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WILLIAM CHITTICK, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). Pp. 494. \$26.50 cloth; \$25.95 paper.

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*The Self-Disclosure of God* is the second installment in William Chittick's excellent interpretive studies on Ibn al-'Arabi's (d. 1240) monumental work *al-Futuhat al-makkiyya*. The first volume appeared as *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), and an overview of the projected *The Breath of the All-Merciful: Ibn al-'Arabi's Articulation of the Cosmos* is included in the introduction to the present book (pp. xxviii–xxxii). In his previous studies of Ibn al-'Arabi, Jalal al-Din Rumi, Afdal al-Din Kashani, and others, Chittick's effort has been to translate extensively from the original sources to convey not just the messages of the authors but also their voices. This practice is amply in evidence in *The Self-Disclosure of God*, as well, but to regard the book as only a translation would be both to underestimate Chittick's erudition and to come away with the erroneous impression that Ibn al-'Arabi's work utilizes categories that would make intuitive sense to a modern reader. The passages Chittick has chosen for translation obviously shape the picture of Ibn al-'Arabi we receive, and the *Futuhat* translated outright, without his schematization and continuous commentary, would be an obscure text for anyone not already familiar with Ibn al-'Arabi's compositional idiom.

The book's Introduction provides a brief overview of Ibn al-'Arabi's thought as it pertains to cosmological concerns, and the main text of the book is divided into chapters grouped in

sections focusing on Ibn al-‘Arabi’s understanding of God (“God and the Cosmos”), the world (“The Order of the Worlds”), and the human being (“The Structure of the Microcosm”). The chapters are followed by an appendix discussing Ibn al-‘Arabi’s views of three Sufis: Abu al-‘Abbas al-Sabti, Rabi‘at al-‘Adawiyya, and ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani. The material covered in this appendix seems to be unrelated to the book’s main theme and should be seen as an additional contribution to the field of Ibn al-‘Arabi studies. The book also comes with an appendix of technical terms, a short supplemental bibliography, and separate indexes for sources, Qur’anic verses, hadith statements, proper names, Arabic words, and technical terms. This extensive apparatus in the back matter of the book makes it a considerable resource for scholars seeking to incorporate Ibn al-‘Arabi’s views into thematic or historical studies.

As anyone familiar with Ibn al-‘Arabi’s thought can appreciate, the contents of *The Self-Disclosure of God* are far too complex and filled with nuances to present (or even represent) adequately within the limitations of a book review. Chittick’s choices for translation include both prose and poetry and convey a rich sense only of not the great Sufi master’s thought but also of his linguistic and aesthetic sensibilities. His brief comment on the difficulties of translation in the introduction (pp. xxxv–xl) should be illuminating for anyone undertaking a similar task in the future. In addition, throughout the book Chittick is careful to keep the reader aware of the fact that a translation of Ibn al-‘Arabi should never be taken as an adequate substitute for the original. As an author, Ibn al-‘Arabi is phenomenally sensitive to his choice of words and deliberately uses vocabulary that conveys ranges of meaning rather than singular significations. The translator, however, has to choose a particular term in English, which, first, makes the text more “fixed” than the original, and second, has the danger of conveying the false impression that the original necessarily implies the whole semantic field of the chosen English word. A translator’s difficulties are further compounded by the fact that Ibn al-‘Arabi is also a very precise writer, and any part of his work is linked to other points in the text through numerous linguistic and contextual clues. Chittick’s commentary in *The Self-Disclosure of God* continually invites the reader to appreciate the challenges and ambiguities resulting from these factors, and close attention to his discussion would be very valuable for anyone wishing to master the technicalities of medieval Sufi discourse from a modern academic perspective.

The density of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s prose means that, even with Chittick’s illuminating accompanying discussion, understanding his ideas fully requires patient acquisition of the technical terminology used in the text. For example, Ibn al-‘Arabi discusses the concept “body” under the terms *jism*, *jasad*, *badan*, *haykal*, *shabah*, *markab*, and *qālab* (pp. 279–80), with slight changes of nuance from one term to the next. In one instance, the interconnection between a body and the spirit that animates it is described as follows: “[i]n the spirit, the body has intelligible, known traces, because it bestows on the spirit knowledges of tastings and what cannot be known except through it; and in the body, the spirit has sensory traces that every living thing witnesses in itself. So also is the cosmos with the Real. In the cosmos God has manifest traces, which are the states within which the cosmos undergoes fluctuation. This is one of the properties of His name Aeon” (p. 280). The cosmological significance of this passage lies in the fact that it discusses the relationships between souls and bodies and God and the cosmos in a parallel way. While it is easy to see how this idea would connect to the general theme of the cosmos being an aspect of God’s self-disclosure, a full appreciation of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s view requires familiarity with the technical meanings ascribed to the terms spirit (*rūh*), trace (*athar*), tasting (*dhawq*), cosmos (*‘ālam*), state (*ḥāl*), fluctuation (*taqallub*), and Aeon (*dahr*). All of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s works in the original present similar challenges of prior knowledge to the reader, and it is a tribute to Chittick that he makes portions of the *Futuhat* accessible in English while retaining a considerable proportion of the original’s highly textured quality.

*The Self-Disclosure of God* will make instructive reading for specialists and non-experts on different grounds. Those aware of Sufi thought will find much that is familiar in the book, since Ibn al-‘Arabi’s work summarizes or responds to his predecessors among Sufis, and he exercised

280 *Int. J. Middle East Stud.* 36 (2004)

tremendous influence on authors living in the centuries after his death. Readers who are not well versed in Sufism will find the book a demanding but rewarding window into the thought of an author who is quite central to understanding the Islamic tradition. *The Self-Disclosure of God* is sure to remain crucial for any bibliography on Ibn al-ʿArabi, Sufism, and medieval Islamic intellectual history for much time to come.