

IRFAN REVISITED: KHOMEINI AND THE LEGACY OF ISLAMIC MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHY

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IN 1968—five years after Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini's expulsion from Iran—SAVAK, the shah's secret police, raided his Qom house and confiscated his papers, including commentaries on mysticism that he had written in the 1930s. Fifteen years later, in 1983, some of Khomeini's lost works were rediscovered by a religious student in Hamadan. The student, whose name is never mentioned in subsequent accounts of the event, bought two books from an itinerant vendor who, having failed to find a buyer in the local bazaar, came to a seminary (*madraseh*) to sell them for 50 tumans.¹

One of the books was a nineteenth-century Egyptian lithographical edition of the commentary on Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam* (Bezels of wisdom) composed by Sharaf al-Din Mahmud al-Qaysari (d. 751/1350), who was both an extraordinary mystical thinker in his own right and a widely known exponent of Ibn Arabi's doctrine.² On the margins of the book the student found numerous handwritten notes that, in keeping with the age-old tradition of Muslim manuscript writing, simultaneously constituted a supercommentary on the original text of the *Fusus*

1. Muhammad Hasan Rahimiyan, ed., "Muqaddimat al-nashir" (Publisher's introduction), *Ta'liqat ala sharh "Fusus al-hikam" wa "Misbah al-uns" li-ayat Allah al-Khomeini* (Commentaries on the interpretation of *Fusus al-hikam* and *Misbah al-uns* by Ayatollah Khomeini) (Tehran: Pasdar-e Islam, 1406/1986), p. 7.

2. For Qaysari's teaching, see William Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qunawi to al-Qaysari," *Muslim World* 72 (19 → James Morris, "Ibn Arabi and His Interpreters," part 2, "Influences and Interpretations," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106, no. 3 (1986).

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al-hikam and a commentary on the book by Qaysari. In amazement, the student discovered that the marginal notes, written in Arabic, were signed “al-Sayyid Rouhollah Khomeini.” Not believing his eyes, the student rushed the books to the preacher of Hamadan’s Friday mosque, Ayatollah Hosain Nuri, who immediately recognized Khomeini’s script on the margins. The other book turned out to be an annotated treatise on Shi’i theology with notes written by Khomeini’s late son Mustafa. In either a demonstration of loyalty to the leader of the nation, or a demonstration of what may have been as well a sign of genuine admiration for his intellectual achievement, several Muslim scholars hurried to publish the newly discovered works. They presented them as pertaining to the literature of *irfan* (gnosis)—a term used in the context of the Islamic culture of Iran to describe a synthesis of philosophy, speculative theology, and mystical thought that emerged in the later medieval period and has persisted until today.³

The text of Khomeini’s supercommentary by itself apparently did not look imposing enough to the editor, who decided to supplement it with another supercommentary written by Khomeini on the margins of the *Misbah al-uns* (Lamp of intimacy), a commentary on Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi’s (d. 673/1273–74) *Miftah al-gayb* (Key to the unseen) composed by the famous Ottoman scholar Muhammad b. Hamza Fanari (d. 834/1431).⁴ The two supercommentaries match well and give us an idea of the mystical and philosophical outlook of perhaps the greatest, or at least the most influential, Muslim political leader of the twentieth century.

Given the author’s status, the editor did not dare to publish the commentaries without Khomeini’s permission, and, thus, he sent to Khomeini a draft of the handsomely copied manuscript for correction and approval. Khomeini sanctioned its publication after making a few minor stylistic changes.⁵ To bypass the enormous difficulties involved in a critical edition of the voluminous texts that had been commented upon by young Khomeini, the editors chose to reproduce only his rather disparate remarks and elaborations. In order to provide his discourse with a minimum of integrity, they retained those phrases from the original

3. This peculiar type of later Islamic thought, combining in itself the elements of scholasticism, rational philosophy, and mysticism, has also been known in Iran as *hikmat* (wisdom). Henry Corbin suggested that it should be rendered into European languages as *theo-sophia*. See Henry Corbin, *Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques*, Bibliothèque iranienne, vol. 10 (Tehran and Paris: Institut franco-iranien, 1964), pp. 82–93; see also Mulla Hadi Sabzawari, *Sharh-i “Ghurur al-fara’id” or Sharh-i “Manzuma”* (Commentary on *Ghurur al-fara’id* or Commentary on the *Manzuma*), part 1, *Metaphysics*, ed. by M. Mohaghegh and T. Izutsu (Tehran: Moasseseh-ye Mutalaat-e Islami, 1969), pp. 1–15 of the English text.

4. For Qunawi’s life and work see William Chittick, “The Last Will and Testament of Ibn Arabi’s Foremost Disciple and Some Notes on Its Author,” *Sophia Perennis* 4, no. 1 (1978); idem, “Mysticism versus Philosophy: The al-Tusi, al-Qunawi Correspondence,” *Religious Studies* 17 (1981); idem, “Sadr al-Din Qunawi on the Oneness of Being,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1981). For Fanari, see Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, supplement, vol. 2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1938), pp. 328–9; and J.R. Walsh, “Fenari-Zade,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 2, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960–), p. 879.

5. Some of the corrections in his hand are reproduced on page 6 of the editor’s introduction to the supercommentary.

lithographical editions that elicited his comments. Nevertheless, an attempt to grasp the author's complex reasoning without having recourse to the original texts on which they are based is a rather frustrating task. Both Qaysari's and Fanari's texts are essential, therefore, for a proper assessment of Khomeini's position vis-à-vis these thinkers and the philosophy of *irfan* as a whole.

From the outset, it should be stressed that Khomeini's interest in Islamic mystical philosophy at the early stages of his scholarly career is neither novel nor sensational.⁶ Despite the availability of relevant sources, no scholar previously has undertaken a systematic analysis of Khomeini's mystical and metaphysical views. What follows is an attempt to do justice to this aspect of Khomeini's legacy, which, although less spectacular than his political achievements, deserves a serious examination.

ORIGINS AND EDUCATION

Khomeini was born on September 24, 1902, in Khomein, a small provincial town southwest of Tehran. Because he came from a family of religious scholars claiming descent from the Prophet, Khomeini obtained a solid theological training, studying initially with his elder brother Ayatollah Murtaza Pasandideh. At age 19, Khomeini went to the nearby town of Arak, where he was accepted into the circle of students of Abd al-Karim Ha'iri (d. 1355/1937), an acclaimed Shi'i scholar.⁷ When Ha'iri was invited to Qom in 1921, young Khomeini followed him and soon made the acquaintance of Mirza Muhammad Ali Shahabadi (1292/1875–1369/1950), a master of both religious and rational sciences. This teacher, together with the somewhat controversial religious thinker Mirza Ali Akbar Hakim (d. 1344/1925), and possibly several other scholars, became Khomeini's mentors in

6. Khomeini's inclination toward mysticism and mystical philosophy is treated in some detail by Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), especially, pp. 183–5, which were reproduced in *Books and Religion* 16 (January–February 1986) under the title "Islamic Mysticism, Politics and Ruhollah Khomeini." Mottahedeh, however, apparently did not have a first-hand knowledge of Khomeini's mystical writings, which, this author believes, led him to a number of questionable suppositions regarding the sources of Khomeini's mystical doctrines and metaphysics. Thus, Mottahedeh seems to have exaggerated Khomeini's dependence on the teachings of al-Suhrawardi al-Maqtul. Rather, it was Ibn Arabi, Qunawi, Qaysari, and their later successors within the framework of *wujudi* Sufism who may be regarded as Khomeini's primary masters in esoteric philosophy, while Suhrawardi's influence on him is much less pronounced. The term *wujudi* is derived from the phrase *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being), presumably coined by Qunawi and his circle to describe the essence of Ibn Arabi's teaching. The latter, however, never used it in his own works. Moreover, the problem of being, which seems to have been only one of his major concerns, became central only for his followers, who, thus, quite appositely, are referred to as *al-wujudiyya*.

