" (*sabw*). This is a complementarity, however, not a contradiction, and like *yin* and *yang*, each modality is found in the other. Ibn 'Arabi's sobriety is intoxicated, and Rumi's intoxication is sober. For his part, Ibn 'Arabi — as Michel Chodkiewicz has written — has an answer for every question, and there are people whom God has created with the drive to know all the answers. There are others who see this drive as dispersion and wish only to be immersed in the One Beloved, and Rumi speaks much more directly to them.

Finally, in their voluminous output, both Rumi and Ibn 'Arabi give voice to the paradox of the inexpressible — the Station of No Station, the vision of He/not He — the fact that, although the Ultimate cannot be explained, there is nothing else to talk about. Rumi suggests something of his own role here — and its contrast with Ibn 'Arabi's role — in one of his *ghazals*. In the penultimate line, he asks, "What is it to be lover?" Then he answers his own question: "Perfect thirst." "So," he says, announcing his divinely inspired project — "let me explain the water of life." In the final line, he changes his mind and rejects the

possibility of explanation, seemingly in response to the project of *tabqiq*: "I will not explain, I will stay explained — that is what I will do."³

³ Rumi, *Kulliyāt-4 Shams*, edited by B. Furūzānfar (1957-67), verses 17361-62.

because the created world is also God's world, closure of the Absolute *Haqq*. The only possibility as they truly are — that is, to recognize the given knowledge of them by God.

His greatest work, *al-Futûbât al-makkiyya*, indicates that he was given. *Futûbât* means "opening." Ibn 'Arabi often explains that either through divine inspiration or to divinely inspired knowledge by their own power to stand at the door and knock. Knocking through its *baqq* to the extent that is humanly possible, giving God His *baqq*. God's first *baqq* upon man to remember Him constantly — this is the knocking at God's door by remembering Him in words and deeds; if He chooses, He opens the door for us to get past the door unless God opens it.

It is clear that Ibn 'Arabi and Rûmî display a certain distinction and thereby answer to the vast diversity of meanings of Islam may be expressed, modalities such as "sobriety" (*sukr*) and "intoxication" (*sabw*). Sobriety, however, not a contradiction, and like *yaqin* is found in the other. Ibn 'Arabi's sobriety is intoxication is sober. For his part, Ibn 'Arabi — as written — has an answer for every question, from God has created with the drive to know all others who see this drive as dispersion and wish to reach the One Beloved, and Rûmî speaks much more

continuous output, both Rûmî and Ibn 'Arabi give the inexpressible — the Station of No Station, — the fact that, although the Ultimate cannot be said anything else to talk about. Rûmî suggests something — and its contrast with Ibn 'Arabi's role — in the penultimate line, he asks, "What is it to be perfect?" "Perfect thirst." "So," he answers his own question — "let me explain the divine project —" in the final line, he changes his mind and rejects the

possibility of explanation, seemingly in response to Ibn 'Arabi's grand project of *tabqîq*: "I will not explain, I will stay silent. What cannot be explained — that is what I will do."³

³ Rûmî, *Kullîyyât-î Shams*, edited by B. Furûzânfar (Tehran: Dânişgâh, 1336-46/1957-67), verses 17361-62.

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