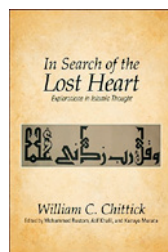


In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought

*By William Chittick,
edited by Mohammed Rustom, Atif Khalil,
and Kazuyo Murata
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Reviewed by Syed A.H. Zaidi



In their selections of essays from William C. Chittick's most seminal works, Mohammed Rustom, Atif Khalil, and Kazuyo Murata capture not only the breadth of the author's scholarship, but also his intellectual trajectory. In this book, we find Chittick's essays addressing Islamic mysticism (Sufism), philosophy, and culture. Furthermore, this anthology captures essential dimensions of his thought framed in a manner that allows the reader to understand the subtle nuances of the philosophical and spiritual positions and the issues he addresses. This volume serves as an epistemic-ontological overview of philosophical Sufism is not only an anthology of some of Chittick's best works, but also a key reference to the dimensions of Islam that can be used as an excellent introductory textbook for a class on Islam, Sufism or Islamic philosophy. This work is divided into four parts with several key appendices. Each part provides a clear and comprehensive approach to the dimension of Sufism at hand.

The first part is on the relationship of Sufism to the Islamic tradition. These essays capture the intimacy that has always existed between the roots of the Islamic religion (*usul*) and Sufism. The first essay introduces us to the various meanings of the word Islam, and captures its meaning

in-depth by recounting and explaining the ḥadīth of Gabriel, in which he appears as a man and summarizes Islam to the Prophet with several of his companions as witnesses. Chittick approaches Islam not only as a matter of faith, but also as a source of profound knowledge. He defends his understanding with references not only to eminent Islamic jurists, but also famous Sufis such as al-Ghazali and Ibn al-'Arabi. We see the same approach in his following essay on the most rudimentary exoteric mandate for the Muslims, the Salat (which is performed five times a day), in which he looks at how each movement corresponds to elements of the ascension of the Prophet from the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem to the Throne of God (*al-'Isra' wal-Mi'raj*). This section then covers ancillary areas of the exoteric dimension of Islam, such as how weeping and love are understood through verses of the Koran and various *abadith*, along with the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi, Ruzbihan Baqli, and Rashid al-Din Maybudi. Finally, the essay selected on Shi'ite Islam describes the intimate exchange that occurred between Shiites and Sufis, who hesitate in using the term Sufism despite the fact that it was quite influential in the later development of Shi'ism.¹ Chittick has made significant contributions that introduces the Western intellectual community to Shi'ite Islam, and this essay demonstrates the intimate relationship between these two dimensions of Islam in ways that are not often seen so clearly. Finally, this section closes with an exploration of the relationship of the Koran to Islam, as not only the scripture for Muslims but as the “Word of God, and God’s own Self-expression with the purpose of guiding those whom He loves” (59).

In the second part of this work, we see the heart and scope of Chittick’s academic interests, including his lifelong investigation into Ibn al-'Arabi’s philosophical Ṣūfī thought. In the first essay, Chittick addresses the history of the term *Wabdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being) and its roots in 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Ma'ruf al-Karkhi. He then recounts the history of the concept throughout all of Ibn al-'Arabi’s thought, as well as the use of the term by his intellectual successors, such as Ibn Sab'in and Qunawi. This essay is particularly important because it also examines supporters and opponents of the concept, and the logic behind arguments on both sides. The following essays continue to focus on Ibn al-'Arabi’s thought,

¹ For more information on the historical relationship between Shi'ism and Sufism, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1972), 104-123.

and those who were influenced by it. The essay on Sadr al-Din Qunawi's Neoplatonism shows the intimate relationship between Ibn al-'Arabi's and Plato's philosophies (whom he called *Aflatun al-ilabi* ['The Divine Plato']²) and the influence of Neoplatonic writings on Qunawi's thought. Chittick makes clear the abundant number of parallels that exist between the Sufism and the Neoplatonists and states that "if [Qunawi] was asked whether Plotinus had possessed the same vision of reality, he would have answered in the affirmative" (114). A perennial debate in Islamic mysticism and philosophy is on the difference between the soul and the spirit. Chittick's essay on this debate is an excellent example of his ability to clarify such issues in a short space while also addressing the significance and ramifications of this debate in Islamic thought. This part closes with a wonderful guidebook from an Indian Sufi order that not only explains the theory and practices of a prominent order, but also graphically describes the means and practices which lead to an end. The strength of this part is that it is not only epistemologically and ontologically sound in the context of Sufism but also brings out the practical facet of this aspect of the Islamic tradition in a scholarly fashion.