7. On Ha'iri see Abdul Hadi Hairi, "Ha'iri," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, supplement, pp. 342–3; Mottahedeh, *Mantle of the Prophet*, pp. 228–9; Farhang Rajaee, *Islamic Values and World View: Khomeini on Man, the State, and International Politics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), p. 25. It was owing to Ha'iri's activities that Qom rose to the status of a major religious center of Iran.

his study of *irfan*.⁸ These teachers and their masters⁹ linked the future ayatollah to the long tradition of learning in Iranian Islam that combined mystical and metaphysical trends dating back to the teachings of such seminal figures in Shi'i intellectual history as Mir Damad (d. 1040/1630) and Mulla Sadra (d. 1050/1640),¹⁰ who had drawn their inspiration from eminent predecessors, such as Haydar Amuli (d. ca. 787/1385), Ibn Arabi, and Yahya al-Suhrawardi, also known as al-Suhrawardi al-Maqtul (executed in 587/1191).¹¹

In the light of the foregoing, it seems quite natural that Sadra's *Kitab al-asfar* (Book of journeys) was the first work on *irfan* that Khomeini studied under Shahabadi's guidance.¹² Mulla Sadra provided an account of the spiritual development experienced by the mystical wayfarer and stressed the mystic's obligations toward the community of the faithful arising from his seemingly individualistic quest. Sadra divided this spiritual journey into four stages corresponding to the wayfarer's degree of spiritual attainment, on the one hand, and, on the other, to his function as a divine messenger. In the first stage, man travels from his self and the world to God; the second journey takes him from God to God, as he oscillates between considerations of divine attributes and divine essence; in the third stage, man sets out on the road from God back to the world and his self; finally, he begins to wander from man to man, bestowing on his community a new dispensation of spiritual and moral order.

8. See Rouhollah Khomeini, *Misbah al-hidaya ila al-khilafa wa al-wilaya: Ta'lif ayat Allah al-Khomeini* (Lamp [showing] the right way to vicegerency and sainthood: A writing by Ayatollah Khomeini), ed. al-Sayyid Ahmad al-Fihri (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-wafa', 1403/1983), pp. 37–8 and 78; Hamid Algar, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1981), pp. 424 and 434, note 94 and 97. See also Rahimiyan, "Muqaddimat al-nashir," pp. 3–4.

9. For instance, Ali Akbar Hakim was a student of Mulla Hadi Sabzawari (1295/1878), the celebrated Iranian philosopher and theologian. For the latter's metaphysical views see Sabzawari, *Sharh-i "Ghurar al-fara'id."* Sabzawari undertook an overall critical reassessment of previous mystical and metaphysical doctrines, creating yet another intricate fusion of mystical experience, theology, and analytical thinking.

10. See A.S. Bazmee Ansari, "Al-Damad," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, pp. 103–4; Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1975); James Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Parvez Morewedge, trans., *The Metaphysics of Mulla Sadra* (Tehran and New York: Institute for Cultural Studies, 1991).

11. On Haydar Amuli, see Josef van Ess, "Haydar-i Amuli," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, supplement, pp. 363–5; Sayyed Haydar Amoli, *La philosophie shi'ite*, ed. Henry Corbin and Osman Yahia, Bibliothèque iranienne, vol. 16 (Tehran and Paris: Institut franco-iranien, 1969); and Peter Antes, *Zur Theologie der schi'a: Eine Untersuchung des Jami' al-asrar wa manba' al-anwar von Sayyid Haidar Amoli* (Freiburg: Freiburger Islamstudien, 1971). Suhrawardi's life and work were carefully examined by Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, vol. 2, *Sohrawardi et les platoniciens de Perse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); idem, *Yahya Sohrawardi: opéra metaphysica et mystica*, Bibliothèque iranienne, vol. 17 and 17a (Tehran and Paris: Institut franco-iranien, 1952–1970). For Ibn Arabi's teachings, see Ralph Austin, trans., *Ibn Arabi: The Bezels of Wisdom* (New York and Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1980); Michel Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints: prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn Arabi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986); and William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: SUNY, 1989). For the best biography of Ibn Arabi, see Claude Addas, *Ibn Arabi: ou la quête du soufre rouge* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

12. Rahimiyan, "Muqaddimat al-nashir," p. 4.

This model of human destiny outlined by Mulla Sadra—and later adopted by Khomeini—harks back to earlier Sufi teachings. Thus, Sadra's description of the spiritual journey is reminiscent of Ibn Arabi's concept of the perfect man (*al-insan al-kamil*) in its particular emphasis on his functions as a religious leader of the community of believers—a function some Western scholars have tended to downplay, instead focusing their attention on the perfect man's role in the all-important cosmic force tying together the origin and the return.¹³

Khomeini's next textbook on irfan was Qaysari's *Sharh "Fusus al-hikam"* (Commentary on the *Fusus al-hikam*).¹⁴ This work, together with the commentary on the *Fusus al-hikam* written by Qaysari's teacher, Abd al-Razzaq Kashani, are probably the most influential and widely read elucidations of Ibn Arabi's masterpiece. Qaysari's *Sharh* had a profound and lasting effect on Khomeini's outlook in general and his metaphysical views in particular. He made extensive use of this book in his writings on irfan.

After studying Qaysari's commentary, Khomeini turned to the fountainhead of the tradition of rationalizing interpretation of Ibn Arabi's heritage as epitomized in the works of Qunawi, Ibn Arabi's direct disciple.¹⁵ Khomeini's first exposure to the teachings of Qunawi presumably was through a commentary on Qunawi's *Miftah al-qayb*. This particular commentary was the work of Fanari, who for many years held the position of chief *qadi* in Bursa. Fanari claimed to have received the right to teach the *Miftah al-qayb* from his father, supposedly a pupil of Qunawi.¹⁶ In the traditional curriculum of Iran's madrasehs, the text of the *Miftah al-qayb* with Fanari's glosses was considered the most advanced work on metaphysics taught after the *Fusus al-hikam* of Ibn Arabi and the *Kitab al-asfar* of Mulla Sadra.¹⁷

Khomeini's studies in Qom under the supervision of Shahabadi lasted at least six years, until the irfan teacher moved to Tehran. Left more or less to his own devices, Khomeini apparently continued to read the works of medieval Muslim philosophers and mystics. It seems likely that he adopted a number of ascetic practices associated with the early stages of the Sufi path: renunciation of worldly delights and desires, self-imposed poverty, scrupulous discernment of the "lawful" and "forbidden," and so forth. His biographers point out that his bent for

13. See, for example, Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 222–7, 242–3.

14. See Da'wud b. Mahmud al-Qaysari, *Sharh "Fusus al-hikam"* (Cairo, 1299 A.H.).

15. Qunawi played a major role in the systematization and dissemination of Ibn Arabi's complex and loosely structured teachings. See Chittick, "The Last Will and Testament"; idem, "Sadr al-Din Qunawi"; idem, "Mysticism versus Philosophy."

16. See J.R. Walsh, "Fenari Zade," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, p. 879.

17. Chittick, "The Last Will and Testament," p. 48; see also idem, ed., English "Introduction," Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad Jami, *Naqd al-nusus fi sharh naqsh "al-fusus"* (Critique of the texts in the commentary on the engravings of *al-Fusus [al-hikam]*), (Tehran: Intisharat-e Anjoman-e Shahanshahi-e Falsafeh-ye Iran, 1977), p. xv.

simplicity and asceticism, acquired during his studies in Qom, remained unchanged when he became the leader of Iran.¹⁸

The phases of Khomeini's spiritual and intellectual advancement, as well as his textbooks, were deeply traditional. He followed the steps of many a religious thinker as described in medieval biographical and autobiographical accounts: from a formal legal and theological training to an ascetic devotion and self-purification, which usually led the seeker to a divine "illumination" and a direct vision of cosmic realities and God. A similar spiritual and intellectual evolution may be construed from the autobiography of the great Sunni theologian Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) and from the biographies of the two prominent representatives of Shi'i esotericism, Haydar Amuli and Mulla Sadra.

WORKS AND INFLUENCES

The results of Khomeini's philosophical studies and spiritual labors in Qom were succinctly summarized in the *Sharh "Du'a' al-sahar"* (Commentary on *Du'a' al-sahar* [the morning prayer])—his 1928 commentary on a popular Shi'i litany—and in his first independent treatise on irfan, *Misbah al-hidaya ila al-khilafa wa al-wilaya* (Lamp [showing] the right way to vicegerency and sainthood), written one year later.¹⁹ The latter is a relatively coherent exposition of Khomeini's views on Islamic philosophy and esotericism, which deserves a closer examination.

Khomeini's *Misbah al-hidaya* displays some features common to many others' early, but not yet mature, writings: a lack of compositional perfection—which in Khomeini's case is the disparity of the parts constituting the discourse, an unnecessary repetition of rather trite metaphysical propositions, and the absence of a clearly defined approach. The impression of immaturity is reinforced by constant references to the Muslim thinkers whose writings determined the course of Khomeini's reasoning and his overall attitude toward religion. These same features, however, facilitate the task of analyzing Khomeini's first independent contribution to the Iranian esoteric tradition. Thus, even a cursory survey of his quotations betrays his indebtedness to the world of ideas associated with the name of Ibn Arabi.

Khomeini was particularly fascinated by the rationalizing interpretation of akbarian²⁰ teachings initiated by Qunawi and, from the fourteenth century onward, adopted by Shi'i thinkers of esoteric slant. Apart from his direct teachers—Shahabadi and Sa'id Qommi, both of whom apparently belonged to the

18. See M.H. Siddiqui, "Ayatullah Ruhullah al-Musavi Khomeini's Ultimate Reality and Meaning," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Philosophy of Understanding* 9 (1986), p. 127.

19. See *Sharh "Du'a' al-sahar": Awwal ta'lif li-ayat Allah al-Khomeini* (Commentary on *Du'a' al-Sahar: The first writing of Ayatollah Khomeini*), ed. al-Sayyid Ahmad al-Fihri (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-wafa', 1402/1982); *Misbah al-hidaya*.

20. This adjective is often used to refer to the teachings introduced by al-Shaykh al-Akbar (the greatest master)—an honorific title of Ibn Arabi used by his followers.

same *wujudi* tradition²¹—Khomeini displays a special liking for Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam* and *al-Futuhat al-makkiyya* (The Meccan revelations), Qunawi's *Miftah al-ghayb*, Qaysari's *Sharh "Fusus al-hikam,"* Kashani's *Sharh qasidat Ibn al-Farid* (Commentary on Ibn Farid's poem, that is, *al-Ta'iyya al-kubra* [The great ta'iyya]), and *Istilahat al-sufiyya* (The technical terms of the Sufis). He also makes frequent references to *al-Asfar al-arba'a* (The four journeys) of Mulla Sadra.²² Even without such overt quotations, Khomeini's dependence on those thinkers can be inferred, since the text of the *Misbah al-hidaya* is permeated with stylistic features and terminology characteristic of the writings of the school of Ibn Arabi.

At the same time, Khomeini occasionally mentioned the names of Sufis who stood outside the akbarian tradition. Thus, apart from al-Suhrawardi al-Maqtul, who is cited in passing without reference to any of his works,²³ Khomeini quotes a couple of mystical verses: one by Abdallah al-Ansari (d. 481/1089), a famous Hanbali Sufi from Herat, the other by Rumi (d. 672/1273).²⁴ Poetic lines are quoted in Persian—a practice employed by Khomeini in his later writings in the tradition of *irfan*. He apparently gave preference to the Persian language as a means of conveying the subtleties of mystical experience, while his metaphysical speculations and theoretical statements are invariably clothed in Arabic theological and esoteric terminology, approved by many generations of his predecessors.

It is interesting that the title of Khomeini's first mystical treatise coincides with that of the popular Sufi manual by Izz al-Din Mahmud Kashani (d. 735/1334–35), which is an adaptation of the Arabic work *Awarif al-ma'arif* (Gifts of mystical knowledge), written a century earlier by Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234).²⁵ The similarity in title may, of course, be an unconscious borrowing, since the moral and practical aspects of Sufism that are central to Kashani's *Misbah* are far from the metaphysical concerns that inform the discourse of its namesake composed by Khomeini.

One should add to the list of authorities quoted in the *Misbah al-hidaya* a number of references to the sayings of the Shi'i imams, primarily Ali and his son Hussein,²⁶ as well as reports of their "reliable" transmitters, notably Kulayni (d. 329/940–41)²⁷ and Ibn Babawayh al-Saduq (d. 381/991–92).²⁸ Occasionally,

21. See *Misbah al-hidaya*, pp. 27, 37, 112, 116, 134, 153.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 51, 52, 69, 84, 110, 112, 113, 114, 131, 148–51.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 93 and 109; see also note 7.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 147. On Ansari, see Serge Laugier de Beaurecueil, *Khwaja Abdullah Ansari (386–481/1006–1089): mystique hanbalite* (Beirut: Institut français de Damas, 1965). For Rumi's mystical and philosophical views, see William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: SUNY, 1983).

25. On Umar al-Suhrawardi and his commentators, see Richard Gramlich, trans., *Die Gaben der Erkenntnisse des Umar as-Suhrawardi ("Awarif al-ma'arif")* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1978). For the place of Mahmud Kashani's commentary in the history of Persian Sufism, see Chittick, English "Introduction," p. xvii.

26. See *Misbah al-hidaya*, pp. 113, 127–8.

27. On this Shi'i authority, see Wilferd Madelung, "Al-Kulayni," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 5, pp. 362–3.

28. See A.A.A. Fyzee, "Ibn Babawayh," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 3, pp. 726–7.

Khomeini invokes Ibn Sina and his *Kitab al-shifa'* (Book of healing),²⁹ which is natural in view of the latter's marked impact on the writings of the wujudi school in general, and those of Qunawi in particular.³⁰

More noteworthy, perhaps, is Khomeini's heavy reliance on the work of Aristotle.³¹ Khomeini was not the first Muslim thinker to come under the influence of the ancient philosopher. The so-called *Theologia Aristotelis* (Theology of Aristotle, or *Uthulujiyya Aristutalis*), to which Khomeini turns for arguments in his exposition of cosmological theory, is actually only a paraphrase of Plotinus' *Enneades*, written by a Hellenistic author, possibly Diodocus Proclus (d. 485). Since the *Theologia* is "enormously remote from the genuine teaching of Aristotle,"³² its attribution has been questioned by several medieval Muslim thinkers acquainted with the authentic legacy of the Stagerite. Such doubts were expressed, for instance, by al-Suhrawardi al-Maqtul, the founder of the mystical doctrine of *ishraq*, and later by his renowned commentator Qutb al-Din Shirazi (d. 710/1311).³³ From the mid-nineteenth century until the early twentieth century, the authorship of the *Theologia* was the subject of scholarly debate among Western Islamicists and historians studying Hellenistic thought. Though some Muslim intellectuals who could read European studies on Islamic civilization may well have known that Aristotle had never written such a work, this fact became widely known in the Muslim world only in the 1950s, thanks to the studies of the Egyptian philosopher Abd al-Rahman al-Badawi.³⁴

The text of *Misbah al-hidaya* carries not only indirect borrowings, but also a number of word-for-word citations from the pseudo-*Theologia*.³⁵ The way the citations are used would seem to indicate that the future Iranian leader was ignorant of both the misattribution and of the doubts regarding their authorship voiced by medieval Muslim thinkers. This impression is strengthened by the fact that Khomeini made no attempt to be ambiguous when speaking of the personality of *Theologia's* author. He straightforwardly refers to him as "the teacher of [philosophical] profession" (*mu'allim al-sana'a*), "the sage" (*al-hakim*), and finally, "the instructor of the peripatetics" (*mufid al-mashsha'iyyin*).³⁶

There are two possible explanations for Khomeini's apparent ignorance: either he was simply unaware of the doubts of the medieval Muslim scholars, as

29. *Misbah al-hidaya*, pp. 109, 117.

30. ➔ James Morris, "Ibn Arabi and His Interpreters," part 2, "Influences and Interpretations [Conclusion]," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107, no. 1 (1987).

31. *Misbah al-hidaya*, pp. 60, 109, 116–18.