The third part of this work focuses on Chittick's approach to philosophy. In their selection, the editors have chosen a compendium of essays that address the dichotomy that exists between mystical and analytical philosophy. Furthermore, the essays display Chittick's emphasis on understanding the philosophers in light of the context that they were operating in, and the need to be painfully careful with the meaning of the terms they use. This is particularly important in a world where words and their meanings are often misinterpreted and misunderstood due to incorrect translations. We see Chittick's emphasis on this in the first essay. In choosing the essay titled "Rumi and the Wooden Leg of Reason," the editors elucidate the fact that Chittick emphasizes the mystical domain of Islamic philosophy, and while he understands the particular and very detailed differences between the analytical-philosophical thinkers, his goal is situated in the epistemic-ontological relationship between subject and object. In this part, we not only deal with philosophy as we see being done today, but also psychology, the study of phenomena, and eschatology *qua* philosophy. In each of these essays, Chittick addresses

² Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur* Islamic Text Society (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 105.

how various Muslim philosophers such as Baba Afdal, Mulla Sadra, and Sana'i address these important issues. In the first essay, we see Chittick use the issues of modern translations as a method that opens the reader to the two forms of philosophy mentioned above and the preference of mystical philosophical discourse over analytical or rational discourse. In the beginning of this essay Chittick uses Rumi's famous analogy of the wooden leg (201) to criticize the weak nature of the translations that we have of Islamic mystical and philosophical texts. In this discourse, Rumi states that "the leg of the reasoners is wooden—a wooden leg is awfully unsteady" (201). Chittick then comments, "When Rumi tells us that the leg of the philosophers is wooden, notice he is talking about their 'leg.' He is not stating that rational thought is useless. He is not objecting to the organized and even organismic vision of reality that was expressed by Islamic philosophy, the home of logic and systematic rational discourse. Rather he is criticizing those who think that analysis, investigation, rational argumentation, and scientific proofs provide a leg strong enough to reach the goal of human life" (201). In using this analogy to describe the translations we have today, Chittick argues that while the present translations are not useless they are nothing more than aides for a means to an end. In another essay focusing on Baba Afdal's psychology, Chittick again goes into a detailed investigation into the nature of the word *wujud*, which has been predominantly translated as "being," which does not completely capture the essence and meaning of this important philosophical term. Chittick then goes on to state that

When the secondary literature summarizes the positions of the Muslim philosophers on *wujud*, it usually forgets to mention that the Arabic word does not have the same connotations as the English words "existence" or "being." 'Being' is perhaps a better translation than existence, because it does not imply the same coldness, concreteness, and inanimateness that "existence" does. But the literal meaning of the word *wujud* is "to find" and to "perceive." It has always been understood to imply (if not to demand) awareness and consciousness. When Avicenna and others speak of the Necessary *wujud*—meaning the Ultimate Reality—it is not at all strange that they should say that this Being is by Its nature alive and aware.

Chittick then goes on to make clear the differences between Ibn Sina and Baba Afdal's, approaches to "being" and how the latter does *not* redefine "being," but uses it in a different manner. He first states

that it *cannot* be defined, but is present everywhere. By doing this, he emphasizes that being is to be found through two ways, finding and being (217). Without going through the detailed philosophical discourse that Chittick clearly elucidates, we can see this as best summarized with the analogy “the universe is a tree whose produce and fruit is man, man is a tree whose produce and fruit is the soul, the soul is a tree whose fruit is intelligence, the intelligence is a tree whose fruit is the encounter with God” (219). Man’s job is to find the soul. By finding the soul, we are able to train the intelligence, by training the intelligence, we get to know the universe and God.

In the following essays, we see Chittick taking great care in defining terms such as ‘perception,’ ‘being,’ and ‘absence’ in his essay titled “Mulla Sadra on perception” and situating and comparing them in the context of previous philosophers. Furthermore, the strength of these essays lies in the fact that the reader is not bogged down with detailed philosophical differences but instead is presented with introductions that involve clear charts and graphics that allow them to gain a rudimentary understanding into the various issues that Islamic philosophy has dealt with. In these essays, Chittick makes clear the meaning of terms in an unambiguous and unsophisticated manner while not demoting the importance of these terms. These essays not only capture the depth and breadth of Islamic philosophy, but also the spirit of it. For Chittick, the relationship between Sufism and philosophy is an intimate one, and for someone such as Ibn al-‘Arabi (whom Chittick holds in high esteem), they are one. The selected essays bring this out, and captures the fact that Ibn al-‘Arabi had no issue with borrowing terminology from all dimensions of the Islamic world, and fitting it into this philosophical Sufism in his framework known as *Wahdat al-Wujud*.