32. Majid Fakhry, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 32.

33. On Qutb al-Din Shirazi, a student of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, and himself a distinguished philosopher and astronomer, see E. Wiedemann, "Kutb al-din Shirazi," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 5, pp. 547–8.

34. Abdurrahman Badawi, ed. and comp., *Plotinus apud arabes. "Theologia Aristotelis" et fragmenta quae supersunt* (Cairo, 1955); see also Fakhry, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 32–40.

35. For example, see p. 60.

36. *Misbah al-hidaya*, p. 116.

well as of the studies of the Western researchers, or he intentionally disregarded them, demonstrating his faithfulness to the strongly entrenched stereotypes of traditional scholarship.³⁷ In any case, Khomeini's ignorance is revealing insofar as it provides an insight into the nature of the hermetically sealed and apparently xenophobic intellectual milieu that shaped his religious outlook.

THE SYNTHESIS

The list of Muslim thinkers who influenced Khomeini is instructive insofar as it reflects the major layers that constitute Khomeini's discourse in the *Misbah al-hidaya*. It is evidence of his preoccupation with the metaphysical and cosmological doctrines rooted in Ibn Arabi's doctrines and further developed along the rationalizing lines of interpretation established by Qunawi and perpetuated by the wujudi school. Young Khomeini, however, clearly understood that the vision of the world held by these thinkers was based on some earlier patterns, including ones that had come into existence prior to the rise of Islam. He turned, therefore, to the texts in which these earlier patterns found an expression that he regarded as apposite to his aims. Not surprisingly, he yielded to the fascination and elegance of Neoplatonist emanational theories that were, minor points apart, quite consistent with the views espoused by Muslim esotericists.

In principle, Khomeini was ready to accept non-Islamic theories provided they were sanctioned by the tradition within the contours of which his thought operated. At the same time, he remained alert to the limitations of what he thought were "pagan," and thus "deficient," outlooks, unadorned, as it were, by a monotheistic revelation. Hence, he always sought to buttress the Neoplatonist theoretical construct by the scaffolding of Islamic tradition, creating a conspicuously precarious synthesis of philosophical emanationalism and religious revelation. This religious dimension, at least in the *Misbah al-hidaya*, is exemplified by the major three branches of Islamic knowledge: the corpus of transmitted traditional wisdom—the Quran and the Shi'i hadith; the Shi'i doctrine of *imamat*; and the legacy of Muslim esotericism (namely, the school of Iranian *irfan* with a distinct wujudi slant). To be sure, some other sources and authorities—Ibn Sina and earlier Iranian sufis, such as Ansari and Rumi—loom vaguely in the background, but they are seemingly assigned only secondary roles in the overall plot.

Muslim traditional knowledge, as well as the metaphysical and theosophical speculations of the proponents of *irfan*, who invariably couched their arguments in the language of Islamic revelation, enabled Khomeini to reduce the chilling impersonality of the Neoplatonist notion of the One (The First Cause) and to

37. Interestingly, the editor of *Misbah al-hidaya* also seems to ignore Khomeini's views regarding the *Theologia* and similar pseudo-Aristotelian writings, or at least he never points out Khomeini's delusion.

replace it with the God of Muslim monotheism—the Essence endowed with personal features and qualities ascribed to it in the Quran and hadith. Introducing the finely chiseled concepts worked out by many generations of Muslim mystical thinkers and divines, Khomeini, like so many of his predecessors, sought to overcome the perennial problem posed by the transcendency and necessity of the Absolute Being and its contingent and temporal self-manifestation in the material substratum, resulting in the emergence of visible universe. Khomeini argued,

It is said that Being [wujud] may manifest itself through a unifying manifestation of the Unseen in which all [divine] Names and Attributes are annihilated. Such a manifestation takes place through God's all-comprehensive Name [*al-ism al-musta'thir*],³⁸ and the 73d letter of His Greatest Name. Thus, this is the station [*maqam*] of non-conditionality.³⁹ At this station He has a name, though it is contained in His knowledge of the Unseen [*al-ghayb*]. This is the unifying manifestation in the aspect of the Unseen that occurs due to the Most Holy Effusion [*fayd*]. As for the [divine] Essence as such, it does not appear in any mirror of the mirrors [of Universe], and neither the wayfarer among the people of God, nor the possessors of hearts,⁴⁰ nor even the friends of God are able to perceive It. It is the Unseen, but not in the sense of the unifying Unseen, nay It has neither a name, nor a [visible] effect, nor can It be alluded to; none aspires after It!

[As a poet said:]

Phoenix is impossible to trap,
So take your snare, and leave!

God may, however, manifest Himself in an aspect which embraces the realities of all the Names and Attributes. This is the station of God's Greatest Name, the Lord of Perfect Man, [the level of] intelligible manifestation through nominal manyness [*kathra asma'iyya*] that comprises all other nominal manifestations. This is the station of oneness [*al-wahidiyya*].⁴¹

To overcome the dramatic polarity separating God from the cosmos, Khomeini made extensive use of the doctrine of divine Names and Attributes that Ibn Arabi and the wujudi school elaborated upon at length. Commenting on the phrase "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate," which opens the text of the Quran and is subsequently placed at the beginning of each Quranic *sura*, Khomeini offered the following explanation of the two epithets ascribed to God:

38. This term, often employed by Khomeini, may also be translated as "the Name appropriated by God exclusively," since, in contrast to God's other Names (Lord, Willing, Seeing, Knowing, and so forth), this Name—Allah—cannot be shared with Him by any creature. In this case, it should be read as *al-ism al-musta'thar*.

39. Khomeini refers to the stage of divine existence (presence) that allows no positive judgment (*hukm*) about the divine Absolute. There, it can only be conceived of in negative terms, that it is neither this nor that. In other words, it is not "conditioned" nor "specified" by any attribute, quality, property, or judgement.

40. An epithet routinely applied to the Sufis in general, Sufi "gnostics" in particular.

41. *Ta'liqat ala sharh*, pp. 14–15.

Know, that the Name “the Merciful [*rahman*] the Compassionate [*rahim*]” is one of the all-embracing and all-comprehensive [divine] Names. Indeed, “Merciful” is a station where the [potential] expanse of external existence is unfolded, and thus becomes visible as it emerges from the obscurity of the unseen Reality [of God] to the [world of] absolute witnessing. It is a manifestation of merciful Mercy. The “Compassionate,” on the other hand, is a station where existence is brought together through a unifying contraction, and is thus taken back to the realm of the Unseen. . . . Whenever existence enters into obscurity, arriving at the gates of God—it is the compassionate Mercy. As for God’s Greatest Name, it is the station where both the unifying expansion and the unifying contraction are brought together. This is the station of the all-comprehensive bringing together. That’s why in the phrase “In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate” these two epithets are placed after God’s Greatest Name [Allah].⁴²

While handling two types of divine Mercy, Khomeini almost surely had in mind an important theme discussed in Ibn Arabi’s *Fusus al-hikam*. In that work, Ibn Arabi depicts divine Mercy as operating in two directions: “outwardly, in creating the necessary object of the divine love” (*rahman*) and “inwardly in reestablishing the original synthesis of the Reality” (*rahim*). Both authors seem to be pursuing the same goal, insofar as they endeavor to illustrate “the double and inevitable necessity of otherness and nonotherness for love whether divine or human, which creates the tension necessary for the experience and awareness of self-consciousness.”⁴³

Demonstrating an intimate knowledge of Ibn Arabi’s problematics, Khomeini then took up the task of achieving a reconciliation between a representation of God as absolutely “incomparable” with and removed from the world (*tanzih*), and a more “scriptural” view, portraying Him as more or less “similar” and “immanent” to His creation (*tashbih*).⁴⁴ To this end Khomeini had recourse to a method of reasoning described by a contemporary scholar as “mystical dialectic.”⁴⁵ Such “dialectic” occupied a prominent position in Ibn Arabi’s discourse and was later inherited by those who followed his lead in marrying philosophy to mysticism. In discussing the problem of *tanzih* and *tashbih*, Khomeini unequivocally took sides with the Sufi “sages” (*hukama*) and rejected scholastic solutions advocated by the Muslim speculative theologians:

You will see that these people [speculative theologians and rational thinkers] may deny any relationship [between the world and its Maker], and postulate a diversity

42. See *ibid.*, p. 16, insofar as these two names exemplify the two possible aspects of the Divine Essence (Allah) and its two possible relationships with the world.