In the last part of this work, the editors focus on Chittick’s approach to contemporary problems in the Islamic world. In these essays we see his personal and intellectual approaches to handling the problem both Muslims and non-Muslims face with each other in the modern world. It is significant that the most important issues for the world: war, peace and extremism—are dealt with first in this part. Here Chittick clarifies that “in the general Western view, Islam is the most warlike of religions. Stereotyped opinions, coupled with the fact that few people have the patience to delve into the principles and “myths” underlying surface

appearances, make the task of presenting Islam's actual views of war and peace especially difficult. Only by probing deeply into Islamic ways of thinking, however, can we hope to understand Muslim views of the current situation" (277). He then goes on to define the nature of war and peace in the Islamic world, semantically and metaphysically, and how we should look at it now. What should be emphasized is his view that the inner struggle and the statement to Muslims that to "realize *tauhid* on all levels is *jihad*" and that the struggle "is of three kinds—with the hands, the tongue, and the heart" (288). In another essay, Chittick makes clear the need for man to be at harmony with the cosmos. This is to be in harmony with nature, the environment, and by doing so, with the Creator. Throughout the essay, Chittick quotes various verses of the Koran that relate man to God through nature, and which displays how man is God's vicegerent on earth (294-6). The penultimate essay titled "Stray Camels in China" is slightly comical but delivers a provocative message: The Muslim world needs to revive its ability to come to an understanding of other religious traditions. In quoting two well-known statements of the Prophet Muhammad, "Seek knowledge, even unto China" and "Wisdom is the believer's stray camel; wherever he finds it, he has the most right to it" (301), Chittick makes clear the importance for the ordinary Muslim to regain his or her intellectual grounding and use it for discourse with others. In this essay he addresses various topics in Islamic thought, such as *qur'an* and *furqan* (gathering and discernment), mercy, and the need for inclusivism. He closes this essay with an essential question: "If they are not aware of the diversity of their own wisdom, how will they be able to recognize the wisdom when they see it in other pastures?" This question remains a cornerstone in contemporary Islamic philosophical and theological thought, and is handled well in this essay by Chittick. The last essay in this part deals with an aspect of Chittick's life that is usually overlooked: his relationship to traditional Chinese philosophical thought. In this essay, he gives us an introduction to the work he's done with Sachiko Murata in reviving a bridge between Confucianism, Taoism, and Islam. He brings out key intellectual figures in thought such as Confucius, and Mencius, along with terms that remain essential in traditional Chinese philosophy such as *dao* (the way), "*xin*" (heart-mind), and "*ren*" (humanity). He then addresses how these terms have been integrated into the Islamic worldview, and the fact that "the characteristics of the

sages as found in Confucian classics like the *Doctrine of the Mean* were in keeping with their own understanding of prophets” (317). This essay captures various aspects of the Chinese-Islamic relationship based on love, knowledge, and shared human problems, and serves as a gate into what becomes Islamic Neo-Confucianism. This part remains essential in that it addresses the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, Muslims living in non-Islamic lands, and the epistemological problems that the lay Muslim is dealing with in the modern world.

This work ends with several appendices that serve as invaluable references to students and scholars alike. The first is a chronological list of all the figures cited, Muslim and non-Muslim. This shows us the various stream of scholars that have influenced Chittick’s intellectual thought in a neat and clarifying manner. The following appendices contain source material and a bibliography of Chittick’s books. While it would have been of significant advantage to also have his articles present, this bibliography captures the essence of Chittick’s intellectual trajectory and can serve as an aid to one who wants to understand his approach to Ibn al-‘Arabi and Rumi.

The editors ought to be commended for bringing forth a work that allows a student and scholar to *not* only understand William C. Chittick’s scholarly history, but also the various streams of Islamic thought and the cross-pollinations that have occurred throughout Islamic history. While it could have been further substantiated by Chittick’s contributions to Shīte Islam, with his early translations and the essay he wrote on Rumi’s views on the event of Karbalā’,³ it nonetheless delivers this through the essay in part one. This work captures the essence of William C. Chittick in that it follows the style and scholarship that he is well known for. Furthermore, it renders complex philosophical and theological ideas in a clear and well-structured manner. Its diversity of topics is well organized and brings about a wealth of ideas for students and scholars alike. With this said, *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought* is a great contribution to intellectual thought in Islamic Studies.

³ For a copy of this article, see William C. Chittick, “Rumi’s View of Imam Husayn.” *Alserat* 12, no. 1-2 (1986): 3-12.