43. Austin, *Bezels*, p. 29.

44. For Ibn Arabi’s position with regard to *tanzih* and *tashbih*, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 68–76. Khomeini’s tackling of this theological problem appears to be nothing but a reiteration of the solution offered by Ibn Arabi.

45. For a discussion of this notion, see Michael Sells, “Ibn Arabi’s ‘Garden among the Flames’: A Reevaluation,” *History of Religions* 23, no. 4 (1984) → *idem*, “Apophysis in Plotinus: A Critical Approach,” *Harvard Theological Review* 78, nos. 3–4 (1985).

[between them], thus isolating the Real [*al-haqq*] from the Creation [*al-khalq*]. They are oblivious of the fact that this inevitably results in stripping God of His attributes [*ta'til*] and in tying His hands with the ropes of causality. May their own hands be manacled! Cursed be they for what they taught! Occasionally they incline to intermingling [God and creatures], which leads them to assert a similarity between them, being ignorant as they are of the authentic nature of His incomparability. In contrast to them, the gnostic, unveiling [divine mysteries], the divine one [*ilahi*], traveling along the path that takes him to gnostic sciences [*ma'arif*],⁴⁶ is possessor of both eyes. By his right eye he will contemplate the relationship and the annihilation, or rather, the negation of otherness and multiplicity, while by the other eye he will see the negation of the [previous] negation and the emergence of the properties inherent in multiplicity. He will also see that everyone deserving it is given his due. Thanks to this his feet will never ever slip in what concerns [the proper understanding] of *tawhid*, and he will eventually enter the ranks of those who have achieved the unifying vision. . . .⁴⁷

When discussing cosmology and metaphysics, Khomeini often employed the concept of “immutable entities” (*a'yan thabita*)⁴⁸—one of Ibn Arabi's most important contributions to Islamic theology and mysticism. Placed between the Absolute and the empirical world, the “immutable entities” help to bridge the dramatic gap between the intrinsic uniqueness and transcendency of the former and the visible multiplicity and perceptibility of the latter.

Know that immutable entities are but the entitification [*ta'ayyun*]⁴⁹ of nominal manifestation in the Presence of Oneness.⁵⁰ In this realm, manifestation takes place through the Most Holy Effusion. The one which becomes manifest is the [divine] Essence devoid of the names which are enclosed within the unseenness and latency of divine He-ness. The one to whom the manifestation presents itself is, first, the all-comprehensive [divine] Names [*al-asma' al-muhita*], and, further, in the Presence of Oneness and immutable entities, the particularizations of the manifestation, or, in other words, the [divine] Names. . . . The manifestation [directed] to the Names occurs through the Essence Itself, while the entities partake of it [indirectly], in virtue of their dependency on and subordination to the Names.⁵¹

Because the problem of the status enjoyed by the immutable entities—which were often viewed by Muslim thinkers as the universals—has a long history in

46. For the numerous meanings and connotations of this Sufi term in the context of Ibn Arabi's teaching, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 148–9.

47. *Misbah al-hidaya*, p. 12.

48. Western studies of Sufi philosophy offer a wide variety of possible translations of this ambiguous Arabic term. In this study the author follows the version introduced by William Chittick. See Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, index, pp. 444.

49. This Arabic term may also be translated into English as “particularization in concrete entities.”

50. For the concept of “presence” in Ibn Arabi's teaching, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, index, pp. 452 and 467, under “presence” and “hadra”; for its later development, see idem, “The Five Divine Presences.”

51. *Ta'liqat ala sharh*, pp. 22–3.

Islamic philosophical and theological literature, Khomeini deemed it necessary to define his own position in this regard. He discarded the views of those who conceived them as a special kind of existents (*wujudat*) supervenient on either mental or concrete existence.⁵² This, he argued, would logically presuppose that there were certain existent entities independent from the existence of God, which was tantamount to an encroachment on the principle of *tawhid*. For was not God the only possessor of the real and necessary existence that He bestowed upon the creatures? Neither did Khomeini accept a theory treating the *a'yan thabita* as absolute nonexistents, since this would have implied that the material world as such did not exist, and had, actually, never come into being.⁵³

Linked very closely with the concept of immutable entities are several other important notions introduced by Ibn Arabi and developed by his followers. Khomeini also borrowed these other notions, and they often appear in his works on *irfan*. The previously cited texts have shown that he made frequent use of the akbarian theory of divine “presences”—the levels at which the transcendent Deity makes its successive appearances, gradually emerging from the self-centered latency to the outward existence. He adopted Ibn Arabi’s two-fold system, according to which Absolute’s initial unfathomable uniqueness in the Presence of Unity (*hadrat al-ahadiyya*) makes its first step towards differentiation and concretization when it descends to the domain of the Presence of Oneness (*hadrat al-wahidiyya*). The latter is, in fact, nothing but the first creative impulse that entails the emergence of multiplicity embodied in the things and phenomena of the positive world. Like Ibn Arabi, Khomeini usually associated these two presences with two types of divine effusion, respectively, the Most Holy Effusion (*al-fayd al-aqdas*) and the Holy Effusion (*al-fayd al-muqaddas*). In Khomeini’s view, the latter presence and the effusion associated with it constitute the greatest mystery of being, since it is there that the “introversion” and uniqueness of the Absolute start to externalize and multiply in a series of consequent self-manifestations taking place on various levels of external existence.

To anyone versed in the writings of Ibn Arabi and his school, the akbarian inspiration of Khomeini’s reasoning is undeniable. Many passages in the *Misbah al-hidaya* and his later works appear to be a slight reformulation of Ibn Arabi’s favorite themes.⁵⁴ Summing up Khomeini’s cosmological theory, one may say that, like many of his forerunners in akbarian tradition, he envisioned the material universe as a projection of divine self-image and self-knowledge into a primordial void, which is followed by their gradual objectification in the entities and phenomena perceived by human beings in the surrounding world.

52. Ibid., p. 27.

53. Ibid., pp. 27–8.

54. For a vivid example, see the myth of divine Names, seeking the realization and fulfillment of their qualities. It was originally recounted by Ibn Arabi in his *Insha' al-dawa'ir* (The drawing of circles), ed. Henrik S. Nyberg, *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn Arabi* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1919), pp. 32–7, and then reiterated by Khomeini in the *Misbah al-hidaya*, see pp. 143–5.

Turning to the discussion of the practical religious and soteriological implications of his metaphysical tenets, Khomeini remains faithful to akbarian thought. His treatment of human functions and obligations is rooted in Ibn Arabi's doctrine of the perfect man, and the related conceptions of vicegerency and sainthood accorded to the perfect human individual in each epoch. In the *Misbah al-hidaya* and the commentaries, Khomeini treated them in the light of the Shi'i doctrine of imams—a practice that can be traced back to a period when Ibn Arabi's teaching gained wide currency among Shi'i thinkers of Iran—from the fourteenth century on. It often implied the identification of the akbarian perfect man with the Shi'i Hidden Imam. The latter, as a rule, substituted for Ibn Arabi's "Seal of Mohammedan Sainthood," while the "Seal of Universal Sainthood"—a rank Ibn Arabi reserved for Quranic Jesus—in Shi'i milieu, was invariably ascribed to the Shi'i hero Ali ibn Talib.

In the *Misbah al-hidaya* and the other esoteric writings of Khomeini, such a Shi'i bent was somewhat muted, although certainly palpable.⁵⁵ Still, he seemed unwilling to concentrate on the doctrinal differences between the Sunnis and the Shi'as, and in the context of the cosmic and metaphysical theories discussed in his early writings, these differences seemed to appear to him as matters of minor significance. Central to his discourse is man's place in the divine plan with regard to the creation, and, more specifically, the place of the saint or prophet among mankind. Closely following the doctrine of the perfect man as outlined by Ibn Arabi and finalized by Qunawi and his successors,⁵⁶ Khomeini arrives at the familiar notion of human destiny, aptly described by Marshall Hodgson as "a myth of the microcosmic return." This myth makes it possible to "apply the findings about the unconscious to the cosmos as a whole—and conversely to illuminate the self from what could be understood from the cosmos."⁵⁷ Hodgson's definition is fully pertinent to Khomeini's idea of vicegerency and sainthood that rests on an inextricable fusion of personal experience and putatively objective ontological thinking. This is the principal topic of discussion in both the *Du'a* and the *Misbah al-hidaya*. Khomeini invariably returned to it in his later writings on *irfan*, when he tried, in a typical akbarian manner, to place the perfect human being in the context of cosmic processes:

The more perfect is God's manifestation in the mirror of His Essence, the more clearly it points to what is hidden in the world of the Unseen. This world, which encompasses the pure intellects and the governing souls [*nufus mudabbira*] free from the darkness of substratum, far removed from the contamination of matter, and

55. See *Misbah al-hidaya*, p. 42; *Ta'liqat ala sharh*, p. 48.

56. Especially, by Abd al-Karim al-Jili (d. 832/1428), who expounded the doctrine of the perfect man in his *al-Insan al-kamil*. For Jili's life and work see Helmut Ritter, "Abd al-Karim al-Djili," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, p. 71; Morris, "Ibn Arabi and His Interpreters," part 2, "Influences and Interpretations [Conclusion]," pp. 108–10. For the Yemeni period of his life see Alexander Knysh, "Ibn Arabi in the Yemen: His Admirers and Detractors," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* 11 (1992).

57. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, vol. 2, p. 225.

unmixed with the dust of entification pertaining to quiddity, is nothing but God's most perfected words. However, due to the fact that each of those entities reflects only one of God's numerous Attributes, and only one of his many Names, each of these words, by itself, is incomplete. . . . The Perfect Man, being the all-encompassing entity, the perfect mirror, which reflects all divine Names and Attributes, constitutes God's most perfect Word. Furthermore, his is the divine book, which embraces the totality of divine books. A report, dating back to our Lord, Commander of the Faithful, the master of those who proclaim God's uniqueness,⁵⁸ says:

"Don't you know that you are a small body,
While in you the entire great world is folded up!
You are a 'Manifest Book'⁵⁹ through
The letters of which the hidden secret has become explicit. . . ."⁶⁰

Khomeini's portrayal of the perfect man as the divine Logos (*kalimat Allah*) was almost certainly inspired by the ideas of Ibn Arabi. One will immediately recall the latter's doctrine of the divine words that become embodied and exemplified in the personalities of the prophets of the Muslim Revelation. This doctrine is the principle theme of the *Fusus al-hikam*—a book that Khomeini diligently studied and commented upon, and that no doubt played a preeminent role in his spiritual formation and metaphysical education. At the same time, the phrasing of the passage is not necessarily akbarian. Some terms, such as, for example, "the perfected words [of God]" (*kalimat tammat*), might have their origin in the works of Mulla Sadra—another major source of Khomeini's outlook.⁶¹ This, however, does not affect the general conclusion of Khomeini's great indebtedness to Ibn Arabi, since, in many respects, Mulla Sadra himself may be considered Ibn Arabi's indirect disciple.

The theme of the perfect man, the contours of which were delineated in the previously cited passage from the *Du'a'*, is further refined in the *Misbah al-hidaya*, where it occupies the central position. In that treatise, the metaphysical and cosmic functions of the perfected human individual are consistently being linked to his magisterial and soteriological mission. The two aspects achieve a harmonious synthesis in the perfect man's role as God's "vicegerent" (*khalifa*), or "deputy" (*na'ib*), who represents the Deity in the created world with which guidance and preservation he is entrusted. The timeless archetypal vicegerency is, in Khomeini's opinion, a model upon which all individual and "historical" prophetic (and saintly) missions are based:

58. Meaning Imam Ali.

59. In the Quran, one of the synonyms of divine Revelation. See the Quran, 5:15, 6:59, 10:61, 11:6.

60. *Du'a'*, pp. 66–7.

61. See Morewedge, *Metaphysics of Mulla Sadra*, pp. 71–2; see also Douglas B. Macdonald and Louis Gardet, "Kalima," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 4, pp. 508–9. For Mulla Sadra's role in the subsequent development of Persian philosophy, see Sabzawari, *Sharh-i "Ghurar al-fara'id,"* pp. 10–11 of the English text; and Morris, *Wisdom of the Throne*, p. 46–50.

Know, oh spiritual friend—may God grant you success in obtaining His satisfaction and may He bestow upon you and us a vision of His Names and Attributes!—that this vicegerency is among the loftiest divine ranks and the noblest lordly stations granted by God. It is the main gates of Divine Appearance [*zuhur*] and Being [*wujud*],⁶² the major key to the [world of] Unseen and the world of Witnessing. This is the station of proximity [to Godhead] which contains the keys to the Unseen, the keys known to Him and nobody else. By means of those keys the divine Names have made their appearance from their concealment, and the divine Attributes have come out from their hiding. . . . Such vicegerency is the spirit of Mohammedan successorship, its master, its root, and its principle. It is the root from which sprang the vicegerency in all existing worlds. It is simultaneously the vicegerency, the vicegerent, and the one who appoints the vicegerent to the world. . . . This type of vicegerency manifested itself in its most complete form in the presence of God's Greatest Name, which is the Lord of Absolute Mohammedan Reality, the root of universal divine realities. Therefore, this vicegerency is the root of vicegerency per se, while the latter is nothing but its [outward] manifestation. . . .⁶³

Therefore, in Khomeini's view, each concrete prophethood, as well as each particular sainthood, may be regarded as an instant of "externalization" and "publicizing" of the archetypal vicegerency that otherwise would have remained occult and imperceivable:

Verily, the real and absolute Prophethood consists in disclosing the mysteries which reside in the secret depths of the Unseen. This disclosure occurs on the level of Oneness in accordance with the predisposition inherent in the loci of manifestation [*mazahir*]. Such predisposition, in its turn, takes place in keeping with the authentic [divine] instruction and the tidings [coming] from the divine Essence.⁶⁴ Hence, Prophethood is a station where vicegerency and sainthood become manifest, while, at the same time, it is a station of their latency.⁶⁵

Khomeini was especially anxious to stress the fact that the instruction and the tidings vary depending on the intrinsic nature of those upon whom they are bestowed. On the other hand, he maintained that from a certain point of view, the instruction and the tidings were but a gradual self-disclosure of the divine

62. On the complex meaning of *wujud* in the context of Ibn Arabi's teaching, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, index, p. 478. The word has both ontological and experiential connotations to it, which are closely intertwined and must always be borne in mind by anyone seeking an adequate understanding of the doctrines espoused by the *wujudi* school. In this concrete passage, Khomeini may have implied both the objective ontological existence of God and the supersensible and irrational "finding" of God through individual experience, since the verb *wajada* in Arabic means both "to be" and "to be perceived."

63. *Misbah al-hidaya*, pp. 36–37.

64. Also see Ibn Arabi, who argued that the predisposition, or "preparedness," of the recipient, namely, of the *a'yan thabita* which form the matrix for the whole creative process, had itself been entirely determined by His Most Holy Effusion, "for all power to act [all initiative] is from Him, in the beginning and at the end." Austin, *Bezels*, p. 50. This logically leads to a fatalistic conclusion that both Ibn Arabi and his exponents from Qunawi to Khomeini have sought to overcome by introducing the "mystical dialectics."

65. *Misbah al-hidaya*, p. 61.

Essence that follows the familiar five-fold pattern.⁶⁶ When reflected in human revelatory insights, however, this pattern assumes a reverse order: the seeker starts from the lower stages associated with engendered material existence, then gradually ascends to the higher mysteries of Being pertaining to the unfathomable Godhead as such. Thus, the experiential progress of man towards a realization of God is made possible by the correspondence between the human and the divine. It is in the structure of his own self and his own thinking that man finds the vital clue to the mysteries of cosmos and creation. For man is a condensed image of the world that is nothing but God's rationality projected into outward existence.⁶⁷

In the final section of the *Misbah al-hidaya*, Khomeini delineated the path to be taken by those human beings seeking to fulfill their preordained cosmic function. Although this is also one of the characteristic akbarian themes, Khomeini departed, in this case, from Ibn Arabi's two-fold scheme, replacing it with a more detailed one involving four stages of human self-fulfillment. He seemed to be following the pattern established by Mulla Sadra in his *al-Asfar al-arba'a*. Ibn Arabi used to envision the gnostic's goal as "passing away from self" (*fana'*), culminating in a complete comprehension of Divine Unity and rejecting any notion of "otherness." This comprehension results in a drastic departure from the multiplicity associated with the phenomenal existence—an experience succeeded by the stage of subsistence (*baqa'*), when the seeker returns from his unifying vision back to the multiple universe. From this spiritual journey the gnostic brings with him a newly acquired knowledge that he is obliged to impart to the others.

Very probably Khomeini's four-stage venture is simply a further particularization of Ibn Arabi's vision of an exemplar human destiny and self-fulfillment. Seen in the light of the myth of the microcosmic return, the experiential venture performed by the perfect man is a mirror reflection of the experience of the Absolute: an abstract and insipid image of Himself projected into nothingness returns to Him in the variegated and colorful form of material existence. Correspondingly, man's uninitiated and thus chaotic vision of universal disparity and multiplicity gradually becomes orderly and structured as he gains an ever deeper understanding of the creative situation and the all-pervasiveness of the divine Absolute and its Being. The similarity between divine and human experi-

66. For a detailed analysis of such a pattern in the works of medieval representatives of the wujudi school, see Chittick, "Five Divine Presences," *passim*.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 62. Much of what Khomeini says here has close parallels in Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam*, where man is portrayed as "the microcosmic image of the macrocosm" who experiences "the imaginative process both as being part of the greater creative process and also as having within himself an imaginative faculty." As a result, man experiences "an imagination within an Imagination," his own microcosmic dream being part of the greater macrocosmic "dream." Austin, *Bezels*, p. 119. For Ibn Arabi's general view of human function in the universal creative process, see Austin, *Bezels*, pp. 46–59.

ences have wide-ranging theological and philosophical implications that are complicated and require a separate study.⁶⁸

KHOMEINI'S PATH

In summarizing the overall impression produced by the *Du'a* and the *Misbah al-hidaya*, one may describe them as apologetic works written by a beginner, and, therefore, somewhat lacking in focus. They were constructed from roughly hewn blocks of the traditional knowledge, which do not always fit well together. Because of this, the works in question may remind the reader versed in irfan of a student's compendium, embracing a great deal of important, yet often poorly digested, information. It seems likely that, at the beginning, young Khomeini was too overwhelmed and fascinated by the tradition to make a coherent rendition of it.

Written somewhat later, Khomeini's glosses on Qaysari's commentary of the *Fusus al-hikam* display the greater maturity and growing independence of the author's thought. His overall approach was dictated by the genre of commentary writing that imposed on the commentator a number of substantial limitations, albeit allowing him a certain degree of discursive freedom. Unlike Qaysari, whose concern with the metaphysical aspects of Ibn Arabi's masterpiece prompted him to make long digressions from his direct subject,⁶⁹ Khomeini consciously circumscribed his comments to the issues raised in the text. His notes were brief and mostly to the point, furnishing a helpful guide to the reader. He seemed quite at home in the complex and often recondite terminology worked out by the wujudi school, of which Qaysari is a vivid representative. On many occasions he corrected the latter's interpretations.⁷⁰

The authorities cited in Khomeini's supercommentary were more or less similar to the ones that appear in the text of the *Misbah al-hidaya*. His principle sources were either the works by Ibn Arabi (such as *Insha' al-dawa'ir* [The drawing of circles]) or writings composed by his followers. The future ayatollah also quoted several Shi'i traditions attributed to Ali. It is interesting to note that in the writings of Sunni authors these same traditions are routinely ascribed to Sunni authorities, namely the first Caliph Abu Bakr,⁷¹ generally detested by Shi'as, who regard him as the usurper of leadership in the Muslim community, which they believe should have gone to Ali.

68. For an interesting discussion of the provenance and development of the teachings based on the notion of such similarity in an Islamic context, see Masataka Takeshita, *Ibn Arabi's Theory of the Perfect Man and Its Place in the History of Islamic Thought* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1987).

69. One may stress the fact that Qaysari's commentary is much longer than the original text of the *Fusus al-hikam*.

70. See *Ta'liqat ala sharh*, p. 27, where he defies Qaysari's understanding of the a'yan thabita.

71. See *Misbah al-hidaya*, p. 20; see also p. 57.

In other respects, Khomeini's work appears to be an amplification and elaboration of the keynotes first introduced in the *Misbah al-hidaya*. The discourse again centers on the process of emergence of the material world from the transcendental Godhead, "the thought thinking itself," as it differentiates itself through a series of manifestations taking place on various levels. The divine plan in regard to creation achieves its consummation in the personality of the perfect man. Combining in himself both the traits of God, and the features of the engendered universe, he rises to such a preeminence that he becomes invested with divine "deputyship" (*nayaba*) and vicegerency. As a true servant of God, he manifests divine properties "in the most perfect manner, giving everything its due."⁷² In a sense, he establishes himself as the ruler of the cosmos, acting as a channel of divine Will. He is the only creature in the world who is granted the vision of both God's intrinsic transcendence and His immanent presence in the events and things of material being. "His relationship to the world," said Khomeini, "is that of the spirit to the body; he has attained the true existence, and, having abandoned the creaturely one, his body has become identical with the universal Body, his soul—with the universal Soul, and his spirit—with the universal Spirit."⁷³

These are variations on the basic themes set by Ibn Arabi and elaborated in great detail by his followers. Anyone seeking to read Khomeini's esoteric treatises in search of some bold theoretical innovations or, perhaps, "a stroke of genius," is likely to be disappointed: neither of these are there. Instead, a reader would discover careful and duly respectful pondering on the long tradition of Islamic esotericism, with slight deviations on issues of minor significance. One is likely to be struck by the vigorous self-sufficiency, tenacity, and seeming immutability of this tradition, its imposing resilience and indifference to outward influences, be it sensational scholarly and scientific achievements or dramatic changes in the social and political life of Muslim societies during the last centuries. From a certain viewpoint, Khomeini's esoteric works might be seen as timeless insofar as they could have been written three, four, or five centuries ago. The non-Muslim reader may well have the impression that at least from the time of Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra, and probably much earlier, neither the methods of reasoning, nor the concerns and favorite themes of the wujudi writers have undergone any substantial changes, or even minor alternations.

This view, however, is a one-sided reception of the situation informed by the inherently Eurocentric notions of originality and change. Despite the purported "immutability" of the tradition that Khomeini tried to revivify in his early writings, this immutability seems less apparent upon closer examination. Indeed, the reader steeped in the *irfan* and *hikmat* literature will always be able to spot subtle, albeit extremely meaningful, nuances in the interpretations offered by the

72. Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 380.

73. *Misbah al-hidaya*, pp. 89, 90.

writers who pledged themselves to the school of thought started by Ibn Arabi. Each of those writers proceeded from the accumulated wisdom of his predecessors, introducing almost imperceivable modifications that were quite obvious to the “insiders,” but might well pass undetected by the reader unfamiliar with the nuances of their ideas and terminology. Yet, on the whole, the discourse of those who adopted akbarian teachings tended to operate within the invisible contours set by the tradition’s founder. It was within those limits that the wujudi writers were free to exercise their creativity and discursive skills, hence, the acute interest in every new nuance of reasoning, every terminological subtlety, and the great significance accorded to the most delicate details of the inherited authoritative texts.

As time went on, the tradition absorbed a number of themes that, although derived from different sources, proved congenial, in the long run, to the esoteric world outlook introduced by Ibn Arabi. Not surprisingly, Ibn Arabi, being the “founding father,” was regarded by his interpreters and exponents as the highest authority to whom they appealed when they disagreed with their peers or precursors over a thorny metaphysical or theological problem. This is exactly what Khomeini did when he opposed Qaysari’s elucidations of Ibn Arabi’s ideas. Nonetheless, on rare occasions, Khomeini was audacious enough to question Ibn Arabi’s own statements, thus demonstrating a considerable degree of independence of thought.⁷⁴ For the most part, however, Ibn Arabi, like Caesar’s wife, remained above suspicion.

In conclusion, one is obliged to raise the inevitable question of how Khomeini’s interest in Islamic esotericism may have affected his political stance as the leader of the Iranian Revolution. To answer, the subsequent stages of his career must be reviewed. As years passed, his interest in esoteric philosophy and mysticism did not wane. While still in Qom, he taught mystical philosophy to a close circle of friends and students, among whom were the future ayatollahs and Muslim leaders Morteza Motahhari and Hosain Ali Montazeri,⁷⁵ who were to play active roles in the overthrow of the shah and the establishment of the Islamic government in Iran. Khomeini did not suspend his classes despite opposition to esoteric teachings on the part of many eminent Shi’i scholars, including Ayatollah Hosain Borujerdi, the highest Shi’i authority from 1946 to 1961.⁷⁶ Paradoxically, shortly after Borujerdi’s death, Khomeini—for unknown reasons—canceled his irfan classes. From the early 1960s onwards he apparently was too preoccupied with political activities to give attention to his philosophical inclinations. Still, he occasionally introduced the overtones of irfan and *hikma* philosophy into his

74. See *Du‘a’*, pp. 52–3.

75. See Michael M.J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to the Islamic Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University, 1980), p. 242 and index, p. 310.

76. See Mottahedeh, *Mantle of the Prophet*, pp. 242–43; Fischer, *Iran*, p. 242. The reasons why the majority of Shi’i jurists and theologians were often suspicious of, or forthrightly opposed to, the irfan-hikmat speculations are finely explained in Morris, *Wisdom of the Throne*, pp. 41–50.

public discussions of Islamic morals and the meaning of Quranic verses.⁷⁷ The rest of his life was devoted to the struggle against the shah's secular regime and to working out the ideological foundations of the Islamic revolution. His major contribution to political theory was the concept of "the guardianship of the faqih" (*velayat-e faqih*), which was to play an important role in his subsequent ascension to power.⁷⁸ The political aspect of Khomeini's legacy eclipsed the other, purportedly "less significant and less relevant," dimensions, including his status as a master of *irfan*.

Nevertheless, as previously stated, Khomeini never seems to have abandoned his early spiritual and intellectual allegiances. Thus, in public lectures delivered in late 1972 to an audience of religious students, he frequently referred to his knowledge of Islamic esoteric philosophy. He insisted that political activity always must be joined to moral purification and spiritual advancement in order to make it Islamically valid and effective.⁷⁹ To this end, students should master the works written by the Muslim mystical thinkers and philosophers of the past. In his view, these works would provide deeper insights into the real state of affairs in the universe and inculcate genuine values that students must embrace if they want to devote their lives to achieving social harmony and attaining spiritual perfection.

In his lecture on the divine Names, which appears to be a simplified version of the more intricate speculations found in his mystical treatises and commentaries, Khomeini presented himself as a strong advocate of mystical gnosis and direct vision of realities enjoyed by a chosen few, but hidden from the "outsiders." Such gnosis and direct vision are cognitive instruments that by far surpass all rational sciences, which are only able to provide an approximate and inexact picture of Reality. Those who deny the insights and intuitive awareness of the saints and gnostics without proof "forfeit the attribute of humanity." At the same time, rational and logical training is necessary insofar as it helps to avoid the illusions and aberrations that may be produced by unenlightened mystical visions and ravings.⁸⁰

Khomeini's permission to publish his earlier works on *irfan*, when he was already at the peak of his political career, also bears witness to the fact that he had

77. See Mottahedeh, *Mantle of the Prophet*, p. 242.

78. For this crucial concept of Khomeini's political outlook, see Norman Calder, "Accommodation and Revolution in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence: Khomeini and the Classical Tradition," *Middle Eastern Studies* 18, no. 1 (1982); Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: Islamic Revolution* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), index, under "velayat-e faqih"; idem, "The Rule of God in Iran," *Social Compass: International Review of Sociology of Religion* 36, no. 4 (1989); Dabashi, "By What Authority?" *ibid.*; Michael Kimmel, " 'New Prophets' and 'Old Ideas': Charisma and Tradition in the Iranian Revolution," *ibid.*; Seyyed H. Nasr, Hamid Dabashi, and Seyyed V.R. Nasr, eds., *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ism in History* (Albany: SUNY, 1989), pp. 288–367.

79. See Algar, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 349.

80. See *ibid.*, pp. 411–13. Also see the position of Sabzawari and his predecessors, who were "wholly convinced of the reciprocal relationship between mystical experience and logical thinking" and insisted that "all philosophizing which does not lead to the highest spiritual realization is but a vain and useless pastime." Sabzawari, *Sharh-i 'Ghurar al-fara'id*, p. 10 of the English text. On Mulla Sadra's view of this relationship, see Morris, *Wisdom of the Throne*, pp. 45–6.

not disavowed the predilection he had harbored in his early years. His open letter to Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev is yet another striking example of how he used his proficiency in esoteric philosophy.⁸¹ Praising the former Soviet leader for his heroic efforts to destroy the “repressive Communist regime,” Khomeini suggested that the ideological and cultural vacuum created by the fall of Marxism should be filled with immortal philosophical teachings and moral values worked out by the medieval Muslim thinkers. Khomeini named Ibn Arabi and several of his followers as particularly helpful. He invited Soviet scholars to Qom in order to partake of the fountainhead of wisdom and to acquire the knowledge essential for the construction of a new society based on truth and justice.⁸² This episode is an enlightening example of how Khomeini tried to employ his extensive knowledge of *irfan* for propaganda purposes.

Unfortunately, the letter is not equally instructive as to how his preoccupation with mystical philosophy contributed to the shaping of his political views and programs. Neither can it help us to deduce how Khomeini’s *irfan* leanings affected his understanding of his role in the events that brought dramatic changes in the political and cultural development of Iran. He may have regarded himself as the perfect man of his time destined to rescue the world of Islam that was overwhelmed by evil and corruption spawned by the atheistic superpowers. Moreover, he may have viewed his political reforms in the context of the cosmological and metaphysical theories outlined above, presenting himself as a “divinely guided ruler,” an embodiment of the perfect man of his epoch.⁸³ Scholars need to examine these questions, although they may not come up with satisfactory solutions because the relationship is too subtle and personal to yield to even the most competent scholarly analysis.

CONCLUSION

This survey of Khomeini’s views on esoteric philosophy has not explored the many parallels and similarities with Sufi doctrines prior to Ibn Arabi. These earlier doctrines, no doubt, exercised a profound influence on Ibn Arabi, and, through him, on Khomeini’s outlook. Tracing all akbarian themes used by Khomeini back to their origins would be a daunting and formidable task. Furthermore, it would not, necessarily, be valuable, because it was in the akbarian synthetic teaching that medieval Sufi tradition took its final shape, and it was Ibn Arabi’s terminology, intellectual models, and theological thought that became the starting point for

81. For the English and the Persian text of the letter, see *Iran Times*, January 13, 1989. Its Russian version, printed in the form of a flyer, was widely distributed in the former Soviet Union in 1989–1990. Such flyers seem to have first appeared at an annual book fair in Moscow and were then reproduced on photocopy machines.

82. This author hurried to write a letter to the Iranian embassy in Moscow expressing the wish to visit the scholars of Qom and to profit by their extensive knowledge of *irfan*. A reply was never received.

83. For such bold conjectures see Rajaei, *Khomeini*, pp. 35–7.

the doctrines of most Muslim esotericists—not just those of his adherents. This analysis, at least, demonstrates that it was those teachings, terminology, models, and theology that played the decisive role in the formation of irfan ideas espoused by Khomeini.

